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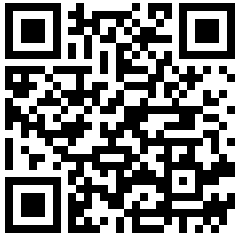

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DON'T MISS THE STORY ON PAGE 27.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 392. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 4TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

BE SURE TO CUT

IT MAY

10,000 RUGS GIVEN AWAY.

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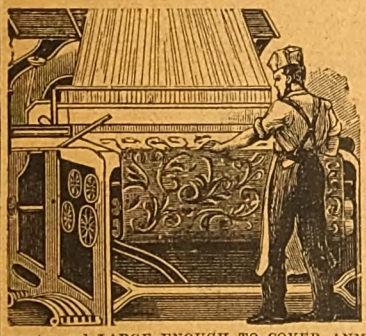

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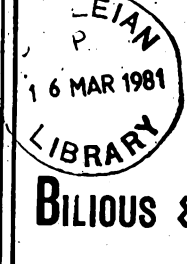

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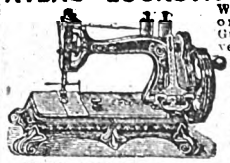

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July 4, 1896.

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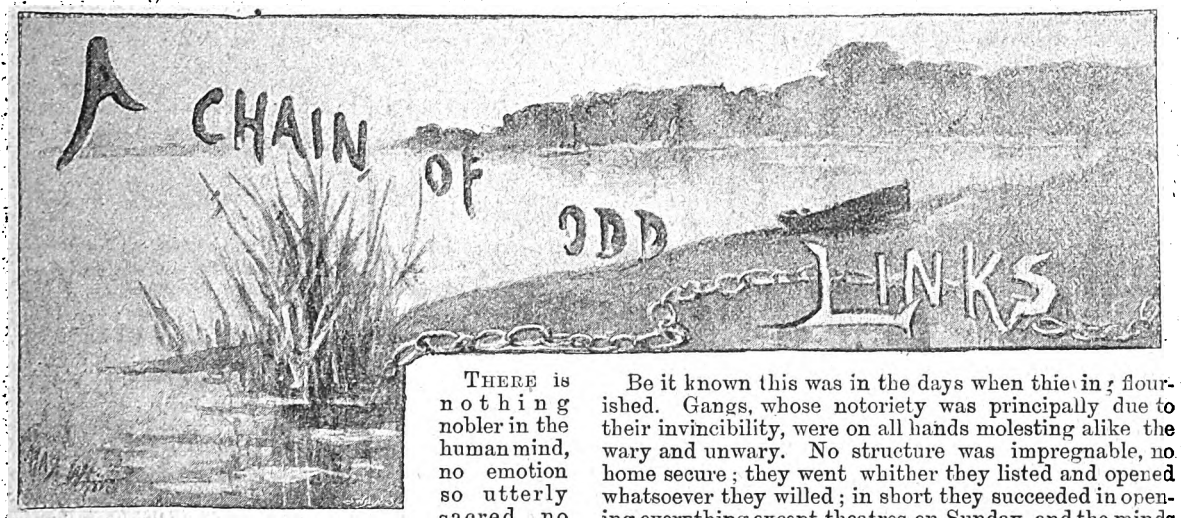
SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 392.] For the Week ending July 4th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.



THERE is nothing nobler in the human mind, no emotion so utterly sacred, no spirit beyond the confines of Heaven so truly divine, as that of self-sacrifice.

It is not inception, nor anything else bearing a name; it is one of those invincible proofs striving to force in mankind a recognition of its own brotherhood, through the medium of some great unknown.

It was in the days when my mad hungering heart denied access to the palliating influences of mind. It was while I was ambling through the world with neither object nor care. I knew no hope, no despair, no joy, no woe. I was in that imperial state of indifference when a man would just as soon live as die, or vice-versa. I was like a king in an unpeopled kingdom. Owing to a lack of education and depth of thought, I was superbly ignorant of myself. I had passed many semi-utilitarian epochs, such as newsvending, viâ pick-pocketing and Salvationism, to histrionic performances on provincial stages.

The experience gained in this latter avocation opened my mind to a perception of beautiful realms corrupted. I saw minds of might stranded and rolling upon the scorial shores of passion, and my own mind sickened at the sight.

About this time a legacy enabled me to escape this atmosphere of dishonest vice—dishonest because half concealed—and contemplate with well measured concern vices committed honestly and openly. This recreation projected upon my mind a scheme of vast moral reform, in pursuance of which I frequented gaming hells and slums, and dens of depravity.

Closely thereby hangs my tale.

One night when everybody in the land—properly excepting myself—seemed exceptionally wicked, I was disconsolately meandering amongst the ill-omened slums above mentioned.

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Be it known this was in the days when thieving flourished. Gangs, whose notoriety was principally due to their invincibility, were on all hands molesting alike the wary and unwary. No structure was impregnable, no home secure; they went whither they listed and opened whatsoever they willed; in short they succeeded in opening everything except theatres on Sunday, and the minds of Local Protection authorities. They opened the purses of uncharitable millionaires, they opened wonderment and fear, and probably—if not too luxuriously inclined to spendthriftness—banking accounts.

One particular gang proclaimed itself particularly successful in this way. This was a society of young ladies, so neat and tender in their cunning, as almost to inspire belief that their predatory usages were all on behalf of the "starving poor."

Wending my melancholy way I was thinking of all these things when I found myself quickly contracting a most profound interest in them, and I imagined into shape a new inroad for my great moral reform schemes.

Consequently I bent my head and my thoughts at the same time, and ploughed the road assiduously.

In this manner was I engaged when a jerk in the region of my vest, suggested the possibility of my effects being in danger. Groping hurriedly, I caught a hand closing over my watch. With the hand still disengaged, I examined my person, and found my purse already gone. Turning to my uninvited retainer I found her to be a woman.

After a momentary pause I asked—quite dispassionately:

"What are you doing?"

"You seem to have found out," she returned; and I was struck with the rich beauty of her voice. Her tones implied no coarse defiance, neither did they betray any fear.

Vaguely realising her remark was in some way conclusive, but still feeling a deep interest, I cast about for something to say next. At length I succeeded.

It was—"What shall we do?" It seemed rather irrelevant, but I did not mind so long as I said something

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"I suppose you're going to lock me up, aren't you?"

Disregarding this suggestion entirely, I asked: "Whatever made you do it? Do you want money badly?"

"*I* don't," she returned with earnest emphasis on the pronoun, "but others do, and it is my mission to help them."

My mystification grew, and releasing her wrist, I asked her to follow me to the light of a near street lamp. When we both were beneath its full glow, I scrutinised her intently, with a rudeness ruder than her designs on my property had been. The inspection filled me with wonder. She looked a mere child—a veritable baby, I thought—and truly her face bore an expression of pensive divinity. In fact I was so amazed, that at that moment, slight as she was, she could have knocked me down and plundered me had she so wished, without any fear whatever.

"Forgive me, sir, I did not know you."

With slowly subsiding surprise, and accumulating interest I cried:

"Heaven above, child, you should not have attempted that; why did you not ask me for help? Don't you know your own——"

Here I abruptly stopped, fearing she might misconstrue the intent of my compliment.

"Forgive me, sir, I did not know you," she rejoined; and the glistening pleading of her eyes found a direct and tumultuous response in the rugged depths of my emotion. A lump of choking tears rose in my throat as in a half fever I gulped:

"Here, take it, little one, take it all!" And straightway upon this I proceeded to divest myself of every valuable I had about me. I pressed her to receive them, for I was beside myself with compassion for this strange misplaced little creature.

"No, no," she hurried to rejoin. "I cannot take it now. Here is the purse I stole—take it back please—take it." She faltered a moment, and then in a voice of perfect pain sobbed:

"God help me, whom have I tried to rob."

In the true fulness of my heart I answered:

"Someone less deserving than yourself, child. Don't, little one, don't grieve any more; your tears unman me."

Hastily turning I wiped one, of my personal conception, away. I struck it away, half in shame.

Her tiny hand fell within mine, but I dared not press it, lest it should vanish.

"Forgive me," she said. "Forgive me and let me go. May your goodness turn to your own reward. Forgive me, sir, and let me go." Upon which she moved as though to depart. I started. Let her go?—this tiny, heavenly little thing with hair like bronze hyacinths, this mite of perfect purity, rusting on a mound of vice? Let her go—how could I?

"Who *are* these people you work for?" I questioned at last, with half-shaped indignation.

"My blind husband and his son!"

I started again, exclaiming:

"*Your* son?"

"No, one by his first wife."

"Can I see them?" I next asked her.

"Yes, come with me."

Started on our way, I requested her, with as much considerate reticence as the circumstances permitted, to tell me her history: and these are the words in which she gave it.

Readers will notice she commenced with: "When quite a tiny child." I laughed at this consumedly, but she didn't mind.

"When quite a tiny child," she began, "I had strayed far away amongst the northern hills and sullen lakes. I had no home that I knew of, and in all truth I was a waif.

"This night was peculiarly dark, but yet I had no fear. I knew there to be danger all about me, but I did not care. I only strayed on and on, very hungry and very cold.

"Between two low ranges of hills, deep in the valley, a black river lay, stagnant and still. On either side it was embanked with tall green weeds, seeming to have a wonderful fascination for me. People used to say I was a strange child, and I believe I must have been, because some folks said I was mad.

"Well, I was standing by the edge of this river wondering. I wondered why it was really so black and nasty, and yet so lovely to me. Once or twice I felt I wanted to throw myself in and never come out again, but I didn't do so, as you see.

"Walking on a little way, I came to a place where the bank rose high. I stood on the extreme edge to see the picture of myself in the water below. I was so engaged when a wild duck flew shrieking from amongst the weeds, startling me, and giving me a very hard knock. In a second I lost my footing, overbalanced, and fell splashing into the water.

"I wasn't frightened, that I remember, but I knew no more until I found myself in a little hut with my present husband and his wife standing over me. He had saved me, and I was grateful, so far as I knew how.

"The accident had no ill effect upon me, but it had upon the man who had risked his life for me.

"From that day his sight gradually faded, until he eventually became quite blind. On the same day, his wife, who had been a mother to me, died in giving birth to a son.

"The doctor said my saviour's blindness was entirely due to the immersion, and just imagine how I blamed myself."

I could not imagine why she did blame herself, and I made intimation to that effect. Although she was speaking without emotion, and afterwards silently heard my attempts at her justification, I saw she meant what she said and continued to blame herself accordingly. The thread of her story was resumed.

"This calamity took from him all means of subsistence, between which and his wife's death his life became little better than a blank. But I remembered his goodness

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to me, and did all in my power to comfort him. He was genuinely appreciative, and although when he asked me to marry him I was greatly surprised, I did so from pure gratitude and—and, well because I did not love anyone else. But matters all went sadly; we found it hard to live, and so we came here. He earns a little by playing a harmonium, and I—well you know all about that, sir. Circumstances have forced me in league with others of the same set, and they help us when business is bad. I am not expert, but I have never been caught till now. It seems like an intervention of fate; I mean that my first—well that you should have been so good and forgiving. I hate doing it—hate it, but think of all he has done for me and the gratitude I owe him. Think of it."

She stopped, and I saw the glistening tears falling down her cheeks. Oh, how I pitied her! pitied her with a depth of sadness, deeper than the mysteries of the stars.

"But this son of his?" I queried. "Can he do nothing?"

"Nothing at all. He's undersized—a dwarf, and only half-witted; so I work for them both."

Thereupon I was about to make some speculative remark—or more probably, a fool of myself—when my companion intimated we had reached our destination. As we traversed the cramped back entrance of an isolated house, we were immediately greeted with a weird dreamy melody, floating sadly on the sullen air. It was one of those expressive tunes, enabling a man to conjure in one vast array all the phantoms of a morbid imagination. The strangest of earthly emotion fell through the mesh of those sobbing tones.

"Don't want one," rejoined the man ungraciously.

As my guide opened the door of the chamber from whence the music proceeded it suddenly stopped, and the performer addressed the entering souls, in accents which must have delighted the very deuce, making him, or it, drunk with anticipation.

I looked around me. The cold barrenness of the room suggested itself as an ugly relation to the ugliest aspect of a haunted house—forsaken alike of God and man.

I looked again when these sensitising influences had prepared me for improving stages of development.

The man behind the instrument seemed somehow to express a mute but perfect conception of a better world than this for his own especial delectation. Had it not been for his scalding opprobriums upon our entrance, I might have liked him. He was new and novel. His face was pale, his eyes closed, and a rich, unkempt fibre bristled about his lips, chin, and neck.

His raiment was poor—a condition evident in everything material about him.

Recumbent upon a ragged coat in one corner of the room was the dwarf half-wit. His skin was yellow and his forehead receding, but admitting phrenology's capability of truth, this creature should have been of constant purpose and benevolence.

"I have brought a visitor," said my companion by way of introduction.

"Don't want one," rejoined the man ungraciously.

"But he's a friend," the woman persisted.

"I'd rather you brought an enemy," rejoined the man again, still more ungraciously.

I nearly groaned, but with a manly and commendable effort recovered myself sufficiently to say:

"Yes, I'm a friend. I want to help you. I want to stop this——" I hesitated.

"Well?" said the man. "What next?"

"Your little wife here——" But before I completed the phrase, his exuberant petulance made such a raid on his feelings that he was compelled to strike a discordant groan from the instrument, which probably was more expressive and less harsh than my word might have been.

That there is anything reassuring about my voice I am not aware, but in a strange way the man's demeanour grew cautiously trustful.

"To wish to do good by humanity," said he, "proclaims the inveterate foolishness of wisdom; and to *do* good, argues an unhealthy lack of selfishness."

"But look at my motive!" I urged in my unsullied innocence.

"You mean look at my wife," he replied; and then a deep silence fell, broken only by the snoring of the half-wit. Presently the blind man ground another and harsher discord from the vitals of his harmonium and called out:

"Judas!" Then turning to me he said:

"We called him Judas, because he betrayed his mother unto Death."

The boy so addressed sprang up, bending a filmy eye upon me.

"Is this person a traitor, Judas—can you tell?"

The boy scanned me from toe to crown slowly, closed his eyes, and as slowly opened them again, saying in a low, soft voice:

"No; he is true."

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I am essentially a man of first impressions, and from that moment I liked the boy. Furthermore, I saw in him a power by which his blind father might be swayed, and I blessed him accordingly.

The man arising, took my hand and pressed it. In fact, the trio took my hands between them, each pressing their portion. Having cautiously felt my way I broached the subject which, through the fulness of my own nature, and my interest in the woman, had spontaneously sprung upon my mind a new birth.

I told them I was a lone strange man for whom life had no consuming interest—that I was rich but without a call to do good. Would they please press my heart as they had done my hand? Would they pardon me and receive my help? They must not feel hurt, but weigh my words in a true measure. Would they help me to a useful life?—live upon me as a favour to myself? They would—yes—I felt assured they would; and as a result of my earnest solicitations they did. Consequently, in a very little while I had them established with me, a trinity of useful souls and interests.

Judas, the half-wit, entered.

CHAPTER II.

A glorious golden summer beamed and languished, giving sufficient warmth to last us during the spell of its burial and resurrection. We kept beyond the spiky pale of the world, benignly pitying alike its urbanity and vice. A rose ridden cottage, with a sea of summer flowers surrounding, held us and our secrets aloof from all outlying distraction. Our futures were like the dim blue hills in the distance—buried in haze, but withal, enticing.

Looking back, I can see even now in my mind's eye the best radiance of all; the tiny woman laving so to speak in the sleepy ocean of garden flowers.

She seemed like a rarely beautiful giant lily, animated with breath of the Divine to tell the earth of an unknown Heaven. She ever appeared to me—as she had upon my first beholding her—as a baby angel.

I thought of her—I dreamt of her—I loved her. My whole life became absorbed in her happiness. From my mind—she called it a kingdom—I fashioned forth heavens, with her like upon each throne. Many were the conversations in which I betrayed these visioned realms. Day after day would we together glorify these continued dreams, until I at length discovered that in the respect as she was indispensable to me so was I to her. At this consummation I trembled—why, I cannot say. I loved her, 'tis true; but I loved her quite innocently. I loved her as a child—an ambition. I loved her with the strength of sunfire, sucking dry the bosom of the desert, and I trembled at my own power.

Despite this passion, however, this all abandoning love, I always remembered my duty to the others—father and son. We—the quartette complete—spent long hours together, happily talking and discussing, and sometimes listening whilst the blind man played.

In my favour, but next to the beautiful woman, the half-witted boy held position.

The rooms I had chosen for my own use were at the top of the cottage, so that I could sit and watch—watch and with my eyes devour—the woman, as she lingered among the roses.

I used to see her burst upon the rose-decked lattice, like a new Parnassus, where all the Muses sat.

Here, by my window, the boy would often join me, and we would sit and watch together, mutely drinking her loveliness. A strange wild fire would leap into the dwarf's expressionless eyes, whenever they lighted on her, his father's wife. I could not understand it, and feared it consequently. His eyes, so generally lustreless, seemed on these occasions to absorb all surrounding light, so much so as to render me for the time being unconscious of almost everything save themselves.

With the one propitious circumstance, the occurrence was invariable. Their blazing radiance, portentously blended itself with my ever-present fancy of the woman. Their fire swarmed about me, and yet I could prevision no disaster.

One unusually sombre night a little before Eastertide, when I thought all except myself had retired, I was sitting reading, as was my wont. The fire burnt freely, but the lamp had burned dim. At the first weak flutter of its dying flame I put down my book and lay back, placidly musing. Fancy took his flight, and my senses were just about to succumb to their own lethargic influences when I was aroused by a knock at my chamber door.

"Come in!" I said, startled and surprised.

Judas, the half-wit, entered. In the spectral dancing of the fire flame his face appeared ashen and grey, and its yellow parchment skin was more than usually roughly drawn. I saw he wore a dressing-gown, as though he had recently and hurriedly left his bed.

I almost shuddered as I looked. Although his eyes were, as usual, half closed, something told me the sometime mystery in their depths had deepened.

He sat down, paused, and then spoke.

"We are on the eve of the Crucifixion, aren't we? That's when the Master died to save the thing He loved; the world that is—the world which didn't love Him in return. Never mind, He died all the same. No sacrifice was too great, or had a second consideration. He humbled Himself, denied Himself, became worldly, and because people whom He loved wouldn't die for His sake, well He died for theirs. Judas betrayed Him and *he* died too—repentant, I believe. Never mind!"

He paused, and in that moment I felt a revelation was about to burst upon me. His eyes opened vacantly, and as he resumed, his voice sank lower than ever, containing a strange, sweet ring.

"Father's a poor useless man," he began; and for my life I could not then have denied him the belief.

"Yes, a poor weak man, and very much in the way of other's happiness. His wife's a very wonderful—a beautiful and wonderful woman—almost an angel. She is

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good, and deserving of happiness. But I say, how *can* she be happy with father or—or me? You are fairly good, and with good influences might be useful to God's world. Tell me, is it wrong to love when you can't help it—no matter where you put your love? Tell me that."

I felt his eyes, the sight of his soul going through me, and a painful blush sprang from my heart, suffusing my face as I answered:

"I don't know!" my head drooped.

"You say you don't know, well, I should say not. Who can help themselves?—never mind."

He paused again, and a look of genuine emotion lit the icy hardness of his face.

"Who can help loving my father's wife?" he asked. "Not me, not you, nor yet the angels who envy her. The world she loves, therein she should rightly reign; and that world is not my heart, nor my father's heart, nor the world of weary gratitude! None of these."

I was stung to the quick. I was mad. I spoke but cannot now remember my words.

Gasping with fear, awe, and sinful expectation, I sank back again. The long restrained burden of my love had made me capable of Hells.

"Gratitude," he continued, "dies on the threshold of love. Now listen—listen well. Would you like to be alone with—with——?"

I sprang up with a rasping moan. I shrieked: "Your father, boy, your father! Think—he lives!"

"He might die!" rejoined the boy measuredly.

"God! no, no, no! not that," I shrieked again.

"Why not? What sacrifice is too great?" said he.

The blood leapt to my head like beads of molten lead. I sweated and quaked—I groaned.

The boy knew me; he saw as clearly as the scintillant stars; this knowledge encompassed my whole being. I dared not answer him. I dared not stay him. I dared not consent. I was dead to all save fear and love—my consuming love for the woman. His next words I remember only as a fantastic dream, thrust within the chaos of latent reason.

"You are not well—you shiver and yet will not die. You *will* not die—will not; that I *know*. You are not meant to die, and yet somebody *has* to die. The only way to diet an infant is to tempt with various things, and mark the one chosen. Everything earthy is an infant—an infant of Nature's. Rivers are infants and require feeding, and should they vomit afterwards you must change the food."

I was conscious of another pause here, during which a vague understanding of his meaning bent my thoughts.

Continuing he said:

"This is the eve of the great world romance. The eve of Death, of Burial, and of Resurrection. Such death was at once encompassing, and self encompassed, and yet not sinful. I must remember that, must think of it, and remember. I have power and resource. The blind man depends on me, and is the mere breath of my nostrils.

"Rivers like human food. Sometimes they vomit, and sometimes they devour. You are unwell. Never mind, you will recover!"

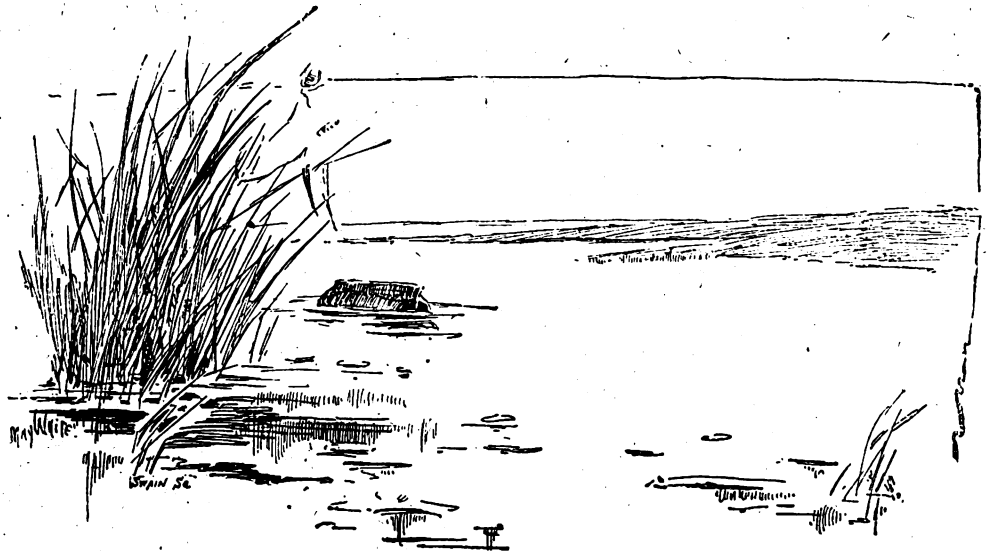
Recalling in the extremity of all horror this significant scene again with its gall and inhuman delight, I remember him drawing from his vest a red rose. He kissed it first, then flung it upon the floor, mutilating it beyond recognition. It was one *she* had given him.

* * * * *

Shortly after midday on the day of All Holiness, the boy Judas rowed his blind father far down the silver stream. The gathering treachery burst. The poor old man bent his head, ploughed the seared furrows of his eyes, and then shrieked and shrieked again.

With a sudden turn the boat capsized, and an hour afterwards two stark bodies threaded their way through the nausea of weed, scum, and bubble, down to the raging sea.

DUNSTAN DENN.



Down to the raging sea.

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A WOMAN'S RING.

"I suppose it must go; there is no help for it." Her voice choked a little as she spoke the words, and her long, slim fingers trembled as they came in contact with the little gold hoop with the single brilliant in it. There was a quivering of her pale lips, too, and just the semblance of a tear glistened in the corner of her eye. But it was there only a moment. With a hasty and impatient movement, as if angry with herself at having given way to the sudden weakness, she brushed the tiny drop away and forced a laugh, harsh and unreal.

"Poor old Jack; I wonder where *you* are now. In your grave or out of it?"

And she fell into another reverie, slipping the ring on her finger, and letting the dull light flash and glitter on the lovely diamond.

Three years ago Jack had given it to her; the date was stamped on her memory. She had forgotten thousands of other things far more inportant, but she remembered that lovely evening in August when they drifted together down the river. The sky was red with the setting sun, and the calm water looked like blood beneath the crimson clouds. They had had a jolly day, a day never to be forgotten, a day of joy and happiness to them both.

In the sweet solitude there had been no one to disturb them, and they had landed on a little island. Lost in the leafy shadows, they watched the sun vanish and night give place to day. And when she got home, weary, but palpitating with the recollection of the day and of the evening, she found the ring on her finger. Jack had slipped it on as she lay in his arms—perhaps it wasn't right, but how could she, a poor weak woman, help herself?—besides, Jack had promised to marry her when he came back, so what did it matter?

In a week Jack had gone, called away on foreign service, and from that day, when they parted at the railway station, and the train rolled out of the station, to the waving of handkerchiefs and "The Girl I Left Behind Me," she had never received so much as a line from him.

Her letters, too, were returned marked "Not known." At first she gave way to passionate fits of tears, but growing calmer, she resigned herself, a something telling her that she had muddled the address, and that he would come back to her and fulfil his pledge some day. This calmed her, and became her one fixed idea.

And so three years slipped away; many things happened, and still she cherished the little gold circle with the great glittering stone in it, even though scores of little treasures dear to her with a great and tender remembrance had gone to the pawnbroker.

That is how she was situated. She had been out of an engagement for close upon a twelvemonth; no one would have her; the agents shook their heads when she called upon them. She had grown tired of their silly grins and repulsive familiarities, and she had given up calling and resigned herself to her fate.

And yet she could dance and sing, had a picturesque little face, and rounded limbs. There were plenty of girls on the stage who had neither, and yet fortune smiled on them and managers paid them big salaries. And the agents spoke of them quite respectfully, and had their photographs pinned all over their walls. It was hard luck, that it was, nothing more or less.

However, there was no good fighting against it. One must live, and there was only one way to do it. At least, there were other ways, but Nellie had always kept straight. She felt that she should hear from Jack one day, and she didn't mean to do as other girls had done.

So one by one her little trinkets and trifles vanished into the pawnbrokers' shops, and now nothing remained but Jack's ring. And over that she cried; it gave her a wrench to part with it. Still it must go; it would keep her alive for a long time to come, and life was worth more than silly sentiment.

Besides, in a week or two managers would be filling up their vacancies for the pantomimes, and there was always a chance for her. But it was silly wasting time in this way. She would put on her hat and coat, and slip round to old Emanuel's at once. If she hesitated much longer, her courage might fail her altogether, and the ring be locked up again, in its covering of tissue paper. That would be stupid.

Old Martin, her landlady, was crying out for her rent. And there was nothing to eat in the house, and she was ravenous. It was no earthly good starving, that wouldn't get her an engagement, at least, not in this world. And an engagement in the next wouldn't be of much use.

So she popped on her hat and coat, and put on her gloves, wondering the while what that old skinflint, Emanuel, would give on it. The aged one was in a good humour; in fact, quite genial, and handed over quite a handful of glittering, clinking, musical sovereigns.

* * * * *

"You'll be a fool to return it." Susie jerked out the words with spiteful emphasis. "If you don't want the thing, do as I do."

"What's that?" Nellie asked innocently.

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"Take it to the people it came from—you'll find their names just inside the case—and ask them how much was paid for it. When they tell you, offer to sell it 'em back at a reduction. They'll take it like a shot, for, don't you see, they'll make two profits and yet have the things to sell again. That's what I do with half the things left at the stage door for me. I don't want them; the money's far more useful, I can assure you, and if you're not a fool you'll do the same."

It was a pretty enough little bracelet, attached by a blue ribbon to a visiting card bearing a name and a few lines scribbled in pencil: "Will Miss Daltry honour an ardent admirer of her talents and beauty by accepting this trifle, and may he hope to be granted the pleasure of her company at supper to-morrow evening?"

Nellie didn't know who the ardent admirer was, nor did she possess any desire to make his acquaintance. The note could be left to take care of itself, but the bracelet—what was to be done with it? Susie's advice was practical, and early the following morning she did not hesitate to carry it out.

They gave her fifteen guineas for it, about half its real value, Susie said. But she didn't care if she had been swindled. All she wanted the money for was to get Jack's ring out of pawn, and fifteen guineas would do that easily, and leave a bit over. "Jack's ring, Jack's ring;" even the passers-by in the street seemed to be shouting the words in her ear, and the very cabs and omnibuses rumbled it out as they ploughed through the mud.

With a light heart Nellie rushed to the theatre. There was a "call" for rehearsal of the chorus, some new business was to be introduced, and all day long the girls hung about the cold and draughty stage whilst the stage-manager and the author squabbled about this, that, and the other. After the evening performance Nellie crawled home, weary and shivering. It was too late to get Jack's ring out of pawn; she would make that her first business the next morning. It would be quite like old times to have it back again. Yes, just like old times.

* * * * *

"She's in a state of high fever," said the doctor, as he felt Nellie's burning wrist, "and you mustn't let her move on any account."

For days she tossed on her hard little iron bedstead, muttering deliriously about a ring and calling upon some one, vaguely named Jack, to marry her, and take her away from her solitude, misery, pinching, and screwing, and temptation. Poor old Martha didn't know what she meant, and she didn't trouble to find out as long as the fifteen guineas lasted out.

Regularly each week she helped herself to the little store, and when the last sovereign melted away, Nellie, as thin as a lath and as shaky as a blade of grass blown by the wind, began to sit up and to smile in her old way at the doctor when he said she was pulling through all right, and would be well and strong in a week or two. Then the good Martha began to ask her when and how a fresh supply of the needful would be forthcoming.

Nellie listened listlessly to her grumblings and growlings; the doctor's warning that she was not to attempt to return to her old pursuit affected her more keenly. What was she to do? She had no money, everything of value was pawned, and Jack's ring had not yet been redeemed. That worried her more than anything else. Suppose he was to return suddenly and to find that she had parted with his gift? What would he say?

The thought haunted her night and day, but it gave her strength to grow well again. She was determined to get that ring back again somehow. She accepted an engagement at an East-end music-hall—anything was better than idly lounging about—and danced and sang her heart out.

Every week she put a trifle by, and each Saturday she opened the little tin money-box and counted out the sixpences and shillings. She might have filled the box with sovereigns a dozen times over if she had accepted only a few of the invitations that were showered upon her; but whenever she felt weak and tired of the dull grind she kissed Jack's photograph, and comforted herself with the thought that he would return directly and carry out what he had promised, and they would go away from the hateful scenes and associations for ever.

* * * * *

It took a long time to save up the right amount, but in time it was got together, and with a beating heart Nellie rushed to Emanuel's.

"Diamond ring, miss? Oh, yes, I remember. Ticket ran out a long time ago and it's been sold."

"Sold!"

"Yes, miss, sold last night, strange to say. Who bought that diamond ring, Isaacs?" He called out to his assistant. "Wasn't it a gent with a fair moustache?"

"Yes. Said he'd come from Africa or somewhere."

Nellie staggered from the shop, weak and helpless. It was raining heavily, and a cutting east wind tore down the streets. But heedless of both she wandered about crying softly, and clutching the worn leather purse in which lay her little store of silver, so carefully gathered. It was all of no use now; time and energy had alike been wasted.

She went home and flung herself on her bed just as she was, in her wet and mud-splashed things, and cried herself to sleep.

Presently she awoke. The opening of the door had disturbed her, and she raised her swollen eyelids slowly and languidly. Then she was conscious of a man's face peering into her own, of a man's arms round her, and of a man's lips pressed to her hot, dry lips.

"I have found you at last, little one," said a voice softly, as in a dream. It was the voice of Jack that she heard dimly and distantly. "Yes, I've found you at last. The ring did it. I saw it in a shop window, and the man told me your address. It was only last night, dear, and here I am, and here is the ring again, and neither of us three will ever be parted again."

The sound of his voice was music in her ears. Her throat was too hot and dry to speak, and her tongue refused to move, it was so swollen and heavy. She simply lay there looking at his dear old face, bronzed and anxious, but not changed one whit since that day on the river. She tried hard to speak, but it was useless; an iron hand gripped her throat and slowly choked the life out of her.

She felt him slip the ring on her finger; and with an effort she raised her hand—how heavy it was—! to her lips and kissed the cold, glittering stone. Then a mist came across her eyes; she sighed once—it was a sigh of quiet happiness—and her head sank back on the pillow.

And outside the rain beat pitilessly against the window-pane, and old Martha fidgeted in the hall for the rent that was three weeks overdue.

M. M.

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The Coiners:

AN ADVENTURE IN BIRMINGHAM.

I.

DURING the year 1860 London was flooded with counterfeit coin. It was so well manufactured that it passed readily. The evil at last became so great the authorities requested that a skilful detective might be sent to ferret out the nest of coiners. I was fixed upon to perform that duty.

I had nothing to guide me. The fact, however, that Birmingham was the city where the counterfeit coin was most abundant, led me to suspect that the manufactory might be somewhere within its limits. It was, therefore, to the capital of the Midlands that I first proceeded. I spent five weeks in that city without gaining the slightest clue to the counterfeiters.

I began to grow discouraged, and really thought I should be obliged to return home without having achieved any result. One day I received a letter from my wife requesting that I would send her some money, as she was out of funds. I went into a bank and asked for a cheque, at the same time handing a sum of money to pay for it, in which there were several half sovereigns. The clerk pushed three of the half sovereigns back to me.

"Counterfeit," he said.

"What!" said I, "do you mean to tell me those half sovereigns are counterfeit?"

"I do."

"Are you certain?"

"Perfectly certain. They are remarkably well executed, but they are deficient in weight. See for yourself."

And he placed one of them in the scales against a genuine half sovereign on the other side. The latter weighed down the former.

"That is the best executed counterfeit coin I ever saw in my life," I exclaimed, examining it very closely. "Is all the counterfeit money in circulation here of the same character as this?"

"Oh, dear no," replied the clerk; "it is not nearly so well done. These are the work of Ned Wilson, the famous counterfeiter. I know it well, for I have handled a great deal of it in my time. Here is some of the money that is in circulation here," he added, taking several half-sovereigns from a drawer. "You see, the milling is not nearly so perfect as Ned Wilson's, although it is pretty well done, too."

I compared the two together and found that he was right. I supplied the place of the three counterfeit half-sovereigns with good coin, and returned the former to my pocket again.

A few days after this I received information which caused me to take a journey to a village situated about thirty miles from Birmingham. I arrived there at night, and took up my quarters at the only tavern in the place. It was a wretched dwelling, and kept by an old man and woman, the surliest couple, I think, it has ever been my lot to meet. In answer to my inquiry as to whether I could have lodgings there for the night, I noticed that the host gave a peculiar look at his wife, and after some whispering I was informed in the most ungracious manner possible that I could have a bed.

I have frequently in the course of my life been obliged to put up with wretched accommodation, so I did not allow my equanimity of temper to be destroyed by the miserable fare set before me, and the still more miserable sleeping apartment into which I was ushered after I had concluded my repast.

The chamber was small in size, and was certainly well ventilated, for I could see the stars peeping through the roof. The bed was simply a bag of straw thrown into one corner of the room, without sheets or covering of any kind. This last fact however was not of much consequence, as it was summer-time and oppressively hot.

I stood for more than an hour gazing out of the opening which served for a window. Before me was spread an immense landscape, the limits of which I could not see. The tavern in which I had taken up my abode appeared to be isolated from all other dwellings, and save the cry of an owl and the hum of a moth on the window-pane, not a sound reached my ears. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and so bright that I could have seen to read the smallest print.

At last I began to grow weary, and, throwing myself on my pallet, I was soon in a deep slumber. How long I slept I know not, but I was awakened by a dull sound, which resembled someone hammering in the distance. I suppose it was the peculiarity of the sound which awoke me, for it was by no means loud, but conveyed to me the idea of someone striking iron with a muffled hammer. I rose from my bed and went to the window. The moon was low in the western horizon, by which fact I knew that it must be near morning. The sound I have referred to reached me more distinctly than when in the back part of the chamber. It appeared to come from some out-houses which were situated about a hundred yards from the inn.

Now, I am naturally of an inquiring mind, and this sound, occurring as it did in the middle of the night, in such a remote, out-of-the-way place, piqued my curiosity, and I felt an irresistible desire to go out and discover the cause of it. This desire, as the sound continued, grew upon me with such intensity that I resolved to gratify it at any price.

I put on my boots, the only articles of attire I had discarded, and cautiously opening the door of my chamber, noiselessly descended the rickety staircase. A few steps brought me into the lower apartment, which I found entirely deserted. I crept quietly to the door, and, unfastening it without making the slightest noise, was soon in the moonlight.

Not a soul was visible, but the sound still continued, and grew more distinct as I approached the place whence it proceeded. At last I found myself before a long, low building, through the crevices of which I could perceive a lurid glare issuing. I stooped down and peered through the keyhole, and, to my extreme

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surprise, I saw half-a-dozen strong looking men, with their coats and sleeves turned up, engaged in a variety of strange occupations. Some were working at a forge, others were superintending the casting of moulds, and some were engaged in the process of milling coin. In a moment the whole truth burst upon me. Here was the gang of counterfeiters I was in search of, and the landlord and his wife evidently belonged to the same band, for in one corner I perceived them employed, the man polishing some old half-sovereign pieces just turned from the moulds, while the woman was packing the finished coins into rolls.

II.

I had seen enough, and was about to return to my apartment again when suddenly I felt a heavy hand placed on my shoulder, and, turning my head round, to my horror found myself in the grasp of as ill-looking a scoundrel as ever escaped the gallows.

"What are you doing here, my good fellow?" he exclaimed in a gruff voice, giving me a shake.

"Taking a stroll by moonlight," I replied, endeavouring to maintain my presence of mind.

"Well, perhaps you'll just take a stroll in here, will you?" returned the ruffian, pushing open the door, and dragging me in after him.

All the inmates of the barn immediately stopped work, and rushed towards us when they saw me.

"Why, what's this?" they all exclaimed.

"A loafer I found peeping outside," said the man who had captured me.

"He's a traveller that came to the tavern to-night and asked for lodgings; the last time I saw him he was safe in bed," said the landlord.

The men withdrew to a corner of the apartment, leaving one to keep guard over me. I soon saw they were in earnest consultation, and they were evidently debating some important question. The man keeping guard over me said nothing, but scowled fiercely. I had not uttered a single word during the time I had been in the barn. I was aware that whatever I might say would in all probability only do more harm than good, and it has always been a maxim of mine to hold my tongue when in doubt. At last the discussion seemed to be settled, for the blackest and dirtiest of the whole came forward, and, without any introduction, exclaimed:

"I say, my man, look here—you must die!"

I did not move a muscle, nor utter a word.

"You have found our secret, and dead men tell no tales."

I was still silent.

"We give you ten minutes to say your prayers, and also allow you the privilege of saying whether you will be hanged or shot."

Suddenly an idea struck me. I remembered something that might save my life. I burst into a violent fit of laughter—in fact it was hysterical, but they did not know that. They looked from one to the other in the greatest amazement.

"Well, he takes it mighty cool," said one.

"I suppose he doesn't know we are in earnest," said another.

"Come, come! you had better say your prayers," said the man who had just spoken; "time flies."

My only reply was a fit of laughter more violent than the first.

"The man's mad!" they exclaimed.

"Or drunk," said some.

"Well, boys," I cried, speaking for the first time, "this is the rummest go I ever heard tell on. What! hang a pal?"

"A pal!—you a pal!"

"I ain't nothing else," was my elegant rejoinder.

"What's your name?"

"Did you ever hear of Ned Wilson?" I asked.

"You may be certain of that. Ain't he at the head of our profession?"

"Well, then, I'm Ned Wilson."

"You Ned Wilson!" they all exclaimed.

"You may bet your life on that," I returned, swaggering up to the corner where I had seen the old woman counting and packing the counterfeit half-sovereigns.

Fortune favoured me. None of the men present had ever seen Ned Wilson, although his reputation was well known to them, and my swaggering, insolent manner had somewhat thrown them off their guard, yet I could plainly see that all their doubts were not removed.

"And you call these things well done, do you?" I asked, taking up a handful of the money. "Well, all I can say is that if you can't do better than this, you had better shut up shop, that's all."

"Can't you show us anything better?" asked one of the men.

"I rather think I can. If I couldn't I'd go and hang myself."

"Let's see it," they cried.

This was my last *coup*, and one on which I knew my life depended.

"Lookee here, gentlemen," I exclaimed, taking one of the counterfeit half-sovereigns from my pocket, which had been rejected at the bank. "There's my last job; what do you think of it?"

It was passed from hand to hand, some saying it was no counterfeit at all, others saying that it was.

"How will you prove it is a counterfeit?" asked one of the men.

"By weighing it with a genuine one," I replied.

This plan was immediately adopted, and the character of the coin proved.

"Perhaps he got this by accident," I heard one of the men whisper to another.

"Try these," said I, taking the other two from my pocket.

All their doubts now vanished.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed some. "Splendid!" said others.

When they had examined it to their satisfaction they all of them cordially shook me by the hand, every particle of doubt having vanished from their minds. I carried out my part well. Some questions were occasionally asked me involving some of the technicalities of the businesss. These, however, I avoided by stating that I was on a journey of pleasure, and would much rather drink a glass of whisky than answer questions. The whisky was produced, and we made a night of it, and it was not until morning had dawned that we separated.

The next day I returned to Birmingham, brought down the necessary assistance, and captured the whole gang of counterfeiters in the very act. The den was broke up for ever, and most of them were condemned to serve a term of years in one of Her Majesty's prisons.

I have these counterfeit half-sovereigns still in my possession, and intend never to part with them, for they were certainly the means of saving my life.

H. P. Leggett.

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The Mistake I Made

The little girl was too charming to be resisted. In vain I called to my aid all the gravity and soberness that beseemed my age. In vain I held myself to myself as a person already within the verge of old fogeydom. In vain I propounded and solved elaborate arithmetical problems as to the variable proportions which sixteen would assume to forty at advanced stages of life. I know that last sentence is not correctly expressed, but let it pass. Thus stood the case: Charlotte was sixteen and I forty, and I, more than double Lotty's age—almost old enough to be her respectable papa—I found myself irretrievably enslaved by that young person, and trotting captive at her chariot-wheels—or more properly, the wheels of her infantine go-cart.

I had nursed Lotty, she had ridden a cock-horse upon my knee. I had kissed her moist lips when kissing was a ceremony performed rather for the sake of politeness to mamma than for any pleasantness in itself. I had made Lotty ill with surreptitious sugar plums; I had presented her with Christmas boxes of the most astonishing toys; I had assisted in the instilling of the alphabet into her youthful mind by means of highly coloured pictures in a painful state of alliteration; I had begged Lotty out of the corner, where she stood obstinate, finger in mouth, and with a general humidity of countenance.

I had thought Lotty a dirty child when I saw her paddling with her little fat hands in a puddle, or with traces of lollipops about her innocent mouth. I had execrated Lotty as a nuisance and a bore when she would poke her pug nose into my flirtation with Miss Mirables (who married afterwards Lord Methuselah). And at last it had come to this! We had changed places. I was the child now, and Miss Lotty was mistress over me and she knew it. She threw me a sugar plum when she so pleased; she taught me a letter of some sweet sibilating alphabet when she had nothing better to do; she patronised me, and began to take an interest in my temper and morals; she petted me when she lacked amusement, and when she was otherwise engaged gave me to understand in the plainest manner that I was a consummate bore, and an unmitigated nuisance.

Miss Lotty knew all about it. In vain I tried to treat her as a child. She laughed in my face at the transparent absurdity of the pretence. In vain I affected indifference. She exacted attention, and would not be snubbed. She flirted with small boys for the express purpose of vexing me, and knew that I was vexed, and I knew that she knew it.

In what manner or at what precise time she left off being a child and began to be a woman I do not know. She passed out of the nursery by no sensible transition, and took to her Missdom quite naturally. Juliet of the house of Capulet, brought out by her provident mother at the age of fourteen, did not assume her new honours with a more perfect coolness.

This, then, was the state of the case. I, who had overlived my youthful heart weaknesses, who prided myself on being safe henceforth from the subtlest fascinations of the female sex, fell into captivity at the hands of a little girl just out of the nursery. Having struggled in vain, I succumbed, and began to think seriously whether sixteen and forty were, after all, such incompatible ages. It was not quite a case of January and May. If I had been sixty and a lord, there would have been nothing unusual in the notion. If I had been a widower, and possessed a daughter a little older than Lotty, the match would have been perfectly *en règle*. The difference was on the right side. It was not as bad as if I had married my first love, who was forty when I was sixteen.

So I ceased to compare myself with the small boys with whom Lotty flirted. I turned a blind eye on the budding obesity of my figure, and began to consider the matter as an accomplished fact. Miss Lotty had an aunt—a very respectable person—of mature age. Miss Sims was the name of this lady, and Miss Sims and I had always been great friends. She was a gushing person, strongly sympathetic, and given to the study of the minor poets of the last generation. We had often exchanged sympathies, had often discoursed together on the affections after a diluted platonic manner, and she was accustomed to apply to me for explanations of namby-pamby passages of her favourite poets.

Charlotte was sixteen.

Miss Sims occupied the place in the family which maiden aunts so often fill. To make things generally pleasant, to be a general go-between, the friend of everybody, the deliverer of messages, the arranger of the delicate amenities of social life—such was Miss Sims' mission.

Her age was certainly verg-

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ing towards fifty. She was well preserved; had expressive eyes, hair scrupulously neat, but very thin, white angular hands, faint smile, and a purring sort of voice.

I respected Miss Sims immensely; I had a great friendship for her. The idea struck me that I would make her my confidante with regard to Lotty. She was the very person for a confidante. I could not for the life of me have broken the subject to papa and mamma. Lotty was a child to them still, and I felt that it would scarcely have seemed more ridiculous to them for me to confess a tender passion for the infant in long clothes than to hint the state of my heart towards Lotty. I had determined to make some move, and the aunt appeared to me the very medium through whom to make it. The familiar friend of Lotty, to whom that little maiden confessed all her innocent secrets — the companion and fellow-councillor of Lotty's parents — this aunt was just the confidante I wanted.

Lotty and her mamma were going forth on the business of card-leaving.

But, beyond this, I felt sure that the state of the case had not altogether escaped the sympathetic penetration of Miss Sims. That faint smile of hers, that wistful look in her fine eyes, a playful shake of the head sometimes, the pressure of a kind hand—these signs had not been lost upon me. Often, when my eyes had been following against their will the graceful, buoyant figure of Lotty, they would meet the eyes of Miss Sims; and as I smiled and half blushed at being thus caught, Miss Sims would smile and half blush likewise. Often, when I had been leaning over Lotty at her book, admiring the downward contour of the soft cheek, or the luxuriance of the glossy hair, lifting my eyes, they would again meet Miss Sims' eyes, and Miss Sims would turn her head away with an expression of countenance which spoke volumes.

Once, when I was shaking Miss Sims' hand on departure, I could not restrain myself from whispering: "*Qu'elle est charmante?*" Why I spoke in French I cannot tell. Miss Sims' knowledge of that language was imperfect, while Lotty's exceeded my own—so that it could not have been an aside from Lotty. But such French sentences are generally spoken without there being any satisfactory reason why they should not be uttered in English. However, to my exclamation, Miss Sims had rejoined: "Hush!" with an upraised bony finger, and an arch smile.

In breaking the matter to Lotty's aunt, then, I did not anticipate very much difficulty. She certainly had observed my admiration of her niece; and even had it been otherwise, the ready sympathy of this kind, estimable woman would have interpreted my meaning from a word or look.

I chose my time. I was copying some music for Lotty. Lotty and her mamma were going forth on the business of card-leaving.

As I took them down to the carriage, Lotty said: "You will finish my music?" And she made the prettiest beseeching *moue*, and lifted her face, just as when a child she had lifted it up to be kissed. "We shall soon be back, and you can stay to dinner. You must stay to dinner. The evenings are so dull and stupid, and then you can sing that duet with me. Now, go back and finish the music. You and Aunt Sarah can talk poetry, you know, till I come back."

"Yes, Miss Lotty, I had that very intention of talking poetry with Aunt Sarah—the sweetest poetry in the world—yourself the theme."

Returned to Miss Sims and the music copying, I made a crochet—"Miss Sims," I said—then two semi-quavers and a rest, then three blank bars.

"Miss Sims," I said, "I hope you will not see anything absurd in what I am about to—to—to lay before you," crescendo, written in neat italics.

"My heart——"

"Dear me!" cried Miss Sims.

"My heart, my dear Miss Sims, may be of a soft and foolish texture—yes, texture." (I had screwed myself up to the mark, and chose my language with deliberation.) "It may be soft, I say, but, upon my soul, I do not think it is. I think no man, the most insensate, could have seen daily, as I have seen, this sweet girl" (*con molto spirito*) "and have resisted her attractions. It does not lie within the power of human nature to resist them."

I was silent for a few minutes, and steadily continued my copying. I had determined to discuss the subject in the calmest and most reasonable manner. I confess the dots were scarcely circular, and the strokes scarcely straight, but I completed a most prodigious series of *ad libitum* before I recommenced. I dare not look at Miss Sims.

"That there is disparity in age I cannot deny. Some people would call it a great disparity——"

"Sir!" cried Miss Sims, with some warmth.

"Yes, I am not surprised at that tone. But I feel that I must bring this into prominence, and consider it judicially. I am not a young man. I cannot hide it from myself, even if I would—I am no longer young. Perhaps I have an appearance of age, a gravity, beyond my actual years."

"I think enough has been said on that part of the subject," Miss Sims interrupted me. "You lay too much stress on this point, and must be labouring, I

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think, under some strange misconception. After all, what does age matter—a few months more or less. It is the heart, my dear sir, the heart; the sympathy of affections, the reciprocity of ideas, the congeniality of sentiments——"

"It is like you to say so," I exclaimed. "I appreciate your kindness. We are old friends, Miss Sims——"

The expression on Lotty's face surprised me.

"Friends of long standing," Miss Sims agreed correctively.

"Friends of long standing. I knew that you would understand me. I felt that you were the best person, the only person, to whom I could first break this delicate subject. I knew that you would meet me half way."

"Oh! do not say that," sighed Lotty's aunt.

"You have seen the truth for some time," I went on. "In your eyes, in your smiles, I have read that you have discovered my secret. Woman's insight, the sympathy of a gentle nature—who can disguise such secrets from these? And now, be frank with me. I come to you in my perplexity. Do not pretend to misunderstand me. My tongue is timid. Help me—advise me!"

"Maidenly propriety!" she said, in a low tone.

"Exactly so. Your good sense and instinctive feeling of what is right prompts those words. I anticipated this. But, my dear Miss Sims, I do not wish to make you a conspirator with me. There shall be no secrets. I ask you to confess none to me. All I ask is that, as a friend, you will tell me whether there is any chance for me. You are everybody's friend—do not deprive me alone of your help."

"Really, I do not know what to say," Miss Sims whispered, in a voice greatly agitated.

I had long persevered in my music-copying. I knew that I was making the most astounding blunders, but that was of little consequence. If I left off this accompaniment I felt that my voice would break down too.

"My dear Miss Sims," I went on, "I know that your present hesitation proceeds from the best of motives. Do not think I am flattering you when I say that to your influence I attribute much of the exquisite purity of your charming niece."

This was not quite true, but I saw that a compliment would be well timed.

"She is a good child," said Miss Sims.

"I, too," I went on, "have not been blind to this gradual change, to those unfolding beauties. We are old friends, we have known each other many years. You can forgive—nay, you will sympathise with the warmth of my expressions. This gradual growth of love—what a mystery it is! 'He never loved that loved not at first sight,' says the poet. What a libel upon human nature, worthy of the gross lips that uttered it! True love is always gradual. The first indifference burgeons into liking, flowers into friendship, fruits into love. We know not where indifference ends and love begins."

In the flow of my words I flung aside my pen, and strode to the fireplace by which Miss Sims was sitting. My oratory must have been moving. Miss Sims was in tears when I next came to a pause.

She lifted her tearful eyes for a moment to mine, as I stood upon the hearthrug close by her side.

"Oh, spare me!" she said. "This tumult of feelings—so painful and yet so delicious! I am but a weak, girlish thing" (she giggled hysterically). "Leave me alone now. Some other time—some other time. I have been expecting this. I knew it must come."

"You *had* discovered then," I said. "I knew you had. Long ago, Miss Sims, long ago—did you not?"

"I could not be blind," she said. "Maiden modesty is very innocent; but could I help seeing?"

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "And there is hope for me?"

"What can I say? Do not press me."

"I intreat you. Say, at least, there is not despair."

"No, do not despair," she said. "I do not wish that."

We were silent for a minute or so. Miss Sims spoke first.

"You will speak to my brother!" she said, covering her face with her hand.

"Certainly. That is my intention, if you tell me I may do so. Do you think I may?"

Miss Sims looked at me between the fingers of the hand and covered her face.

"Yes," she said, "I *think* you may."

I deliberated.

"My dear Miss Sims," I said, "I can never sufficiently repay the kindness—the sympathy, the great sympathy—you have shown to me to-day. I am going to take advantage of this sympathy."

"Sir!" cried Miss Sims.

"Yes; gratitude consists mostly in taking advantage of the people who are kind to you. I am going to ask still greater favour of you. Will you break this matter to your brother? Will you hint my feelings to Lotty?"

"I see no occasion for that! Why to Lotty?"

"Well; I respect your prudence. No doubt you are right. To your brother, then?"

"Had not *you* better do that? It is so very awkward."

"My dear Miss Sims, oblige me in this. I shall be eternally indebted to you."

Miss Sims gave me her angular white hand. She looked up into my face with an expression of most intense sympathy. "I will do anything you tell me, *Henry*," she said—"May I call you Henry?"

"I consider it a most tender mark of your sympathy," I replied. I really thought her calling me by my Christian name, which she had never done before, a touching proof of her kind friendship.

"And now," I said, "I had better go. I am not inclined to see anyone in the present state of my feelings. When I next see you, Miss Sims, I hope to be received in this house on another—a closer and more intimate footing. I think we fully understand each other?"

"Adieu! God bless you!"

* * * * *

My readers, I have no doubt, see clearly the fix I had got myself into. Will they believe me when I say that I had no notion of it myself! A preoccupied man assimilates every word that is spoken to the subject of

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his own pre-occupation. When he enters into tender confidences, he speaks in ambiguously bashful hints, not in the precise language wherewith he would draw up his will.

I left the house with a feeling of the greatest satisfaction. The first move had been made, and made, I could not but flatter myself, with consummate address, and with a success equal to my highest hopes. This good, kind aunt of Lotty, I was deeply grateful to her, and determined that I would make her a handsome present on my wedding.

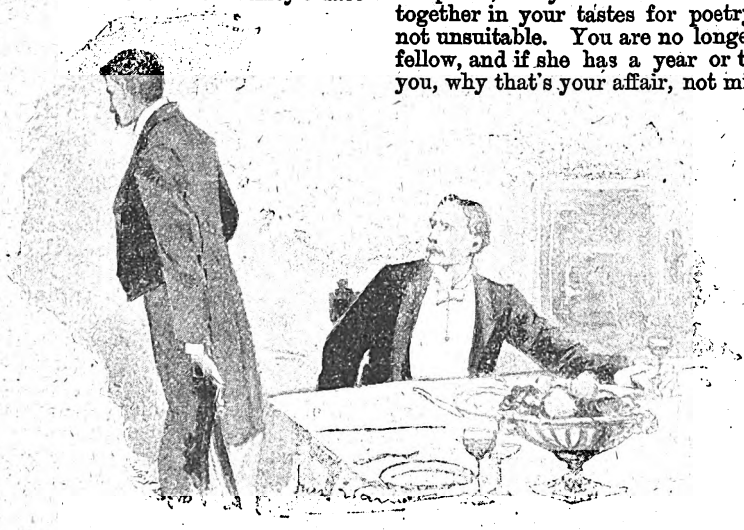
Everything went well.

The next morning I received a letter from Lotty's papa.

"I can have no objection, if you have none," he wrote. "I consent gladly to receive your visits at my house on the footing you desire. Come and dine with us at six, and we will talk it over."

* * * * *

I confess I was slightly nervous as I knocked at the Sims' door. There was a smile on the flunkey's face and an alacrity in his manner as he let me in. I saw that he knew all about it. What can we hide from these omniscient flunkeys?



I rushed from the room.

Miss Sims happened to be upon the stairs.

"How can I thank you?" I said, grasping her hand with a warmth of friendship. The flunkey had disappeared.

"Oh, Henry!" Miss Sims gasped.

Her feelings were too much for her. What a good heart this woman had to be so moved by the happiness of others. She clung to my hand, to my arm, to my shoulder, for support. She raised her eyes to mine, her face to mine—her lips; by Jove, I thought for a moment the good creature was going to kiss me.

"And how is—is—is she?" I said. "She is not unfavourable, I hope, towards my suit?"

"She is only too much blessed!" Miss Sims replied, with a smile, in which archness blended with sympathy. "Can you doubt it for a moment?"

At last I managed to reach the drawing-room door. Miss Sims would have me enter without her, for what reason I could not understand, but she professed to be too bashful and said:

"It would look so odd for us to enter together."

I was certainly very nervous. It cannot be expected that I should now relate accurately all that was said to me, and all that I said in return, when at the time itself I had no very clear notion of that same.

I stammered some sort of vague thanks and gratitude to Lotty's papa; and he said something about congratulating me in return, and then by mutual consent we suffered the conversation to turn on different subjects. Lotty's mamma helped me out of the difficulties of conversation as only a woman's fluent tongue can.

How I got through that dinner I cannot tell. The chief remembrance I have of it, is of the expression of Lotty's face.

I remember that we had champagne as upon some gala occasion. Lotty's papa drank Miss Sims' health and my health together in a humourous manner.

I was in a ghastly dream. Whether I knew the truth or did not know it I cannot tell. The dinner was over at length—the wine was put on. The ladies drank their one glass and left us.

As I opened the door for them Miss Sims whispered: "Do not be long."

We filled our glasses with claret.

"My dear fellow," said my host. "This little affair has given me the most entire satisfaction. I had not a suspicion of it.

"My sister Sarah, though I say it who shouldn't, is a most estimable person, a capital housewife, good-tempered, and you and she have always got on very well together in your tastes for poetry and so forth. Ages not unsuitable. You are no longer a chicken, my dear fellow, and if she has a year or two the advantage of you, why that's your affair, not mine. That is a matter of taste. Of course, you know that her little property amounts to a mere nothing. She has lived with us now for a number of years, and, upon my soul, I shall be sorry to lose her. But we must not be selfish in this world. Yes, I am convinced that Sarah will make you an excellent wife."

"Sir," I gasped, "there is some terrible and fatal mistake!"

"Mistake, sir?" cried my host fiercely; "what do you mean?"

"Your sister is a very respectable person," I stammered, "but I never had the remotest idea of—of——"

"Of what, sir?"

"The remotest idea of asking her to be my wife."

"Jones!" he said solemnly, "I always took you to be a man of honour. The feelings and affections of a woman are not to be played with in this atrocious manner——"

Everything swam before my eyes, the world was resolving itself again into chaos, the final collapse of all things was at hand.

Like Shylock, flung from the height of my certain hopes to ruin irretrievable and blank despair, I turned sick and faint.

"I pray you give me leave to go from hence. I am not well."

I rushed from the room—from the house.

The same night I took my passage on board an Ostend steamboat and floated in the darkness down the Thames, an exile from my native land.

W. Holcomb.

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That Hospitable House.

I opened my eyes and looked around me. A man was leaning over my bed; near the man stood a woman with a bonnet with great white wings on the sides, holding in her hand a moist compress. The room was plain and neat, with clean, white walls. On a table, covered with a great napkin of yellow linen, I noted a number of strange objects—rows of little phials, and a brown earthern jar filled with bits of ice. Through the muslin curtains, which flapped out from the window in the balmy air, I could see a patch of blue sky and the tops of green trees bending lightly in the breeze. Where was I? It seemed like a long dream that I had had; my head felt empty, my limbs ached, and I could not think.

The man gently lifted my head, and gave me a few drops of some liquid, which I swallowed with avidity.

"Well, Mr. Furniss," he said, "how do you feel?"

"Eh, what?" I muttered. "Where am I?"

"You are in my house, my dear sir, and we shall take good care of you. Now," he added, replacing my head on the pillow, "be quiet, and go to sleep."

I gazed at him for a long time, and all at once I recognised Doctor Bertram, the celebrated specialist in insanity. A shudder passed through my frame. Why was I in Doctor Bertram's hospital, instead of my own home in Phœnix Park, with my book, my herbs, and my microscopes around me? His hospital was for mad people!—and that Sister of Charity, those phials, that bowl of ice—Oh, heavens! I must be mad! But why—how?

"How long have I been here?" I asked, after a time.

"For four weeks, Mr. Furniss. But you must be quiet and sleep. Now do not talk."

For a month! Was it possible? What had happened. But even as I asked myself these questions, little by little I went off to sleep, and I saw in a billowy meadow, a road covered with blood and bordered on either side with monstrous microscopes shaped like trees—a road on which two little girls played at pitch and toss with a severed head, while Doctor Bertram, comically bonneted with a religious cap, rode astride a dead body, which reared and pranced and kicked till he could scarcely keep his seat.

The next morning I was better; and day by day I improved, though that horrible nightmare came to me each night. But it grew less and less distinct, and in a few weeks it almost ceased to trouble me.

One evening the doctor, whom I had not seen during the day, seated himself near my bed.

"Well," said he, feeling my pulse, "you are doing famously. I'll have you out, as good as new, in a few days. But you've had a close shave. It has been one of the prettiest cases of cerebral congestion I have ever handled—a beautiful case.

"Why, it's a wonder you are alive now. Tell me, how is your memory; can you remember what happened before you were brought here?"

"I—I don't know, I cannot think. I have passed through something fearful. What it is I cannot say. From the faint glimmer of recollection that comes to me, I have the sensation of having been dead—murdered! Oh, it is frightful. My brain is weak yet. Then, the child, a pretty golden-haired child—rolling on the floor!"

"Come, come, this will never do," said the Doctor. "You can tell me all about it in the morn——"

"No, now, Doctor," I cried. "It is coming back to me. Yes, I have it now."

Here is an exact transcript of my recital as I told it to Doctor Bertram, and, later, to the magistrate.

You know my passion for natural history. Well, scarcely a week passes that I do not go into the country botanising. That day I went to Glasnevin, where, as you know, the marshy meadows are rich in curious plants, infusoria, and diatoms. I was returning, and was almost in Dublin with my box full of rare specimens, on which I expected to make a report that would astonish the Botanical Society, when I saw a little girl, certainly not more than five or six years old, who was all alone, crying as if her little heart would break.

I approached her, but at sight of me she redoubled her cries. I could see that the little one was lost, and that she did not know where to go, so I spoke to her kindly, and, by dint of promising her unlimited sweetmeats got her to tell me that her name was Lizzie, and that she lived near Beresford Place in Lower Abbey Street. I took her hand, and we soon started off, talking like old friends.

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She was a beautiful child, fresh and rosy, with great, candid eyes and fair hair, which was cut short over her eyes and fell in ringlets about her shoulders. She trotted bravely along, her soft little hand holding my great, ruddy paw confidingly. As we walked she told me remarkable tales, in which figured a big, black horse, a little knife, a doll, and a number of people I did not know.

Lizzie was afraid she would be scolded when she arrived home, but she was not, and I—I was received with transports by her mother, who was half distracted. Never was gratitude expressed so heartily and pleasantly. Who was I? Where did I live? How did I happen to find her? and a thousand like questions were showered upon me.

"Oh, Mr. Furniss," said the mother, "you are the saviour of my child! How can we express our gratitude? We are not rich, but such a debt cannot be paid in gold. How happy my husband will be to repeat my thanks to you! He is still at his office; but—will you do us a great kindness, will you honour our humble board to-morrow? I shall have a *savant* here like yourself, and you two will enjoy each other's company, I am sure. And my husband will be so happy to have you."

I thanked her for the invitation, and promised to be present.

At the appointed hour I was shown into their modest drawing-room, and you may be sure the husband's gratitude was no less warmly expressed than the wife's. And little Lizzie threw her arms around my neck, and showered on me the innocent caresses of a happy child. I seemed, indeed, to be one of the family.

The dinner was a merry one, the *savant* seemed to be an interesting man—in brief, I passed an excellent evening.

The air had been heavy the whole day, and in the evening a storm came. Thunderclaps succeeded one another without interruption, the rain fell in torrents. Whether it was the effect of the storm, of the suffocating heat, or of the wine which I had drunk, I felt a strange melancholy, I could not breathe comfortably. I was about to set out for home, however, for it was late and my house was at some distance; but they insisted that I should stay. It would be foolish to expose myself to such a tempest when I was not feeling well; the mother begged me with such good grace that I was forced to remain and pass the night in that hospitable house. They ceremoniously conducted me to my room, and there wished me good night. I remember even that Lizzie, having fallen asleep in her father's arms, I kissed her little cheek, paled by sleep, and her dimpled little arms.

Left alone, I began to undress slowly, and wandering about the room, as one always does when one sleeps in a strange place. I felt as if I should be smothered in the close atmosphere of the room. Before getting into bed, I wanted to inhale a little of the outside air, and in spite of the roaring storm, I tried to open the window. It was a false window.

"Well, well!" I exclaimed, a little surprised.

I thought I would remove the chimney screen; it was a false chimney. I rushed to the door—it was locked! Fear seized me, and, holding my breath, I listened. The house was quiet, all seemed to be asleep. Then I inspected the room carefully, straining my ears for the least sound. On the floor, near the bed, I noticed spots; it was blood—dried and blackened blood! I shuddered, and a cold sweat stood out on my forehead. Blood! Why should there be blood there? And I saw that a whole sea of blood must have been spilt there—for a great space around the hard wooden floor had been freshly scrubbed and scraped. I tried to call out.

Under the bed I had seen a man, stretched out motionless as an overturned statue. I could not cry or call out. With trembling hands I touched the man. He did not move. With trembling hands I pushed the man; he did not move. With trembling hands I seized the man by the feet and drew him forth—he was dead! His neck had been cleanly cut, as with one stroke of a razor, and the head held to the trunk only by a slender ligament.

I thought I should go mad. But something must be done—the assassin might come at any moment. I raised the body, placed it on the bed, and, having blown out the candle, I slipped under the bed. I did all this mechanically, without thought of defence or safety; it was instinct that prompted me, not intelligence or reflection.

My teeth chattered. My hands were wet with a thick moisture. I felt as if I had gone to bed in a charnel-house.

I remained there, in that awful fear, minutes, hours, months, years, centuries—I do not know how long. I lost all idea of time and place. All was silent. From without, the noise of the storm and the whistling of the wind came to me softened and sad, like moans. I could not picture to myself the assassin who was coming—who was there perhaps. In that state of horror, I could see only little Lizzie, fair, rosy, and frank, with her doll and her great hat; I could see her sleeping in her father's arms; and then she lightly raised her eyelids and disclosed her eyes, which seemed to me to be bold, inplacable, cruel, murderous.

The door opened, but as softly as the scratching of a mouse. I bit my lip till the blood came, to keep from crying out. Now a man stepped in with gliding tread, with infinite precautions to avoid touching the furniture. It seemed to me as if I could see the cruel, clutching fingers gliding over my clothes, searching my pockets. Then the steps came nearer—seemed to graze me. I felt that the man was bending over the bed; that he struck one fierce blow. Then I knew nothing more.

When I recovered consciousness, the room had become silent again. But fright held me nailed to the spot. At length I decided to escape, with what caution you may imagine. On tiptoe I gained the door, which had not been closed. Not a sound, not a breath. Feeling my way, I passed into the hall. I waited to see a head thrust suddenly from out of the shadows, a knife gleam in the dark. But no—the brute, glutted with crime, slept without remorse. I descended the stairs, drew the bolt of the door, and, half fainting, with the blood frozen in my veins, I fell into the gutter of the deserted street.

Doctor Bertram had listened to my recital with the deepest interest.

"And there I found you, Mr. Furniss, and in what a state! Could you recognise the house?"

"Yes," I replied; "but to what end?"

"Well, let me cure you, and then we shall go together to the house of these assassins."

Eight days later, the doctor and I stood in lower Abbey Street. I recognised the terrible house. All the blinds were drawn; in front of the door a placard was placed, bearing the legend: "To Let."

I inquired of the former residents from a neighbour.

"They have been gone a month and more," she replied. "It's a great pity, for they were very nice people."

Reginald Baird.

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THE DESERTER.

In 1864 the horrors of war spread over the South of America like a pall of death. Not only did they stalk among the soldiers to strip the rags from their backs; to starve them or to feed them on rotten meat; to place them in the deadly path of the Minie or the murderous grape; to mow them down with foul disease and loathsome suffering; but they sent conscription to feed mothers on despair and children on stones, and hunger to take up its abode at the fireside of the poor.

The facilities of the transitory and feeble government for supplying means of sustenance to poor families were inadeqate in remote and sparsely settled communities; and now that the husband, on whom had depended the livelihood of his family, had been armed with a musket and ordered to the front, there was no lack of anguish and the distressing cry of children for bread. The despairing mother wrote to her husband on paper that was blotted with tears, and from every word there stared at him the suffering faces of his children, and the imploring look that no parent can withstand.

So the staunch soldier, who could unflinchingly storm a rampart or face a cannon, and who looked upon death as his companion and honour as his future shroud, employed his affections as his gravedigger, and sneaked away in the darkness like a thief. Desertion and death were synonymous terms, and the man sacrificed his life to feed his children. Depletion of the ranks by desertion assumed such alarming proportions that the War Department stretched forth its relentless arm and stained its sword with the blood of its own men. It was not a question of bread for children, but of men for the vanguard.

Desertion was, in point of number, equivalent to death on the battlefield, so far as it affected the strength of the line; in point of discipline it was a thousand times worse. A man's life was worth nothing unless it served to check the career of a rifle-ball directed at the vitals of the government. To such a desperate strait had the war policy of the Confederate Government been reduced, that in order to discourage a defection that was becoming epidemic, a patrol was employed, which, with the assistance of hounds in rare instances, hunted the deserters down and hanged them in chains, or shot them, blindfolded, with their faces to the wall.

One day a deserter named Martin was at work in a cornfield attached to his humble dwelling. Four or five pale, ragged, emaciated children were amusing themselves in the yard, and a homely careworn woman was bending over a wash-tub, while her infant, with hollowed eyes and wasted limbs, was playing in the dirt at her side. The man had been at home unmolested for two months, and had come to experience a faint sense of security.

When darkness came on he shouldered his hoe and trudged to the house, taking in his arm a few pine knots which were to furnish light for the evening. The family sat down to a supper of cornbread, which they washed down with a disgusting drink. It was made from corn, roasted until it was black; it was called "coffee," and was drunk with sugar.

"Well, Mary," said the husband, "the corn will be in rasting-ear in two weeks, and we shall have something fit to eat."

"Yes," said the woman.

"And then, you know, the birds will begin to flock in, and I can trap a few of them and get meat."

"Yes."

"I think we're going to get along first rate. I don't believe the war will last three months longer. You know one reason for so much desertion is that a great many soldiers have no idea now that we can ever whip the North, and they think that if they desert, the Confederate will go under before the patrol can catch them. I'm thinking that I'm almost out of danger."

"I hope so, William; but there's no telling."

"All right, Mary; but they can't take me alive."

This declaration was made with such a calm and quiet determination that the poor woman looked anxiously at the hard lines about his eyes and mouth. She knew that he meant it, and that the loaded revolver he always carried would never hesitate a moment.

In striking contrast to the woman, the man was of powerful build. His hardships in the army had toughened his muscles, and strengthened his large bones and supple joints. In a simple measure of strength he would have been a match for two ordinary men. His shoulders were broad and erect, and his arms and legs large and full of power.

They sat silently watching the blazing knots in the broad fireplace, the woman engaged with some coarse knitting, and the man smoking home-made tobacco in an old clay pipe. On a sudden, the man took the pipe from his mouth, straightened his shoulders, and listened attentively. His wife noticed the movement and hurriedly whispered:

"What is it, William?"

"Sh-h-h!"

They listened a moment longer, and the man stealthily rose to his feet and gazed steadily at the door, which was barred on the inside.

"What is it, William?" the woman again whispered; having strained her hearing in vain to catch any unusual sound.

"Horses."

"Where?"

He answered by pointing in the direction of the road. The truth flashed upon the woman's mind that, beyond a doubt, a hunting party was abroad, and that their game was a deserter. She rose to her feet, very pale, and regarded her husband with an anxious look. The man glanced at his children, lying asleep in their cots, cast a loving look at his wife, stepped softly to a shelf on which was a bucket of water, and dashed its contents upon the fire. The blaze was extinguished, and the room was in profound darkness.

"Run William!" whispered the woman, in a quavering voice.

He silently clasped her in his arms, and said:

"Keep a brave heart, Mary. They can't take me alive!"

He pushed her away, although she unconsciously clung to him, pulled out his revolver, cocked it, and let the hammer down softly. He then put on his hat, quietly unbarred the door, and slipped out in the dark.

The sound of the horses' hoofs had ceased. The woman staggered to the open door, and saw several dark forms hurrying round the cottage. They must have

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seen her husband, for a stern voice called "Halt!" and she heard the click of a carbine.

A shadowy figure stole crouching alongside a fence, and on hearing the command it suddenly straightened, and bounded forward like a frightened deer. There was a vivid flash and a report from the carbine, and the stealthy figure halted a moment, and returned the fire. The soldier fell as a pistol ball crashed through his shoulder; the fugitive ran with redoubled speed, and disappeared in the darkness. There was a rapid discharge of carbines, but Martin had gained the swamp, and further pursuit was out of the question.

The hunters returned and bore the wounded man into the woman's cottage. She rekindled the fire, and assisted, with trembling hands, in dressing the wound.

"How long has your husband been here?" asked the captain.

"Two months."

"Where will he go?"

"I don't know."

"You do know!"

The woman made no reply.

"Do you know you are guilty of harbouring a deserter?"

"Yes," she said, firmly and proudly, looking him full in the face.

"Do you know what can be done with you?"

She said nothing.

"You can be arrested, and punished for a crime."

She regarded him with intense scorn, and remained silent.

"I'm glad he got away," she said at length quietly.

"Did you assist him in escaping?"

"He needed no help."

"He surely told you where he was going?"

She shook her head.

"Did he say when he will come back?"

"No."

"Now, I see that you are a woman of sense and courage. If you will tell me where I can find him I will not arrest you. You would not like to be handcuffed, and carried to prison?"

"I wouldn't care."

"What would become of your children?"

The woman became pale, her eyes flashed, and she stammered:

"You would not leave them here to starve, would you?"

"Certainly," said the officer, as he laughed at her agony.

The mother was transformed into a tigress. She sprang across the room, seized a carbine that leant against the wall, and levelled it at his head.

"You would! You cowardly, inhuman brute!" She screamed as she pulled the trigger.

There was a deafening report, and she fell fainting to the floor.

"Simply sheared me a little," remarked the officer, as, with a certain degree of interest, he felt a narrow, white streak, that the ball had cut through his hair. "An inch lower, and—what was it old Man said at Austerlitz? She's game, though, and quick as lightning. No use trying to get anything out of her. I just wanted to scare her a little, and she took it in dead earnest."

"What are you going to do now, Captain?" asked one of the men.

"Oh, I'll put Walker's dogs after him. They'll fetch him."

"The bloodhounds?"

"Yes."

"Will you follow them up?"

"I don't know."

"They'll never leave him alive if you don't."

"I know it."

"That would be terrible."

"Why?"

"They got that fellow Rutherford down, and tore him to pieces."

"Well, what's the difference? Is that any worse than calling the dogs off, and bringing him back alive to be shot?"

"But he's armed and will kill the hounds."

"Twelve dogs? Don't be uneasy. He will finish two or three of the younger dogs, until his pistol is empty, and the rest will manage him.

"Old Tiger will be there at the finish and will make all the final arrangements for the funeral. He hangs on closer than death, and they've never got a square blow or a safe shot at him yet."

At daybreak, the next morning, an old man, smooth-shaved and stoop shouldered, was riding in the direction of the woman's cottage. The cavalry captain accompanied him, and eleven bloodhounds—magnificent dogs—trotted along, some ahead, and others on either side of the horsemen, while two hundred yards in the rear, a solitary dog jogged along, as if already weary of the enterprise, and disgusted with the life he was called upon to lead. This was none other than the famous Tiger, more generally called "Old Tige," the dog that never lost a trail, and never failed to run his game to earth.

"Walker," said the officer, "I think we had better skirt the woods, and not let the woman know that we've got the dogs out. She might give us trouble."

They entered the swamp in the direction the man had taken, and Walker called the dogs about him. Tiger walked leisurely up, and lay down near his master's horse.

"Heigho! get up, sir!"

The old dog slowly obeyed the command, and stood blinking and staring stupidly at his master. Walker descended from his horse, and, pointing to the ground, said:

"Hie on!"

The other dogs were already scouring the ground, in all directions. Old Tige put his nose to the grass and began to hunt the scent by systematically describing a circle, which he continually widened, his master watching him closely the meanwhile, and paying no attention to the other dogs. A young hound soon sent up the well-known howl, and the other dogs chased eagerly around him, Old Tige trotting to the scene behind all the others.

The dogs were greatly excited. The old dog unceremoniously pushed his way through the crowd, and sniffed the ground. The young hound, impatient that no command was given, and satisfied that he had found the trail, slowly advanced into the swamp, his nose all the time to the ground. Soon he set off on a full run, the other dogs following with yelps. Old Tige examined the spot indicated by the young hound, but was entirely unconcerned, and proceeded to smell the ground for a few yards around. Walker called the other dogs back, and old Tige sullenly shook his head until his ragged ears flapped against his jowls, and lay down again.

"He's not satisfied," said Walker. "I will have to show him the track. He's in doubt."

Walker crept away along the fence, followed by the old dog, and when he had reached the spot opposite where the man was last seen, he saw through the fence

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a track indented in the soft earth, and ordered the dog to climb over. Old Tige clambered laboriously over the rails, and scented the track. He regained his master's side, and trudged with him back to the swamp.

"I think the woman heard the dogs," said Walker. "I saw her looking through the door and listening. Tiger's got the scent. Hie away, sir!"

The dog hunted for a few minutes, and found the trail.

With a single yelp he disappeared in the thicker part of the underbrush, and the whole pack bounded yelping after him. They pursued the trail for a mile through the swamp, and mounted a hill on the opposite side. They disappeared over the summit, and Old Tige, already far behind, reached the highest point, and came to a standstill. He remained for one or two minutes surveying the surrounding country, and then struck off at right angle from the trail, with his nose high in the air and his tail straight with his back. He went in the direction of a large plateau covered with tall pines and salamander hills.

Occasionally he would stop, as if listening to the yelping of the hounds as it rapidly grew fainter in the distance. Having traversed the plateau, which was five miles in width, he came to the outskirts of a canebrake, and bent his nose to the ground. He proceeded two miles along the edge of the dense growth of cane until he found a path which led through.

The traveller would be compelled to pick his way through the mud and water by stepping carefully upon poles and cyprus roots.

The dog sniffed the ground attentively at the entrance to the swamp, and a sudden swishing of the tail and a loud snorting showed that he had found the trail. Before entering, he looked behind him and listened for the dogs, standing the meanwhile on three legs, and as still as a statue. No sound could be heard. They had followed the trail and had gone fifteen miles, while the old dog had cut across the country and headed them off.

He pulled through the mire, clambered over the slippery poles, jumped from root to root, and from tuft to tuft, until he gained the opposite side. Here he found a fence that was decayed and broken down. It inclosed a field that had been in disuse for several years, and that was overgrown with young pines and dewberry vines. Near the opposite side of the field was an abandoned log cabin. The mud had long ago dropped from the cracks between the logs; the roof was partly gone; the chimney had fallen, and was a pile of mud and sticks; the windows had lost their shutters years ago, and the hewn slabs, with which the floor was laid, were disarranged and decayed.

The berries in the field were ripe, and the dog consumed considerable time in wandering around the pines, his nose all the while close to the ground and his tail whisking fiercely. The cause is easily explained; the man had picked the berries and breakfasted in the field. The trail was hot, but the dog remaining silent, every now and then raising his head and peering about him. The old cabin was almost hidden by young mulberries and China trees.

The dog left the trail finally and trotted to the door of the cabin. He place his fore-feet upon the block that served as a step, and looked cautiously around the interior. His victim lay upon his face in a corner, sound asleep, his forehead resting upon his right arm, and the pistol clasped in his right hand. The dog pricked up his drooping ears and eyed him curiously. He noiselessly gained the door-sill, still keeping his eyes cautiously on the sleeping man. He advanced one foot upon a slab to the right, but it rocked and made a slight noise.

Another method of approach was left. The wily old dog crept under the sill and proceeded under the house towards the corner in which the deserter slumbered. About three feet from where he lay a slab had been displaced, leaving an opening of six feet long and twelve inches wide. The dog cautiously poked his head through the hole, planted his fore-paw upon a beam, and gradually brought his shoulders upward until he stood almost erect upon his hind legs. With a dexterous, noiseless spring, he brought his hind feet upon the beam, and stood a moment in this cramped position.

Finding the sleeping man still undisturbed, he approached him carefully, taking steps slowly. He smelt the man's muddy boots, drawing deep and silent inspirations, and sniffed along his entire person until he reached his head, and here he breathed with much greater caution. The man was in his shirt sleeves, and his large, strong neck presented a tempting field for attack. But the dog was old and his fangs were worn with age. He regarded the exposed neck so eagerly, and his whole frame was so rigid, that it seemed he was on the point of taking a desperate step.

Had the man lain with his throat uppermost, perhaps the dog would not have hesitated. As it was, while he was regarding the bait that tempted him he suddenly pricked up his ears and listened attentively. He heard the yelping of the hounds as they emerged from the canebrake. Stepping cautiously backward he disappeared through the hole, slunk into a dark corner under the cabin, and lay down.

The hounds crossed the fence, noisy, furious, and bloodthirsty. They tore through the patch of berries, and their noise awakened the man. He listened, and then sprang to his feet. He trembled in every joint, and his teeth chattered with fear. He looked round wildly and despairingly, and discovered a joist above his head. Securing the pistol in his belt, he sprang upward and caught the joist with his hands. It was old and rotten and swayed under his weight, but he pulled himself upon it and awaited the dogs.

They rushed blindly into the cabin, foaming and yelping, eagerly smelled the slabs on which the man had slept, ran around the cabin barking and hungry for blood, crawled under the cabin, scoured the shrubbery, went over the field again, and rushed madly back into the cabin. Knowing that they would find him sooner or later, and that every moment he lost lessened the distance between himself and the human bloodhounds, the man selected the largest and finest-looking dog, and sent a bullet between his eyes.

The hound rolled over with quivering limbs and stiffening muscles. The dogs were thunderstruck, but not dismayed. One strong young hound made a desperate spring, and fastened his fangs in the man's heel. He fell with a shot through the brain. The man had three shots left, and he must reserve at least one for a last extremity. He had killed two dogs and counted nine remaining. With two more well directed shots he reduced the number to seven.

By this time the fugitive had warmed to his work. The blood tingled in his hands and arms, and he felt his great strength bulging and swelling his muscles. No time was to be lost. He replaced the pistol, stood upon the joist, and pushed a few boards from the roof. Grasping the rotten rafters, he pul ed himself

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upon the roof, and sought a bludgeon. The boards were of oak, and were weighed down with logs, which ran traversely, and which he easily pushed off with his feet. With little difficulty he secured a worm-eaten partially-decayed board, four feet long, and an inch thick. By striking it over the end of a log, he split it, and was thus armed with a powerful weapon.

Martin crawled carefully to the eaves, and prepared to give battle to the deadly enemy. He looked upon the ground, but the dogs were not visible; and, steadying himself, he dropped heavily and caught nimbly on his feet. He felt that he must finish the fight within half-an-hour, or he would be confronted with carbines and pistols. The dogs heard him drop, and sprang through the door. The man turned quickly and raised his weapon; the seven dogs made a furious onslaught, but a powerful blow upon the head sent the leader rolling dead upon the ground. The rotten board was strained by the blow, and he must use it more carefully. Six ferocious dogs still confronted him, and two eyes that he did not see blinked at him from under the cabin. The vigour with which the deserter met the attacks, and the threatening attitude that he maintained, disconcerted the dogs, and they ran around him at a safe distance, their teeth glistening, their tails whisking, their heads bent to the ground, the froth dripping from their protruding tongues.

The man suddenly dashed at a dog, and mortally wounded him with a heavy blow on the back of the neck. While he was in the act of striking, and before he could regain his defensive attitude, an active young dog, with fangs as sharp as knives, sprang upon his shoulders, and fastened his teeth in the back of the man's neck. The other dogs, emboldened by the success of their companion made a furious attack from behind. The man faced about, with the fangs of the hound still imbedded in his neck, and his back ripped and lacerated with the sharp claws of the suspended dog, and struck about wildly and desperately, breaking the jaw of one and the leg of another. He made one terrible blow that, in his agony, missed the mark, and his noble bludgeon was shattered against the ground.

The dog gnawed at his neck, and imbedded his fangs still deeper in the flesh, causing the blood to pour down the man's back and breast. At this moment, when the man was paralyzed with pain, and frantic at the loss of his weapon, the two dogs still unhurt that confronted him, sprang upon him, buried their teeth in his flesh, and bore him to the ground.

He sank upon his knees, threw off the two dogs with a mighty effort, and defended his throat with all the desperation and strength that aroused his every energy, and sustained his failing hopes.

They snapped at his hands, and tore them; and completely stripped the shirt from his body. They ploughed his skin with their claws, and the blood gushed from a hundred wounds. One of the dogs allowed the strong hand of the man to close upon his throat, and then he was flung stunned to the ground. Catching an idea from this manœuvre, the man allowed the other hound to seize his arm, then took him by the leg and dashed him against the house.

The deserter was growing faint; but he staggered to his feet, grasped the hind legs of the dog that clung so tenaciously to his neck, snapped the bones as though they were reeds, and jerked him from his hold, tearing the flesh horribly.

By one of those curious eccentricities of fortuitous chance, the man found a weapon in his hands in the dog that he held by the legs, and that snapped at his legs, and writhed, and squirmed, and howled.

The two hounds that he had succeeded in throwing off rallied their strength and returned to the attack cooler and wiser, but none the less terrible. The man backed against the wall, and met the charge by knocking down a dog with the one he held in his hands.

Finding that he could not advantageously wield his heavy weapon in such close proximity to the wall, he suddenly advanced, and knocked over the other dog in the act. The blows, heavy as they were, did not disable his two antagonists. Every time that he swung down his living bludgeon it became weaker and its struggles more faint. He struck rapidly and carefully, husbanding his strength, yet every now and then missing his object, as it would adroitly evade the blow, and bringing down his heavy club against the ground with a dull thud, crushing its bones, and dislocating its vertebra.

The wounded hounds had hidden in the thicket, and the two that remained had become bruised and crippled, and had changed their tactics into harassing their enemy until he had expended all his strength.

He felt himself growing sick and faint, and he recognised the necessity of immediately bringing the fight to a close by capturing his enemies with strategy. He threw aside his weapon, but the dogs simply glared at him. If he could only get them in his clutches again he would be saved, but experience had made them cunning. So he suddenly threw up his hands and fell, and they sprang to his throat. Quick as a cat he seized a throat in each hand, turned them over upon the ground with great difficulty, planted his great knees upon their breasts, and crushing their ribs with his remaining strength, choked them until life was extinct.

The terrible fight had lasted two hours. The man staggered to his feet, and looked around. Not a soul was in sight. He drew a deep breath, and his naked, bloody chest swelled with triumph. But the loss of blood, and the extreme pain of his wounds, had so exhausted him, that he felt the ground rising to strike him in the face, and with a heavy lunge, he lay extended upon the ground.

Two glittering eyes, followed by the neck and shoulders of a hound, emerged from under the cabin. Old Tige crept forward softly, but darted back, as the man, with a desperate effort, rose to his hands and knees. The deserter battled bravely with unconsciousness, but was dying of thirst. He crawled painfully along a disused path leading to a spring, while the blood streamed upon the ground.

On reaching the spring, he drank freely, and bathed his face and head. The blood poured from his wounds and changed to the colour of wine the little stream that flowed from the spring. The dog had followed him unseen, and was crouching behind a thick clump of shrubbery. The man, refreshed by the water, again staggered to his feet, but the pines swam before his eyes, and he fell unconscious to the ground. The old dog approached cautiously, and closed his powerful jaws upon the throat of the fainting man.

* * * * *

A woman, pale and haggard, and with the wild light of insanity in her eyes, sat on the ground, and held the head of her husband in her lap, and rocked, and moaned, and sang, and cried, and called him vainly. The eyes that stared at the sky were so terribly bloodshot, and the face was so black, and the features so distorted, that it is strange she recognised as her husband the disfigured, lifeless body of Martin, the deserter.

Richard Sibert.

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THE KNIGHT OF THE BLUE ARMOUR

MANY hundred years ago a grim castle frowned with surly aspect from a pile of rocks upon a lonely island.

Rumour said an ogre dwelt there; but really it was Gaston de Mesquin (which translated means sordid and stingy), better known as the Knight of the Blue Armour, who had disappeared from his home in France to guard his treasures in this remote place.

This baron had robbed and plundered his own and foreign countries to so great an extent that his life was not safe. To protect himself, he had ordered a suit of armour to be made in Toledo.

He surveyed himself with pride, for so strangely was the steel burnished that sometimes it appeared bronze, sometimes blue, and sometimes green, and as its owner went clanking about the chamber, he resolved to call himself the Knight of the Blue Armour, and to start a report that he was enchanted.

Rumour wears myriad wings, and, as her lips magnify every tale her ears hear, she spreads this report throughout the country. The frightened servants fled, and alone and mysteriously did the knight convey his hoard of treasures to the rocky island.

The king, who lost his tribute by its master's flight, seized the castle; and nobody mourned the loss of the avaricious nobleman who had sacrificed so many lives for his selfish gain, and nobody tried to discover his fate.

When ten years had dropped their petals in the garden of time, a pestilence swept over the country, leaving famine in its wake; and, although the grief-stricken remnant of humanity murmured prayers for deliverance, no help came.

In their distress they turned to Father Francis, the benevolent, learned, sympathetic monk, whose little church stood not far from the deserted castle.

Father Francis could sit in his little garden in the shade of its high wall all day among the spicy gilli-flowers, the fluffy red peonies and the cloth-of-gold roses, watching the green dragon-flies and brown, speckled butterflies at play among the velvet petals, hearing the birds sing their songs in the swaying trees, and taking pleasure in the bounce and buzz of the industrious bees filling their honey-bags; or he could close his eyes to these delights and study here, as well as in his bare room, odd volumes held together by heavy silver clasps and filled with quaint lettering of ancient scribes.

But even when at his orisons in the chapel, he was always ready to listen to the woes of his people, and to help them by word or deed; for Father Francis believed himself nearer Heaven's blessings when helping mankind than at any other time.

He still believed the Knight of the Blue Armour to be alive, and connected him with the legend of the island, that could be seen on a clear day like a golden dot on the sky line across the sparkling sea.

If he could approach the tyrant, perhaps he might soften his heart. Father Francis called his people together in a little ivy-wreathed chapel.

"I go," he said, "to procure help to that island which legend calls enchanted. Be its owner monster, dragon, wizard or cruel man, I will bid him aid you, my dear children. Who will sail thither with me?"

The faces grew pale.

"Do not leave us, Father Francis, do not leave us," was the cry.

"Who will go with me?" he repeated.

Then in the silence out spoke the bold voice of Jean le Hardi: "I am your unworthy companion, Father Francis, if you will have me."

"One is all I need," answered the monk, "and now farewell, my children; we go to-day. I give you my blessing!"

The people bowed their heads and sobbed. The old ones grieved to lose their priest, but the young maidens sorrowed for the handsome, dauntless Jean, who had captured their tender hearts.

As Adele du Bois walked out under the arched stone door, she found Jean waiting. He clasped her hand and told her in his ardent gaze the secret she had craved so long.

She slipped her scented rosary on his wrist for a talisman, and to thank her he bent his tall head and kissed her before the astonished and jealous girls, at whose gaze deep poppies rose in her cheeks under the shadow of her crimpled linen wimple.

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One bright morning the Knight of the Blue Armour had left his stronghold and lay basking on the rocks. He enjoyed the fresh breeze that blew away the curling heads of the roaring waves as he had blown away human sympathy.

Like himself, the day was cold and brilliant in appearance, and the sun seemed to delight in striking upon the figure that lay a shapeless mass of glittering steel upon the huge brown boulders.

Insensible to the loneliness of the place, he was rejoicing in his good luck to have been so long unmolested, when his quick eye detected a tiny black speck drifting from wave to wave, midway between the island and the ship, many leagues away.

In it were two men, an elderly priest and a strong, handsome youth, who pulled the oars with a hearty stroke.

"It is he," said Father Francis to Jean, as a gigantic billow dropped them down its slippery side in full view of the rock, on which the knight rested. "I thought the Blue Knight and the ogre were identical. Pull steady, Jean, and keep a stout heart."

The knight, meanwhile, with a very angry expression, rose to his feet.

"Who lands?" he cried to the intruders. "Who lands? Is it peace? Is it menace? This island is mine; neither friend nor foe is welcome. Ye land on peril of your lives."

"We are messengers of peace," said Father Francis, as he stepped from the boat, followed by Jean, "and, after craving your pardon and begging for your grace, we sue for favour."

"Beg and sue as you please," was the reply; "your blood will answer for your crime of entering my rocky gates. Begone."

Adele du Bois walked out.

"I know you, Gaston de Mesquin," said the priest, undisturbed by threat and scowl and furious gestures, "I know you. Have I believed the tales of your disappearance? Do I not know that yonder castle contains the treasures won by your greed of will and strength of arm?

"Listen; your people, who are my people, starve. Atone for your evil deeds by giving your bounty to succour the suffering ones. Help them, help; help for their sakes, for your present peace, for your future reward, and for my sake—who will call heaven's gifts of mercy upon your path. Help them!"

"I would the plague had carried you off, too; mayhap famine will, if he bide long enough.

"Were my prayers useful, I would piece head of nation on to tail of vesper and beg him starve thy stomach into dust. Begone, I say, both of you; begone!"

Turning, he started up the beach with haughty, swinging strides.

"Halt, sir knight," called Father Francis, "halt! Once more I give you a chance to atone for your past misdeeds of rapacity. Will you aid your people, or will you continue to selfishly guard what you have gained?

"Choose, for I am empowered to bring you to punishment. Choose, for in this hour your doom is set. Whether you wish it or not, your property is mine—mine to divide among your people, who are my people."

The strong breeze played with the white curls on the troubled brow of Father Francis, for he hoped the knight would relent and escape his doom. But these could not pierce his heart any more effectually than the sun could dart its rays through the glittering armour.

"How blue the sea, how blue the sky, how hard the knight's face, how grieved the monk!" Such were the thoughts of Jean, who gazed wonderingly at the scene.

A strange thing happened.

"It is sad, Jean, but I must punish this man," said Father Francis, as the knight walked away. "We cannot spill his blood, yet we must seize his possessions for the hungry ones at home. Watch!"

As they overtook him again the Knight of the Blue Armour turned with a menacing glance, but was arrested by the monk, who said slowly:

"Knight of the Blue Armour, there are treasures in the sea—guard them; there are monsters in the sea—go live with them. You wear armour—it shall cling to you; the sign and seal of your greedy nature shall be a cumbersome claw; your eye shall shrivel in its socket; and your heart, men shall look for in vain. Begone!"

This was hardly spoken when the knight vanished, and a huge lobster fell from the rocks into the ocean with a great splash.

Father Francis and Jean signalled their ship to land. They loaded it with the spoils of the castle and sailed home; one to the charge of his people, the other to the gentle Adele.

So well does the lobster fulfil the charm that, clad in his helmet and cuirass of mail—a marvel of flexibility—he guards for ever the secret caverns of the ocean.

One thing reminds the Knight of the Blue Armour of his greed—the awkward grasping claw which so often brings him into trouble. ESTHER SINGLETON.

The next number of SHORT STORIES will contain the opening chapters of "Pauper Blue-Blood," a new serial romance by Miss Winifred Graham, whose writings are already known to readers of this paper.

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THE EYES OF LUCILE.

For five years there had been clouds of smoke circling in Valentine's eyes, the roar of surf was in his ears, and sullen apathy in his breast. The world passed before him in a dull grey dream of uninteresting figures, and he seldom knew if it were morning or night.

"How sad—how very sad," he sometimes heard a voice saying; "Val was such a promising boy. But the craze for drink—well, he got it from his father."

He would slowly sweep his leaden eyes upward to see who had criticised him thus, but if he discovered anyone, he could not determine who it was, and the words he would have said in response, stuck in his throat and would not leave his tongue. His servant, the white, bent old man that had cared for his father during twenty years of his lurid life, wept over Valentine as the boy lay at night in the heavy sleep that succeeded his days of drunkenness.

"He'll be dead soon—he'll be dead within a year—the beautiful boy," would mutter the old man, as he bent over the bed and smoothed back the matted hair from Valentine's brow. And then the poor old fellow would kneel and pray for the "dear child," whom he had seen at the hour of his birth and loved as his own ever since. And, praying, he would sink away to troubled sleep, holding Val's hand until he was aroused by the hoarse whisper:

"Morton! Morton! The brandy."

Of late Morton's granddaughter had been coming in the evenings to Valentine's apartments while Val was away, to sit with her grandfather and tell him the news of the outer world, of which he saw nothing. They hung over the table in the soft glow of a lamp, and with clasped hands talked gently together.

"They have asked me to be the fairy queen in the tableaux at the Church, grandpa," said the girl one evening.

"That is because you are so pretty, Lucile," replied old Morton, stroking the slender white hand that lay in his.

The girl blushed and turned her eyes away. They looked into a mirror, and the lashes drooped.

"Alice takes good care of you, I know," muttered Morton, half to himself, as his gaze roamed over the fair head and graceful form of his granddaughter. "She guards you well, eh?"

"Mamma says I cannot be the fairy queen," replied the girl, looking up again regretfully.

"Good," he exclaimed. "Alice is a thoughtful mother. She does not want you exhibited, Lucile. That is right."

There was a knock at the outer door. Morton sprang to his feet.

"It's Val," he exclaimed. "I did not expect him for hours. Lucile—you must not see him. But there is only one way out. Wait! when I let him in you pass quickly by him. Do not hesitate. He will not notice you! but hurry!"

As he spoke, he went into the narrow hallway, and opened the door. The girl rose, and poised herself like a bird for flight. By some chance Valentine, his handsome face as white as marble, his lustrous eyes glittering with the fever of drink, paused exactly on the threshold when he reached the room and braced himself by extending his arms on each side of the doorway, thus completely barring the entrance. His gaze was fixed upon Lucile, who stood with one hand pressed on her breast, looking at him with large, wondering, timid eyes. She had heard incidentally of this young man, she knew his failing—but had never seen him before. Val and Morton had been living in London for less than a month, their home for three years past being in Paris. Only in a vague way had Lucile thought of her grandfather's charge. She had felt a pang of sadness when once her mother had spoken of his habits. But she had pictured him as being repulsive—and now that she saw him, he was beautiful.

The lamp cast a golden halo about her, the rest of the room remaining in comparative shadow. For several moments utter silence prevailed. A strange look of ineffable tenderness and pity stole into the eyes of Lucile, as she looked upon that white, set, ravaged face. A swift sympathy agitated her, and her lips trembled, as she slowly and appealingly held out her hand towards Val. The young rake was shivering violently, his fixed gaze was full of terror, and presently he raised his arms with a pathetic gesture and shielded his face. Then he looked upon Lucile again, only to sink to his knees an

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instant after, sobbing like a woman. Morton, who had been standing just behind him all this time in the hall, sprang into the room, and, leaning down, drew his young master's head to his breast.

"Poor boy, poor boy." he murmured; and then he motioned to his granddaughter to go away at once. Lucile obeyed, after a backward look from the doorway at the tortured form of Valentine as he crouched on the floor, crying as she had never known a man could cry.

"Come, Val, come," murmured Morton, soothingly; "come to your room and tumble into bed. You want a good sleep."

A few hours later Morton sent for Dr. Stanton.

"Look here, Morton," said that impressive person, as he was laying aside his great coat in the hall, "I can't do anything for Valentine, and you oughtn't to send for me at this time of night. He's just like his father, and he'll have to die like him."

"But, doctor," replied Morton, "there's something strange going on in the boy to-night. He is trying not to drink."

"What's that? Do you mean he——"

"He threw a glass of brandy on to the floor after he had it against his lips, and prayed with me to be freed of the curse."

The doctor drew himself up and rubbed his eyeglasses vigorously with his pocket-handkerchief. He was interested.

"Has any unusual thing happened?"

"Well, there was a strange incident I might speak of. When Valentine came in to-night my granddaughter was here. The boy looked long at her, and then set to sobbing like a child. He has since talked of her eyes, and says they condemned him."

"Huh," grunted the doctor. "Did he ever see the girl before?"

"No."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Have her here to-morrow morning at eleven. There's nothing for me to do to-night. Remember about the girl."

The doctor put on his overcoat again and hurried away. The next day at eleven he appeared at the apartment again. Lucile, looking as fresh as a flower, was sitting on the edge of a chair, with her hands clasped in her lap, when Dr. Stanton entered. He scrutinised her closely.

"Ah, I see," he mused softly to himself, as he drew off his gloves. "The eyes are remarkable. They are like a nun's ought to be—innocent and thoughtful." Then, aloud to Morton, who stood by: "How's Val?"

"Very shaky, sir."

"Drinking?"

"He refused to touch anything till I forced him to. He was getting bad, sir, and I knew he couldn't stop all at once, so I——"

"That's right. Now, see here, Morton. I've got a scheme. This girl of yours can do wonders just now. Close Val's door. Now listen. I once had a friend, a young man who drank nearly as hard as Val. Drink had deadened every wholesome impulse in him—all but one—his love for his mother. He worshipped her, and she idolised him. For years she lived in despair of ever redeeming her son. Finally, one day, when he was comparatively sober, she appeared before him—drunk, insanely, terribly drunk. He looked on her, uttered a cry, and fell in a dead faint. From that moment he fought against liquor, and found the strength to conquer it."

The doctor looked towards Lucile, who was attentive and rigid.

"Val has no mother," he went on. "The principal difficulty that we have always had to contend with in his case has been that he was alone in the world and no one could make an effective appeal to his heart. We will not disguise matters now. My dear young lady, your innocent beauty has brought Valentine to a sense of his shame. Your presence has disclosed to him the hideousness of his own soul. By some mysterious process your eyes have pierced the shadows in which he lived, and released the pent up good there was always hidden somewhere in him. If I can make this shock a positive and lasting one, I will undertake to build the boy up physically. If I can produce an absolute horror of liquor in him, I can cleanse his body and make a sound man of him. Will you, my child, help me in this task?"

"Yes, sir," said Lucile.

"You heard my story of the man who was cured by seeing his mother in an intoxicated condition?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well—Valentine has no mother."

The girl was silent. Her grandfather, who had been nervously pacing the floor, and rubbing his hands together, stopped and lifted his head proudly.

"Dr. Stanton," he said, "I love Valentine Brant as well as if he were my own flesh and blood, but you ask too much when you——"

"I insist on doing what the doctor wishes," interrupted Lucile, rising tall and white, to her feet.

The doctor rose also, and, crossing the room, put his hand on Morton's shoulder.

"We can save Valentine if we do this thing," he said, in a serious voice. "His emotion of last night will not last. And if he starts on one more debauch he will die in a week. The girl is willing. I insist on trying the experiment."

"And must she really drink?" asked Morton, looking pitifully at the doctor.

"She must appear before Val at the right moment—intoxicated."

Morton groaned, and drew away, with his hands covering his face. The doctor turned to the girl and talked to her for some time in whispers. She listened attentively, her clear, pure eyes looking straight into his, her pale face serene and womanly. After a while the doctor crossed to where Morton stood, and said:

"Get me a bottle of brandy!"

The old servant shuffled away, and soon reappeared, bringing a bottle with him, and handed it, with a glass, to the doctor.

"Now, my brave little woman," said the doctor, passing over the bottle and glass to Lucile, "you go into the next room. In about half-an-hour I will call you. In the meantime, follow out my directions. Morton, you will come with me while I talk with Val."

Morton took a step towards his granddaughter, and would have snatched the brandy from her hands, but she held it away from him, and drawing herself up, said:

"I shall be very angry if you do not let me do what the doctor directs. I *will* do it;" and she turned and glided quickly into the adjoining room, shutting the door behind her. With a look of utter despair, Morton stared at the closed door, but permitted himself to be led away when the doctor put his hand gently through his arm.

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They found Valentine sitting, white and trembling, in a big arm-chair. He smiled wearily at the doctor, and held out his hand. The doctor looked carefully into his eyes and felt his pulse. While he did so, Valentine, in a nervous way, waved his disengaged hand at Morton, and said:

"Bring me my brandy! I can't—can't—oh this throat of mine—I'm dry—I'm choking! Get me the brandy!"

Morton and the doctor exchanged glances.

"It's the first time he's asked for it since last night," whispered the servant.

"Well, get it," replied the doctor.

Valentine's eyes were roaming about the room in a vacant way.

"Doctor," he said, after a moment, as he ceaselessly slipped a heavy ring on and off his finger, "I believe there's a heaven."

"Yes," said the doctor.

"Yes, I believe there is. I was sitting—somewhere—not long ago—a few hours ago—and I opened my eyes and saw—an angel. She was all white, with wings of gold—and she looked at me, doctor—like a dove. I must have been pretty near gone, don't you think so—to have seen an angel?"

"The angel you saw, Val, may have been an angel of the earth," responded the doctor.

Valentine drew his hand across his brow.

"Morton was there," he went on. "He let her in. She stood in front of me, and gazed at me—gazed—oh, her gaze! It burned me to a cinder, doctor. I am not so vile as the angel thought. I might have been better—if it were not for the—Morton, Morton, hurry with the brandy."

The doctor remained with Valentine for a full hour. Then he rose, and passed quietly from the room. In a moment he returned, holding Lucile by the hand. The girl's golden hair was hanging in a disordered mass over her shoulders. Her dress was torn open at the neck. She was as white as a ghost, her eyelids drooped heavily, and—she staggered. Her grandfather Morton turned and fled as she entered. The doctor led her directly to Valentine.

"Here, Val, is the angel you spoke of," he said, and then stood aside.

Valentine started up in his chair and fastened his gaze upon the girl before him. She stood in a limp, wavering attitude, holding towards him a bottle, which was about three-quarters filled.

"D'you ike bran'y?" she asked. "Here! Help y'rself. I've had 'nough."

Then, wheeling wildly round, she flung the bottle straight against a mirror, crashing it into splinters. This amused her, and throwing back her head she laughed.

"Pardon me," she said, suddenly becoming grave, and turning to Valentine again; "pardon me, but I always mus' break mir's w'n 'm intoxicated. It's a bad habit, but I mus' do it."

Valentine was on his feet, his eyes riveted upon the wavering figure before him. He was deadly in his pallor, and great dry sobs broke in his throat. Gradually he moved slowly round the room till he gained the chest of drawers, never moving his gaze from Lucile. He reached out his arm and opened a small drawer. Then he withdrew his hand and shut his eyes. There was a flash of steel, a click, and Lucile, with a scream, flung herself on him and struck out of his hand a revolver whose muzzle he had pressed against his temple.

"See! See!" she cried, throwing back her hair, and holding herself erect before him; "I am not drunk! It was acting! It was only a trick! Look at me; I am myself!" And, panting with excitement, she extended her arms wide apart, and in glance, attitude and word expressed her innocence. Valentine, pressing back against the wall, looked and looked upon the girl's face, and then, with a smile, sank to the ground unconscious.

* * * * *

"It was a miraculous cure," said Dr. Stanton, as he related the circumstances to a friend some months later. "After all, it takes a woman, a good woman, to drive out demons."

"Well, is the sequel of your story a happy one?"

"Of course. Val and Lucile were married in May."

"Lucky girl. They say Brant is worth half a million."

"Well, what of it? Lucile would be cheap at double that figure."

Annie Townsend.

The July Number of *Pearson's Magazine*, now on sale, commences a new volume. Now is the time to become a regular subscriber. Amongst the contributors to this number are H. G. Wells, Harry Furniss, W. L. Alden, Allen Upward, Georges Montbard, Claude Shepperson, and a host of other clever authors and artists.

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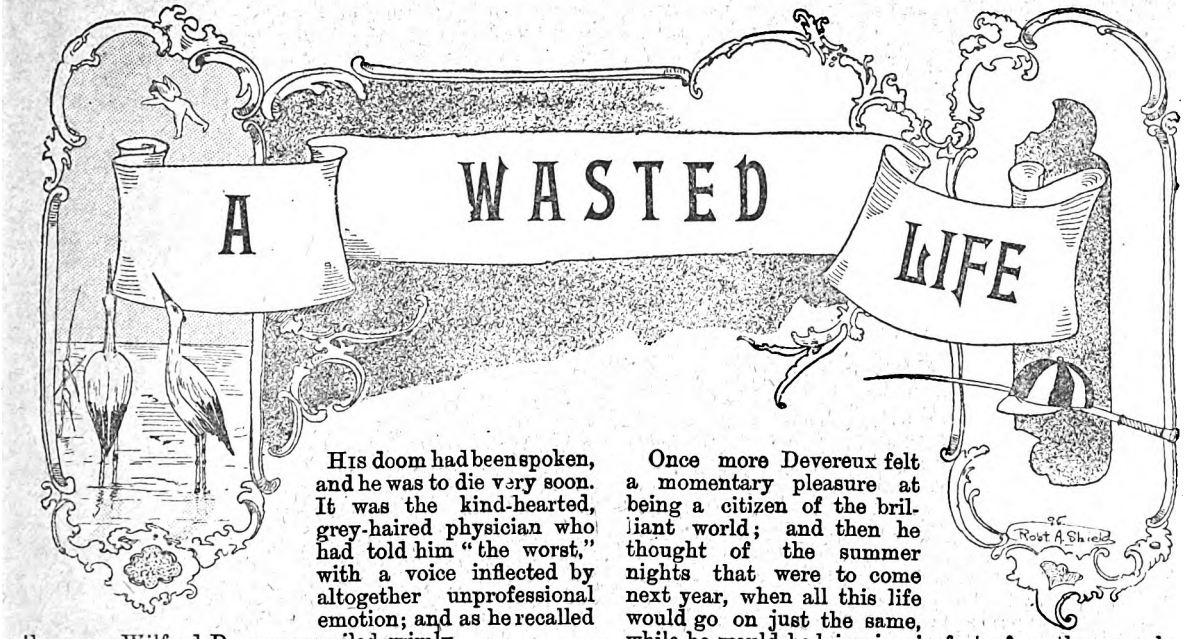

His doom had been spoken, and he was to die very soon. It was the kind-hearted, grey-haired physician who had told him "the worst," with a voice inflected by altogether unprofessional emotion; and as he recalled the scene Wilfred Devereux smiled grimly.

Wilfred Devereux had led a selfish and altogether useless life, but he had found the world fairly amusing until it had begun to bore him, and of late it had bored him profoundly; so he did not care so very much if he was "going out," as he phrased it.

He was to avoid excitement. The doctor had said so. Again he smiled, as he recalled this advice. For years his life had been a restless search after fresh distractions and excitement, and the sated worldling thought how entirely superfluous the counsel tendered by his physician had been.

Well, he was following out the prescription to-night, at all events, idly lounging in the luxurious little smoking-room.

He did not feel any penitence for his misspent years of manhood. No; since one summer afternoon long ago he had made up his mind to give up taking life seriously and to regard it merely as an opportunity for having "a good time," and now he had nearly spent his life; he had had the "good time," and felt reckless.

In a few days, weeks, or months—it did not interest him to speculate which—the men at the clubs would say to one another: "Hello, so I see poor old Devereux is dead," and the cousin who was to inherit his property would congratulate himself that there was anything left to inherit.

That was all. It might have been so different; but it was her fault. Was it quite fair, though, to lay the blame on his old love? Yes, yes; she had cast him off, she had sent him adrift, and his life's shipwreck was due to her.

But, despite these melancholy reflections, Devereux would not give way to gloom. On the contrary, he rose exchanged his smoking jacket for his dress coat, studied his list of engagements, and having ascertained that Mr. Pottinger-Jones expected him at a ball in Kensington, and that Lady Hildegarde had sent a card for her crush in Brook Street, he sailed out into the thronging street.

Once more Devereux felt a momentary pleasure at being a citizen of the brilliant world; and then he thought of the summer nights that were to come next year, when all this life would go on just the same, while he would be lying in six feet of earth somewhere away from the sound of the throbbing of the wheels, and the never-ceasing fall of feet on the London pavements.

He shuddered. After all, death was not pleasant to think about.

Again he forced his mind to thoughts of the past, and presently to such good purpose that he had forgotten Mrs. Pottinger-Jones and Lady Hildegarde, and was leaning on the parapet of the embankment, whither he had strayed, and was watching the sparkle of the stars in the dark river.

* * * * *

It was a sunny afternoon, and the fresh breeze blew from the sea. The tide was out and the long lines of foam were white against the blue. On the cliff edge, where the poppies flamed and the bees hummed in the thyme, stood a young man and a girl.

She wore a pink dress and a hat with a shady brim, and there was a look of pain in her beautiful eyes.

"Is this your final decision?" said the young man. "Have you no pity?"

"Pity? Yes, infinite pity; but I cannot marry you. Indeed—indeed, I cannot," she answered.

"I would do anything, anything," he pleaded, "to make you love me again. I know I am unworthy of you," he went on. "You are an angel, a goddess——"

But she only listened to his frantic praise with head averted.

"No, no, it is too late," was all she would vouchsafe in reply to his pleading. Her mingled expression of pain and scorn told the young man how he had been weighed and found wanting, and he clenched his hands in despair and mortification.

Then he drew himself up and spoke slowly and deliberately.

"Very well," he said, "since you cast me off I have nothing good left to live for. But don't think I shall waste my time in vain regrets, or that I shall ever come

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back to you. I will commit every sin and folly that can hide away the pain of this parting. I will squander my life as carelessly, as recklessly, as I can. I will never try again to be or to do anything pure or good.

"My only object henceforth shall be to forget you and all my foolish dreams, my belief in you and your love, my misplaced trust in womanhood, and all my sins shall be laid at your door. You may repudiate them, Mary, but my sins shall be upon your head. You could save me if you would, and you will not."

His face was flushed, and hers had grown angry and scornful.

Suddenly he softened again. "Don't you see, Mary, how you are spoiling my life?"

She made no reply. He asked her for a last kiss, for the flower she wore at her throat. But she refused both by silence and a downcast gaze. And so the romance of the young man's life had ended.

* * * * *

Devereux thought of all this as he gazed into the dark flowing Thames. Heavens! How well he had kept his word about squandering his life! But he did not blame Mary now.

"Mary is in town to-night," he reflected, as his cab bowled down the Embankment and came under the towers of Westminster towards Kensington. "I wonder if she has changed much, and if I shall come across her before I die."

And now he had reached his destination and was walking up a carpeted stairway, while the music sounded above him. He could not dance. The doctor had forbidden it, so he strolled aimlessly out of the ballroom.

Sometimes one seems to know by premonition what is to happen next. So it was with Devereux, and he scarcely started when the girl whom he had been so recently thinking about appeared before him.

The salt smell of the sea, the freshness of youth and the old impossible happiness seemed to come back to him as he looking into her beautiful, glorious eyes and returned her sedate greeting. She was no longer a mere girl, but she was very beautiful; indeed, little changed from what she used to be.

Silently she suffered him to lead her out on to the balcony.

"I have heard little of you since we parted," he said.

"And I have heard much of you."

"Nothing to my credit, I fear," he said lightly. "You see, Mary, I kept my word, and wasted my life as I foretold I should."

She made no answer.

"Do you think, Mary, that I was really so bad as you believed me to be?"

"As one grows older," she said gently, "I think one's creed grows less narrow. I treated you badly."

The last part of her reply was scarcely audible, but he leant forward and caught her hand, and held it lightly, while his frame thrilled with a feeling he had thought he could never experience again.

And she was thinking sadly of him whom she had cast adrift years before—of a young man, careless, worldly, perhaps, but with many possibilities in him of good, who had, however—she knew it only too surely—since chosen evil.

And she blamed herself bitterly for her self-sufficient righteousness, for her intolerance of what, viewed through the softening influence of time, seemed to be but very human weaknesses after all.

Her old narrowness of mind had been lost with fuller knowledge. The girl had led a sheltered life, and was ignorant of the world and its temptations. That woman who sat in the gloom of the balcony told herself that she had been wrong. That was all. But it had spoiled a man's life.

He was a weak man, to be sure, to have fretted over the loss of a girl's worthless heart; but she sat in the darkness conscious that she had made a great and grievous mistake.

And Devereux sat there as in a trance, drinking in every line of her face, dimly seen in the gloom, his heart filled unexpectedly with the sweetness of the only pure love it had ever felt.

Life had been a fever of late, a hot delirium, but he had found he was not worn out and weary of it as he had believed.

Neither spoke for a few minutes. At last Devereux said: "Mary, could you love me now?"

"Hush!" she said, "you must not speak so. I am married."

"Then I hope you are happy," he said very gently.

She was silent.

"Do you know, Mary, I am to die very soon?" he said.

"To die?"

"Yes. The doctors say I cannot last many weeks."

He heard her breath come faster.

"Mary, will you give me that kiss you refused me once?"

She bent forward and pressed her lips to his pale brow.

"Do you remember I asked for a flower. You did not give it to me. Will you give me one now?"

She took a white flower from her hair, and gave it him silently. Then he led her indoors, and returned alone to the balcony.

He sat down and crushed the flower she had given him to his lips, while its fragrance seemed to penetrate to his soul.

They found him there in the early morning—asleep, they thought—with a smile on his worn face.

But it was something else than sleep. For him "the fever called 'living'" was ended at last.

P. McArthur.

JUMBLE STORY COMPETITION.

No. 1.

Below will be found particulars of a new form of Competition which will take the place of the Picture Puzzle.

Four Prizes, one of £2 and three of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the opposite page, in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, and the first line is in its correct position.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story."

All competitions to be in by Monday, July 6th.

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BESSIE.

"You'll come again to-morrow?"

"If I can."

The man kicked a stone viciously.

He was so tall that he had to bend to look into those stitches.

She stood facing him now, a little thing with soft, fair wistful, upturned eyes.

"How dreadfully old he is looking to-night"—stitch, swiftly.

A man with hair streaked with grey, and a slight pipe.

The man smoked furiously.

"Just once more," he pleaded; "I shall be going away *once* more."

She looked at him astonished.

He took her little face between his hands and kissed it.

He did not often ask for kisses *now*.

The man (he was not so very old either) laid down his his neck, and held her close to him.

"Let me go. I shall be so late."

"I can't, besides——"

"Why didn't we meet three years ago?" A pause. "I meet you like this is very, very wrong."

"Rot!" the man ejaculated.

She was working, and her thoughts kept time to her notepaper.

"Good-bye, Dick."

"God bless you, my darling."

* * * * *

At the gate, by the cornfield, the man and woman met.

"I am going out shooting to-morrow," he said.

She opened her blue eyes bewildered.

"One must have a change," shortly.

"Yes," replied the woman sadly, "and I shall be glad and she sighed.

Oh! how she longed for a change. If only she could stooped like that three years ago. I wonder——" She meant never to see him again.

He was reading the paper and smoking his beloved wife's portrait which smiled down at him over his table.

A clock chimed three a.m. The man did not heed it as it slowly set.

He went into the library and locked the door; then he would be far away.

A knock at the door.

Going into the library she sat down.

"How he stoops! Always poring over those musty old stitch.

After that he began to write. Sheet after sheet of paper, and looked at her, opened his mouth to speak, but stoop, passed them; he half paused, then hurried on soon now."

"Bessie," he said softly.

"You look tired; you had better go to bed. I must see when you have gone. I can't help it, but I know that to to my gun and things; I shall be very late to-night."

"What ages we have been married"—stitch, stitch—while the late autumn sun flooded the room with colour She was very white; they were to say good-bye. She accidentally shot himself.

"You know, Dick, well enough," and the woman turned angrily now.

The woman lit a lamp and searched for some hair clustering round her almost childish face.

The man took her little arms and placed them round "more like thirteen years than three"—stitch, stitch—took a large parchment document out of his desk, and books, I suppose"—stitch, stitch. "I don't think he stopped, and took up his paper again.

It was a long sunny day, the late roses were heavy sleeping peacefully.

"No, no," he muttered, "better not," and he threw notepaper he covered, pausing at length to look at his sudden fear struck her. Still holding the paper in her commotion in the hall; he was coming home; she must go away for a little time, it would be easier to bear then.

"Bessie, dear," he said, "I have not made you very light, then he stole up to his wife's room. She was laid down her work and closed her eyes.

"Shooting!" She sat up and looked at him. "I read it over.

"It will be late when I come home; I want you to kiss the paper on the fire and watched it burn and smoulder with perfume, and the birds sang unceasingly.

"You are up very early," she said.

Yes, she would write to those friends up North, that talk just yet, and the light would hurt her eyes.

* * * * *

A man and his wife were sitting in the drawing-room, but sat smoking. At last, as daylight dawned, he took away. Then he took a fresh sheet and wrote five words yesterday.

"Besides what?" curiously.

Then he kissed her and went downstairs.

A hurried pretence of breakfast in the grey morning was dark and still; she was, oh! so glad she could not on it, and placed it with the parchment in a drawer.

She could not find any, she knew there had been some up his gun and examined it.

They did not see him; they were looking at each other. me, dear."

On a stretcher lay her husband, dead. He had didn't know you cared about it."

She opened a drawer. A folded parchment document, get the letter written quickly; she seized the sheet of paper.

The sun had set when she went slowly home. The house still held. On it was written:

"A change; perhaps he was weary too!"

"Then promise to come to-morrow?"

"I shall expect you. Good-bye, darling."

"No it is not rot, Dick, but I will try and come just happy, but I am going to try and make you happier."

"You are wanted at once," said a strange voice. A fingers, she followed the man out into the hall.

Bessie glanced mechanically at the paper which she and on the top a sheet of paper. There was a sudden wonder why I married *him?*" Stitch, stitch, stitch—away.

My Westar.

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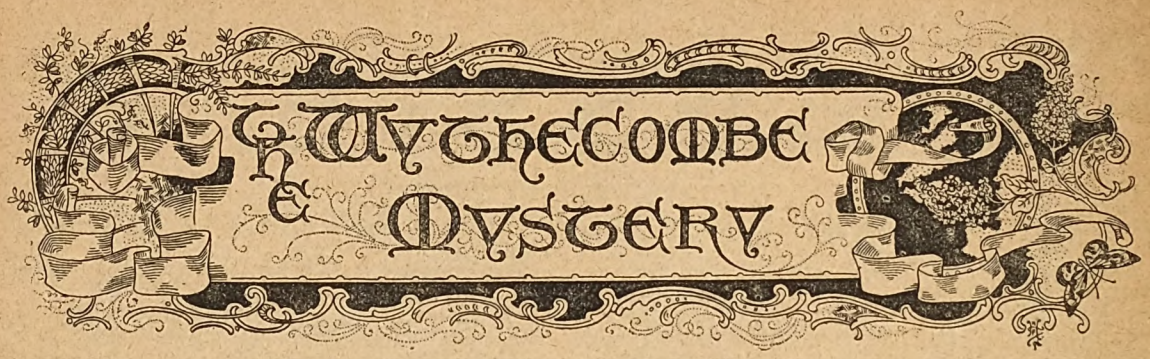

By John K. Leys, *author of "The Tenth of June," etc., etc.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

Finding the Scent.

Kenyon could never explain to himself how it was that he neither felt surprised nor greatly shocked, when Shenstone's treachery was revealed to him. He had not really suspected that Katherine Dale's lover had been playing a double game. If Mr. Daunt had not warned him, Harold would have gone on placing implicit confidence in Shenstone, telling him everything that occurred, and taking his advice at every step. And yet a thousand minute circumstances—a little coldness on Shenstone's part, or a little undue warmth of tone, a certain slackness in maintaining the cause of the absent man, which subsequent protestations could not quite make up for—these, and such like things, had produced an unconscious impression on Kenyon's mind, which made him at once recognise that the attorney had told him the truth.

He merely nodded when Simpson whispered the name, as if he quite expected to hear it; and then turned the conversation into another channel.

Presently Simpson rose to go upstairs, and possessing himself of Kenyon's hand he began protesting with tipsy earnestness that the letter he had written to the bank was only intended as a joke, and "not meant t' injure you, Mishter Kenyon, in any shape or form." Kenyon assured the little vagabond that neither he nor anyone else would suffer on account of the disclosure he had made, and saw him led off to bed with much satisfaction.

When left alone Harold set about reviewing the situation in the light of this new fact which he had learned, and trying to find a reason for Shenstone's conduct. For more than two hours he sat there almost motionless, endeavouring to reason from the known to the unknown, and thinking what his next step ought to be.

The startling fact was that Shenstone had paid what was a considerable bribe—paid it, too, at a time when, as Harold knew, money was by no means plentiful with him—to check the prosecution of the search after Vere. There was no other conceivable motive for Shenstone's conduct. He wanted Vere to remain in seclusion. But *why?*

That was the question that haunted Harold's mind; and he could find no answer to it—that is, no satisfactory answer. A thousand wild surmises ran through his brain. Perhaps Shenstone was secretly in love with the Rector's daughter, and had murdered Vere to prevent the marriage taking place. Or perhaps he had been in love with Miss Unwin, and had beguiled her to the lonely spot in which the body was found, and shot her, out of jealousy. Or perhaps he was a relation of Miss Unwin, though he was too proud to acknowledge it, and had murdered Vere for his conduct to the girl, and had then taken the girl's life to conceal his former crime.

But these were all so many guesses in the dark, and afforded no guide for him in the future. On two points only he felt clear. One was that he would give Shenstone no hint that his double-dealing had been discovered. Simpson, no doubt, would hold his tongue for his own sake. The second point was that he would see Mr. Daunt at once, and be guided by him as to the next steps he ought to take.

Next morning, accordingly, he went straight to Mr. Daunt's office.

The old lawyer heard the news with a grim smile of satisfaction.

"We must find out something more about this man Shenstone," said he. "But tell me, in the first place, can you imagine any reason why he should have wished to injure you personally?"

Harold hesitated a moment. He remembered that he might perhaps have offended Shenstone by declining to allow him to overdraw his account at the bank without security. But then there was no likelihood that any manager who might have been sent down to Darnport in his place would act more leniently. And although Shenstone and himself were rivals in respect of Kate, Shenstone was the successful man, and had nothing to fear (as he must know very well) from his competitor.

"No," answered Harold; "I don't see any motive Shenstone could have had for injuring me."

"Can you think of any reason he could have had for requiring your presence in Darnport?"

"No."

"You had told him, I presume, that you meant to prosecute the search for Vere?"

"Oh, yes; he was helping me in the matter."

"Then I think we may assume, for the present at all events, that it was to hinder that search, to stop it, in fact, that he caused that letter to be written to the bankers, your employers."

"I am quite of the same opinion. But I can't see what I can do. I have advertised for Vere without any success. I don't dare to do so now, for fear that those who might have information to give may communicate with the police. I have not a ghost of a clue to guide me."

"And yet," said the lawyer thoughtfully, "a clue must be within your reach, or Shenstone would not have given himself so much trouble to get you put out of the way of finding it."

"Do you think so?" cried Harold.

"I am sure of it."

"But what can the hidden clue be? What is the point that Shenstone is so madly afraid of my touching?"

"Let me see. Didn't you say that Shenstone had done something to help you in your investigations?"

"Just a little. He called on Beaumont—or said he did—took him to the restaurant at which Vere had left his overcoat, and found that the waiter could not identify him as Vere's companion on the Tuesday evening—the night when Vere disappeared."

"Stop a moment. Did you propose, or did Shenstone, that he should undertake that job?"

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"Shenstone offered to do it himself," answered Kenyon, after a moment's recollection.

"Then *that* is the point to which we must direct our attention. But I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me. I have an appointment for 10.30, and I heard the people come in some minutes ago. Come back this afternoon; for I am deeply interested in this affair of yours, and I mean to see you through with it."

Harold went off at once, as a matter of course, though he was much annoyed that the conversation had been cut short before Mr. Daunt had offered him a word of advice.

But he felt that he must in the first place become, for the time being, his own master. He might be sent back to Darnport at any moment; and it would not do for him to be hampered in that way. He went to the bank, therefore, and told Mr. Bonnington privately that he had discovered the person who had accused him of negligence, and had ascertained beyond a doubt that the letter had not been written in good faith.

Mr. Bonnington stared when he heard this, and naturally wanted to know more. Kenyon, however, did not feel himself at liberty to go into particulars; and the banker had known Kenyon so many years that he was content to say no more, but accept his word for what he had stated.

Kenyon then begged his old friend to procure him leave of absence for three or four weeks, assuring him that at that season of the year, Mr. Green, the cashier at Darnport, was perfectly capable of transacting the small amount of business which was coming in, and adding that he could not retain his situation unless his request was granted.

Mr. Bonnington was at first little disposed to grant what he felt was an unreasonable demand; he told Kenyon that he was a fool; that it is easier to resign a post than to find a new one, and so on. But in the end he said good-naturedly that he could not see him ruined, and that he would manage to send someone to take his place at Darnport for the next three weeks.

"I will never forget your kindness, sir," said Harold, "and you may rely on it, that if the—the painful private business I am engaged in—is finished before the three weeks are over, I will not delay an hour in returning to my place at Darnport."

Having rid himself of this obstacle, which might have proved a formidable one, Harold left the bank. It was then only a quarter-past eleven; and he felt that he could not trouble Mr. Daunt again till after three—nearly four hours to wait. And it seemed to Kenyon that he could not spend this time better than in ascertaining whether Beaumont had really seen Vere on Tuesday evening, or whether Shenstone had lied when he reported that he had ascertained that Beaumont had not been in Vere's company that night.

So, without pausing to reflect, he walked rapidly to Mr. Beaumont's office.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHECK.

"I HOPE you will forgive my troubling you a second time," said Kenyon to the young lawyer; "but I am anxious to ascertain when you last saw my friend Launcelot Vere."

Beaumont sat looking at his visitor a few seconds without speaking.

"When I last saw Launcelot Vere?" he repeated—"I—really—I can hardly say, at this distance of time. When a man has a good many engagements he can't remember them all."

"You had an appointment with him, you remember, for the evening of the day on which he was last heard of," said Harold. "May I ask if you saw him at all on that day, Tuesday?"

Mr. Beaumont shook his head.

"You feel sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure."

"You can't imagine any reason why he did not keep his engagement with you?"

"No, indeed, I can't."

"Thank you," said Kenyon rising. "By the way," he added, "do you mind telling me if a Mr. Shenstone called on you lately?"

Kenyon stopped short.

Something—a nervous tremor, or a too apparent exercise of self-control—in the lawyer's face had brought back the vague distrust which he had before felt about this man. And in the same instant Harold stood aghast at his own folly. For if Beaumont was not to be trusted, the only result of putting these questions must be to arouse his suspicions. And it was a quick, suspicious glance he threw at his questioner, as he replied abruptly:

"Shenstone? No! Don't know any such name. Good-day."

"What an ass I have been!" cried Kenyon to himself, as he left the office. "How can I find out whether this fellow is speaking the truth?"

The answer suggested itself readily. He must confront him with the waiter from whom he had received Vere's overcoat.

Harold at once jumped into a hansom, and in a few minutes was deposited at the "Cock Pheasant."

"Forbes," he said, going up to the stout, sandy-haired waiter, "can you come with me for an hour or two?"

"I'm afraid it's impossible, sir. After hours, I might—"

"That won't do," interrupted Harold. "But it is still early in the day. Can't you find a substitute? I may only want you for half-an-hour or forty minutes; and I will pay you well for your trouble."

Still Forbes looked doubtful.

Kenyon slipped a sovereign into his hand. This wrought a marvellous change in his demeanour.

"Luncheons will be on immediately, sir," he said, "they're beginning now. But from three to five there ain't so much doing. I might be able to get away for an hour, or even two hours, about that time."

Kenyon was impatient at the delay, but there was no help for it; and he thought he might as well spend the time there as anywhere else. He ordered luncheon, therefore, with a bottle of wine; and waited as patiently as he could, until Forbes announced that he had got an hour's leave, and was ready to accompany him.

By this time it was half-past three. The weather was raw and foggy; and in the narrow passage into which Beaumont's office opened, it was almost dark.

"You remember the gentleman who left the overcoat you gave me?" said Kenyon to his companion, when they had reached the spot.

"Cert'nly, sir."

"And do you think you would recognise the gentleman who was with him that night?"

"Yes, sir; I feel pretty certain I could."

"Then I must tell you that this gentleman" (pointing to Mr. Beaumont's name on the door-post) "denies that he was with my friend that evening, and I want to find out whether he is telling the truth. Can you make some excuse for going in and speaking to him?"

Accident rendered it unnecessary for Forbes to tax his inventive faculties. At that moment the office-door opened, and Beaumont himself came out. Kenyon had just time to step back a pace or two, leaving the waiter standing right in the lawyer's path.

Forbes stared hard at him, but Beaumont did not apparently notice it.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the waiter, "but I think you were with a gentleman as left his overcoat at our place, the 'Cock Pheasant,' about three weeks since."

Beaumont started and stared at the speaker, his face growing paler each moment.

"Not I, my man. You've made a mistake. I know nothing about it," he said roughly.

Forbes fell back, and the lawyer's eyes wandered to the corner where Kenyon was standing. Harold, on his part,

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felt ashamed of the part he was playing, necessary as he believed it to be. He would have been glad if Mr. Beaumont had not noticed him; and he expected to receive a look of indignant scorn, perhaps a few contemptuous words, from the man whose word he had doubted.

But it was a very different expression from contempt that rested on the lawyer's face—it was *fear*. Swiftly his glance travelled from Harold to the waiter and back again. There could be no doubt in his mind that Harold had brought the man there on purpose to see whether he had spoken the truth, when he denied that he had been in Vere's company on that Tuesday evening.

He seemed about to speak, then apparently he changed his mind, turned his pale face away, and crept along the passage towards the street.

"There goes a guilty man, if ever there was one!" said Harold to himself.

Forbes nodded his head emphatically.

"That's the man, sir," said he. "I'll take my oath on it. I wasn't quite certain till I heard him speak, but now I know I'm right. He may deny it as much as he likes."

Harold told Forbes he had no doubt he was right, gave him an additional half sovereign, and dismissed him.

But on going to Mr. Daunt's office to report progress, Harold found that a disappointment awaited him. Mr. Daunt had been called away on important business, and would not be back at his office that day. He had left a message for Kenyon, explaining this, and adding that he should expect to see him in the morning.

This was particularly provoking. Harold felt that he was approaching a crisis. Beaumont knew that his falsehood had been discovered, and he must know that Vere's friends would naturally ask—What was the reason for that falsehood? If he was concerned, directly or indirectly, in Vere's disappearance, he had abundant warning that denials would no longer serve his turn. Harold was convinced that it would be a fatal mistake to give him time to prepare his defences. He ought to be pressed at once.

Kenyon pondered the question for some moments, and then decided to see Beaumont again, and point out that it was certain that he was the last person in whose company Vere had been seen, and put it to him plainly that suspicion of a very black kind must rest upon him, if he did not at once tell all he knew about the missing man.

Ten minutes took him back to Mr. Beaumont's office. The door was shut and locked, and no light shone from within. Harold was alarmed at this, for all the other offices on the staircase were open, and clerks were coming and going busily in all directions. Yet there was no notice of any kind posted on the door, to intimate that it would be opened again that night.

Harold waited for more than an hour—waited till every other office was closed, and all the clerks had gone home. But Mr. Beaumont's door remained closed.

Next morning Kenyon was there before ten. The lawyer's office was still shut. There was still hope, he thought. Beaumont had evidently not very much practice. He might be in the habit of coming down late; and the clerk—there was but one—might have fallen into idle habits. He might put in an appearance at any moment.

But every minute this hope became fainter, till at last, when twelve o'clock struck and no one had appeared to open the door, it died away altogether. It was plain that the last man who had seen Vere alive had fled, the moment he was recognised, and had carried with him the secret of Launcelot's life or death.

CHAPTER XX.

The Trail is Recovered.

"My dear fellow, what is the matter with you?" cried Mr. Daunt, starting from his chair, as Harold came into his room. "Surely you are ill."

"Nothing is the matter," answered Kenyon, "except that I am now convinced that poor Vere has met with foul play and I—ass, blind, insensate fool that I am——"

"You are white as a sheet, and—here, drink this," said the old lawyer, pouring out a glass of port from a decanter he produced from a bookcase. "Now, tell me what has happened."

"I have hardly the patience to tell it. In order to find out whether Beaumont had really been with Vere up to the time he disappeared, I went to inquire of—whom do you think? Beaumont himself. He denied that he had seen Vere at all that day. I had sense enough to see that he was lying, however; and I took the waiter who had noticed Vere and his companion at the restaurant, to see whether he could identify Beaumont. Do I make myself clear?"

Mr. Daunt nodded.

"Unfortunately I had not given the waiter proper warning, so that, in speaking to Beaumont, the man allowed him to see that it was known, or at least suspected, that he had lied when he denied being in Beaumont's company that night. I was foolish enough to go to the office myself, instead of simply giving the waiter proper directions; and so Beaumont saw us together. In that way he got full warning, and now—he has bolted."

"Bolted! Surely not!"

"His office door was shut before closing time last night, and it has not been opened again."

"But that looks serious! It looks as if——"

The old man stopped, staring at his visitor in silence.

"As if he had murdered your friend, and fled in a panic as soon as it became known that he and Vere had been seen together"—that was the thought that was in Mr. Daunt's mind, although, out of consideration for Kenyon, he did not utter it. And Kenyon knew well that that was the old man's meaning.

"Can anything be done?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"If he were going to leave the country, he must be on the Continent by this time," said the lawyer, as if speaking to himself. "And in any case, we can't apply for a warrant. There isn't evidence enough against him, by a long way. No," he added, after a pause, "the law can't help us. But that is not to say that we may not help ourselves. Do you go and discover this Mr. Beaumont's private address. Hunt it up from his landlord, his clerk, his—anybody you can think of. When you've got it, come for me, and we'll call there together. Meantime I will make inquiries, and find out something about Beaumont—his past history, his character, and so on. It is just possible that I may hear something that will throw a ray of light on our path. Stay a moment, here is my card with my private address—29, St. James's Square. Can you dine with me to-night, at seven? Very happy if you can. Then we can compare notes, and try to decide on our future plans. Good-day, for the present."

Kenyon's task was by no means so easy as it looked. There are thousands of men in London, respectable men, too, many of them, of whom it might be said that no one but their laundresses are acquainted with their private addresses. They spend their days in their chambers or their offices, their evenings at their clubs; they have no occasion to tell their friends, or anyone, the exact locality of their bedrooms. And Kenyon told himself with a sigh that if Beaumont was the sort of man he feared he was, it was more than likely that he would be extremely reticent on that point.

But Harold had the whole day to work in, and he did not despair of success. He applied first of all to the agent of the landlord, whose name and address he soon ascertained. But the house agent could not help him. The only address Mr. Beaumont had given was that of an hotel at which he had been staying when he took the office. Then Kenyon tried the policeman on the beat, and then the officials of the Law Institution, but with no better success.

Then a bright idea occurred to him. He knew that

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junior clerks are generally on friendly terms with the lads employed by neighbouring firms, so he made advances to the office-boy in the office next to the one Mr. Beaumont had occupied, and obtained from him, without much difficulty, the name and address of the lad who had acted as Mr. Beaumont's clerk. The boy's name was Herbert Joyce, and he lived in Fetter Lane.

Kenyon went there at once, and found Joyce at home—a gawky, sullen-faced lad of seventeen.

"I have been at the office," said Kenyon, "and I find that Mr. Beaumont is away. Can you tell me his address?"

"No; he didn't leave no address."

"Can you tell me when he will be back?"

"No; he didn't say when he'd be back."

"Can you take a letter from me to him?"

The boy shook his head.

"Come. You must know his private address."

"No, I don't."

Harold was convinced that the lad was telling a falsehood. But how was he to make him speak the truth? Harold tried coaxing, bribing, even threatening him, all without any effect. It was evident that Beaumont had so worked upon the lad's fears or cupidity—it was impossible to believe that he had touched his affections, even supposing that Herbert Joyce had affections to be touched—that he would not betray the secret of his master's private address for any reason short of torture. For nearly an hour Harold intreated, bullied, and tempted him in vain. The boy would admit nothing; and at last Kenyon was forced to leave him without attaining his object.

By this time it was getting late in the afternoon, and Harold had not advanced a step. He wandered back to Beaumont's office, without any expectation that it might be open, but thinking that it was barely possible that some one of the clerks in the adjoining offices might have learned from Joyce some idea of the place his master lived in.

A hansom cab was waiting at the door of the house as Harold entered the passage; and when he left, half-an-hour later, after making many unsuccessful inquiries, the same cab was loitering about the street.

Harold, thinking that he might as well give up the hopeless quest, signalled to the cabman; and the cab drew up to the kerbstone.

"St. James's Square, Notting Hill," said Harold, preparing to enter the vehicle.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I have a regular job here. The gen'lm'n's very late to-night. He may be gone. Perhaps you would kindly look behind you in the passage, and see if his office is dark. Name of Beaumont." Kenyon started.

"The office is shut up," he said quickly; "and I am anxious to see him. Did you say you were in the habit of driving him?"

"'Most every night of my life, sir."

"Just take me to his house."

"Can't, sir. Don't know it. I only drove Mr. Beaumont to the corner of Sussex Street, in the Edgware Road."

"Drive me there, then," cried Harold, jumping into the cab.

"Now, it all depends on whether Beaumont had an *alias* for professional use," said Kenyon to himself. "If he had not, I will find his rooms, though I should have to ring every door-bell within a mile radius of the spot where I am set down."

It was dark when the hansom came at last to a standstill.

"That's the street the gentleman always turned down, and I *fancy* he lives there," said cabby, as he pocketed his fare.

Kenyon gave him an extra shilling for this hint, and began his tour among the houses which exhibited an "Apartments" card, with some hope of success.

And Fortune, tired of persecuting him, and retarding his efforts, smiled on him at last.

A trim maidservant answered his stereotyped inquiry with: "Yes, sir; but he's not at home."

Harold was delighted. He had not expected to find the fugitive at his fireside; and the fact of his absence went to show that he was on the right track

"Has he been long away?" he asked.

"Since yesterday afternoon, sir."

"Who is that, Jane?" said a gentle voice in the passage.

"Gentleman inquiring 'bout Mr. Beaumont," said the girl.

"He forgot to leave his address," said the landlady, coming forward.

Miss Bruce—that was the lady's name—was not by any means a typical London landlady; which was explained by the fact that she was not a Londoner. She was a mild-tempered, unsuspicious, garrulous creature, as Harold perceived at the first glance.

She asked him to walk in, and proceeded to exchange with him regrets that neither of them could satisfy the other's desire to know Mr. Beaumont's address. Kenyon purposely lingered, and encouraged her to talk, throwing in now and then a question about her rooms. Finally she insisted upon showing him some apartments which she had to let; and it occurred to Kenyon that he might as well take them. It would be much cheaper than living at an hotel; and he might learn something by becoming an inmate of the house.

"Have you any other lodgers, Miss Bruce?" he asked.

"None but Mr. Beaumont at present, sir, and he is so quiet you wouldn't know he was in the house. He never has company, I may say; not for six months—well there was one night, but he said the poor gentleman was suddenly overcome, and as he went away quietly and made no disturbance, I didn't say anything about it."

"Very good of you to overlook it, I'm sure," said Harold politely. "Mr. Beaumont had a bachelor party, I suppose."

"Oh, no, sir. The young gentleman and he had been dining out at a restaurant he said; and the gentleman had taken a little too much wine."

"When was that?" asked Harold quickly.

"Well, sir, let me see. It would be about three weeks ago—three weeks last Tuesday. Dear me, sir, there isn't anything wrong, is there?"

"No. But tell me about that young gentleman. He is a friend of mine, and I want to know when he came here, when he left, who went with him, and in fact all you can tell me. It is not mere curiosity that makes me ask you this—the truth is," Harold added, "I am sorry to say my friend has left a young lady he was engaged to be married to, and I am anxious to find him. Don't be afraid on his account. I am *his* friend, not the lady's. But I want to bring him back to her. I intreat you to tell me all you can."

Thus adjured Miss Bruce summoned her handmaid, and the sum of what Harold learnt was this:

That Mr. Beaumont had brought home with him, about eight o'clock on the evening in question, a gentleman whose description corresponded exactly with that of Vere. On his first coming in the strange gentleman seemed sober enough, but when the maid-servant went into Mr. Beaumont's dining-room, shortly after nine, he was asleep in his chair, and breathing very heavily. They had had nothing to drink but some coffee, and a little brandy and soda-water, so it must have been at dinner, Miss Bruce argued, that he had over-indulged himself. At any rate a cab came for him a little after nine, and he was so far gone, then, that Mr. Beaumont had almost to carry him into the street—he could hardly move one foot before the other; and the lady who was in the cab had to get out and help him in.

"The lady!" cried Harold, starting to his feet.

"Yes, sir; the gentleman's sister, Mr. Beaumont told us."

"Do you know where they drove him to?" asked Harold in a fever of excitement.

Miss Bruce shook her head; neither she nor her servant was able to say a word on this all-important point. From the description given of the lady, Harold had little doubt that she must have been Miss Unwin. That was the last piece of information he could elicit from either Miss Bruce or the servant; so, telling Miss Bruce that he would occupy his rooms next day, he left the house, and made the best of his way to St. James's Square.

(To be continued.)

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RESULT OF No. 6 COMPETITION.

Of the papers sent in for The Brain Gymnasium, No. 6, not one was wholly correct. Mr. J. R. Trail Hill, of 3, Merchant Street, Peterhead, heads the list with a total of 9½, and the next is Mr. J. Moir, Blackhall, Pitmuxton, Aberdeen, to each, therefore, has been awarded a cheque for One Guinea.

Consolation prizes have been sent to the competitors whose names appears below.

H. J. Beards, Wellington Road, Bilston, Staffs.
Miss Panting, 3, Westover Gardens, Westover Road, Wandsworth Common.
W. Buchan, 9, Romford Road, Stratford, E.
W. C. L. Caird, 12, Franklin Street, South Tottenham, N.
Mrs. M. H. Farnell, 4, Sea View, Haylake, Cheshire.
W. S. Cool, 28, Thirsk Road, Lavender Hill.
G. Redford, 26, Beacon Street, North Shields.
J. Jones, 7, Rhondda Street, Mount Pleasant, Swansea.
E. J. Grapper, 57, Franklin Street, Derby Street, Salford, Lancs.
Mrs. M. Mennie, 99, Queen Street, Peterhead.
S. A. Howe, Lowfield Board School, Sheffield.
G. D. Taylor, 28, Ernest Street, Rhyl.
W. A. Coult, St. Michael's Boy's School, Wyndham Road, Camberwell.
Miss Way, Curraghmore, Shanklin, Isle of Wight.
A. M. Trivess, 4, Graham Road, Southsea, Hants.
W. J. Lavers, Fortescue Hotel, Mutley, Plymouth.
W. H. Lomas, Rose Villa, Stockport Road, Ashton-on-Lynn.
Miss D. Patton, The Links, Ascot.
C. R. Senior, 585, Abbeydale Road, Sheffield.
A. Dawson, Sunny Bank, Frodsham, Cheshire.
Miss G. Erskine, 2, Chapel Street, Peterhead.
S. Richardson, Wycar House, Bedale.
S. Hotton, Springwell House, near Chesterfield.
W. Dawson 23, Hewitt Street, Hightown, Manchester.
J. Wilson, Tyne Terrace, Whiteabbey, near Belfast.
R. H. Monnickendam, 24, Oppidans Road, Primrose Hill.

KEY OF NO. 6 COMPETITION.

Key No. 51.

G R I M
R A C E
I C O N
M E N D

Key No. 52.—Corporations.

Key No. 53.

46½½min. from time *A* starts.

Key No. 54.

This paragraph appeared in *Short Stories* dated May 16th, page 489 second column, second paragraph.

Key No. 55.

Hill. Value 125.

Key No. 56.

The poodle is a quadruped that's principally hair,
Its twelve to fourteen inches long and very nearly square,
It reminds me of a lady's muff that's bolstered up on pegs,
It's very lengthy whiskers and abbreviated legs.

Key No. 57.

S P E R M A P H O R E
I N T E R M E N T
F E A R F U L
F R A U D
I N K
G
T E A
L U M P Y
B A N E F U L
A M O U N T I N G
F R I G H T F U L L Y

Key No. 58.

E Q U E S
M U F T I
P I O U S
H Y E N A

Key No. 59.

Among the best anagrams sent in are:
Son, my coat is ragged.
My acting dogs arose.
Go, aid my strong case.

Key No. 60.

17 k's and 60 f's.

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DROWNED NEAR HIS OWN DOOR.

"*Why, that's Tom, my husband!*" cried the poor woman; "I was expecting his ship to come in almost any day. He'd been gone a year on a voyage to South America, and now here he lies dead on the sand. Oh, God! what shall we do, what shall we do?"

The ship had foundered during a tremendous gale off the South Coast in the winter of 1879, and the body of this sailor (by the irony of fate) had been cast ashore *within* half a mile of his own cottage. Such an incident is dramatic; it appeals to the imagination and excites pity. But are there not thousands ——? What's the use of any more preamble? Read this:

"In the spring of 1884"—so runs a woman's letter—"my health began to slip away from me, as a dream does when one awakes. The first sign of what was happening was a feeling of languor and fatigue that I could not account for. My mind was full of small worries; and things that I commonly took no notice of assumed an importance which did not, I knew, properly belong to them.

"My appetite was bad and what little I ate gave me an intense pain at the chest which seemed to go through to the back between the shoulder blades. Not infrequently the pain in my stomach was so keen, and held out so long, as to double my body up as one folds a napkin. Following this there would come a sense of sinking as if the very ground were failing beneath me.

"Being unable to digest nourishing food, my strength vanished day by day until I had barely power to walk feebly about. All ambition to work was gone from me. With the least exertion I would lose my breath and my heart would throb and palpitate so that I was alarmed lest some one of these attacks might be fatal. Often I would sit for an hour or more, powerless to move hand or foot.

"During all this time I was troubled with other distressful symptoms which I will only allude to in few words. There was a belching of wind or gas from the stomach, foul and disgusting, which sickened me dreadfully; an aching head, sallow skin, a feeling of chilliness even on slight exposure, sleeplessness, mental anxiety and increasing exhaustion.

"I was treated by a doctor, and used many medicines suggested by others—all to no purpose. The disease seemed to be seated beyond the power of human skill to uproot it. I speak now of a time four years after I was first attacked. While in this wretched and apparently hopeless condition I read of what Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup had done in like cases. I procured this medicine from Mr. Gee, the chemist at Whitehaven. After taking it for a week I felt marked relief, and when I had used three bottles I could eat any kind of food; my strength gradually returned and in a short time I was well and strong as ever. This may sound almost incredible to some, but it is the simple truth."

The above letter is from a lady residing at Distington, near Whitehaven, Cumberland. For personal reasons she requests us not to publish her name at present, yet her illness and cure, as stated, are known to all in her neighbourhood. We append a note which explains itself:

"I can vouch for the accuracy of the above statement. I have known the lady for the past five years. (Signed) Charles Clarke, Postmaster, Distington, October 10th, 1894."

For one moment now let us consider two or three important facts. This lady suffered for four years. Read her letter again, and see what this fact means. Pain, loss and sorrow filled that dreary period. Yet she was finally cured in as many weeks. Had she known of Seigel's Syrup and used it at the outset she would have been cured at once. Not a day, not an hour, of all those four years but the Syrup would have set her on the road to health, had she used it to drive out her disease—indigestion and dyspepsia. Still, she suffered, and faced death, with help right at her elbow. *Alas! she knew it not.*

Now do you see why so many of us are like poor Tom, who was drowned at his own door?

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DON'T MISS THE STORY ON PAGE 59.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 393. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 11TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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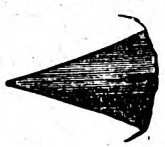

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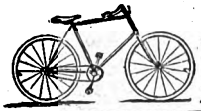

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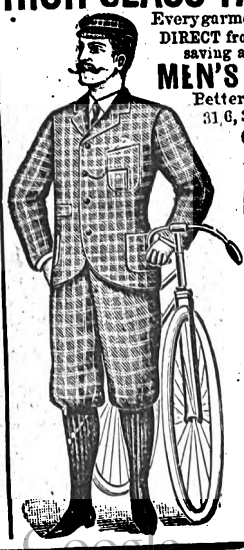

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 393.] For the Week ending July 11th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

BY MISS WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

PAUPER BLUE BLOOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE NICHE GEORGINA FILLED.

Two figures side by side watched a sunset.

"Glorious!" whispered the woman, shading her eyes with her hand, as if the crimson glow, the sea of gold with opal shores, dazzled her.

The man—tall, elderly, pale, with grey hair, and deep lines about his mouth—stared into space, the corners of his lips drawn down, his hands thrust in his pockets.

"It will soon pass," he answered, "and then darkness. You have read, Georgina, that the wicked 'love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.' I look out of these God-made eyes, and loathe those God-made splendours. They rake up in my heart the embers of remorse—a long, long bitterness. One evil deed leading to another, till a chain is formed, twined round the soul—strangling—suffocating!"

He pointed with his thin fingers at the fading radiance of the sky. Beneath the amber haze a black cloud rose like a mountain out of a blue lake. He spoke again, while the woman watched his ever-changing expression with keen, wakeful eyes. His were dreamy and dim.

"You cannot always be in darkness, Georgina," shaking his head and contracting his brows; "the time comes when you can no longer hide the truth from yourself. You see your life about to be crowned with *failure*" (he shivered, as if the word cut him); "your pride, your honour, lowered to the dust; your name—that has been great for centuries—suddenly despised, branded by fraud!"

An ashen hue stole to his lips.

"Then," he continued, "you wake to the fearful discovery that you are your own destroyer; death alone can release you from the condemnation of the world, yet by your own works the terrors of death are increased tenfold."

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"Why?" asked the woman hoarsely.

"Because you have bartered immortality for a bauble, closed your eyes against the light gleaming from the great white throne. You have laughed and mocked at the *real*, and made obeisance to the *unreal!* Your feet have stumbled on dark mountains. In Hell there is outer darkness, and yet inextinguishable flame."

He clutched the woman's arm, and gazed straight into her eyes; his voice rose like a wail in the gathering gloom.

"There is light—the light of fire in the endless night of torment—that man may be able to see his folly, his ruin, his madness. But not light enough for him to read any record of deliverance, and possibility of pardon. How can a man face death with this in view?"

Two figures side by side.

The woman tried to speak, her lips moved, but failed to utter a sound. His hand was still upon her arm, holding it in a deadly clasp.

"Better unmitigated blackness," he whispered, as the after-glow of sunset spread its blood-hued fingers on the fair summer earth. "Better night without a solitary candle—a veil of Egyptian darkness—of solemn and palpable gloom!"

He felt a tremor of dread shake his listener's arm. The tightened fingers relaxed upon her sleeve, while a hand stroked her long white fingers.

"I won't scare you with terrors," he said softly.

She glanced up with a queer, incomprehensible smile. Its power and fascination seemed to lull the storm of misery

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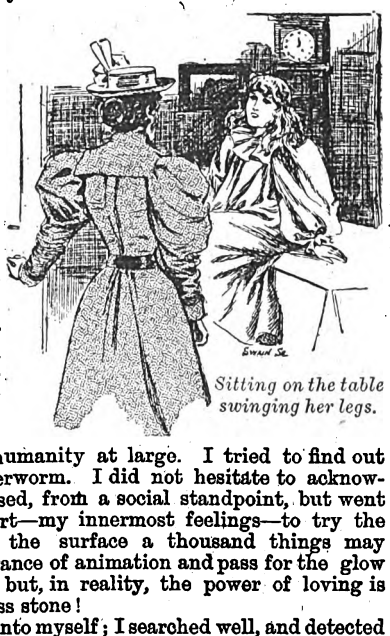
in the man's soul. Yet the woman was not beautiful. Her eyes were bright and penetrating, her hair raven, her mouth wide. She had expression. Oh! yes, plenty of it! But the light that gleamed through the black lashes might have been borrowed from the eternal fires. A half sigh broke from her lips as she drew the man's hand against her heart.

"Speak to me as you will," she murmured. "I fear nothing for you—so strong, so powerful—and Ravenscroft is not easily beaten, even when misfortune meets him face to face on the field. Take courage, and this depression will pass."

She spoke with prophetic power, but he bent his head to hide the thought now uppermost in his mind. Georgina was quick at reading thoughts when she looked into Sir Reginald's eyes. "Your wife knows nothing of this impending trouble—you have not prepared her for the blow?"

"No, Georgina; I am too great a coward. You, with your gentle tact and quick sympathy have drawn forth every secret of my heart, as you inspired the love which is yours to-day and for ever. I can speak to you as a kindred soul—a deeply thoughtful, clever woman—one that understands, counsels, sympathises, but does not betray."

"Strange," she replied, "that fate has placed me under your roof just when you needed me most. I used to think the world was empty — a great, blank wilderness through which I was destined to wander alone. I would ask myself the question a hundred times a day—*why, why* am I here? What can I do? It's so solitary walking through life all by myself. Perhaps, I argued, I am different to other people, repellent in my manner, shrinking too readily into my shell, fearing men and women alike, mistrusting humanity at large. I tried to find out where lay the cankerworm. I did not hesitate to acknowledge myself diseased, from a social standpoint, but went down into my heart—my innermost feelings—to try the pulses there. On the surface a thousand things may preserve the appearance of animation and pass for the glow of life and health; but, in reality, the power of loving is dead—cold as lifeless stone!



Sitting on the table swinging her legs.

"So I descended into myself; I searched well, and detected degeneracy. I was unsound in my lonely career. A worm had been eating out the core of my loveless heart. Then at the very height—or shall I say depth?—of my despair I found a niche to fill. I crept into it with freshly-beating pulses, like a hunted animal who suddenly sees the refuge he is seeking open before his bloodshot eyes. The niche was my corner in Ravenscroft Park, the refuge your heart. Then for the first time I realised the expulsive power of a new affection. It cast out fear, it killed honour, it made all men as shadows across my path. I thought of nothing, I yearned for nothing, but *you—you*—in the early morn to the sunset eve. Now, when I sit in my prim position of instructress over your child, I look only for some glimmer of likeness to you in my pupil's eye, some sound in her voice that reminds me I am teaching Reginald's child. It is a work of love—for *you*."

The woman spoke wildly; her passionate face seemed to kindle the last ray of dying sunset, till it flickered like an unholy flame between the two dark figures.

The surroundings appealed to her in their weird beauty, she stretched out her hands to the sky.

"What a lovely, yet what a deadly world!" she half moaned, pleasure and anguish battling in her soul. "The everlasting toll of the funeral bell, the ceaseless tears, the laughter, the joy, the pain. Love in itself is not sinful; how can it be when all things love? But to love in excess, that is crime, and its poison is upon me now, sapping my very life's blood."

"Hush," he said; "crime and love go ill together. Do not couple the two words."

"Then what would you call it? Madness? Infatuation?"

"Neither! Though the taunts of the world would be hurled at a union of hearts such as yours and mine, we can hide the secret away in the store-room of conscience, treasure it as the very essence of life, the wine of mortality. Do not stand up for the ignorant multitude to cast stones at you, but seek the safe and covered paths which are soft to the feet, and refreshingly beautiful!"

"Yes," she replied; "I have a right to choose my own way, for I have no one but myself to consider—and *you*. My life has been stormy, a struggle from birth, bereft of good influence, devoid of love. I have taken the kicks of the world patiently. Heaven forgive me if I linger over the sweets."

The darkness descended, and shadows of tall, imposing trees lay across wide gravel walks, casting an air of gloom and grandeur from their dizzy heights.

The figures turned to walk towards the house. Through the wide shrubbery and past the lake, till Ravenscroft Park, the splendid old family mansion, stood before them. Within and without the presence of wealth asserted itself.

"Ah!" thought Georgina Pluff, as she surveyed the land stretching away for miles, "how rich the verdure! What a splendid estate, and yet in the face of luxury and ease, ruin has dared to step forward, and is lurking within reach of these lordly portals. When the moment comes he will advance, knock boldly at the door, crying 'Admit, admit.' Even the stately Lady Ravenscroft, with her calm, pale, impassive face, cannot bid him nay. All the servants may not shut him out. He besieges the great hall, he fills the house to its very attics with his decayed and loathsome presence."

Georgina drew a deep breath. Yes, the proud Ravenscrofts must suffer poverty as she had known it.

Truly the awful and desperate time had arrived to justify the declaration: "Ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."

Miss Georgina Pluff went to the schoolroom with lowered eyes. She found her pupil—a pretty girl of fourteen, with rosy cheeks and auburn curls—sitting on the table swinging her legs. Miss Pluff wondered if she ought to tell her it was "unladylike." But she looked at the unmistakable signs of breeding in the child's refined face, and felt that the term would be incongruous. Even the leg swinging was graceful, though careless.

"Where have you been, Miss Pluff?" asked Eva, in rather an aggrieved voice; "I've hunted for you everywhere."

"I was in the garden looking at the sunset."

"Oh! why *didn't* you call me? We might have tried to sketch it together."

"This is your hour for preparation. Why are you not working?"

Eva turned and regarded the open books on the table.

"Simply because I've done it all."

Miss Pluff involuntarily raised her eyebrows. The girl astonished her—she appeared to learn by magic, it was almost uncanny.

"Look," she said, drawing her governess to the window, and pointing to a figure on horseback riding up the drive, "do you know why Sefton is so late?"

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Sir Reginald's son dismounted as Eva spoke, and the girl leant out of the window to wave to her brother.

"No," said Miss Pluff.

"He has been to Rosemont to see Lady Norah. She is very young, and very beautiful. Mother tells me they have an 'understanding.'"

"Then why are they not engaged?"

"Because Lady Norah is a shocking flirt. I heard the FitzJames's say so—she has broken ever so many hearts. Well, you see, her people do not want it made public till they are sure she is not going to change her mind. Of course, Sefton is *quite* certain she won't, and so am I, for who could help loving him? He is so handsome, and so delightfully passionate when fairly roused. I do *love* to see a man in a passion. Don't you?"

"I hardly know. It's such an odd idea, and certainly would not be pleasant if you were the object of the violent wrath!"

"No. But of course a man would never get really angry with a girl. Do you think Lady Norah will marry Sefton?"

"It seems a very suitable match; your brother is the only son of a baronet with untold wealth!"

There was a touch of satire in her tone that yet could not force back the angry tears from her eyes. She resented the sorrows hanging over Sir Reginald, and accepted them as her own.

"Could *you* marry Sefton, Miss Pluff?" continued Eva, engrossed with the subject. "I mean, of course, if you were Lady Norah."

Miss Pluff shrugged her shoulders. "My dear child, what nonsense you talk!"

"She has such green eyes, and they are always laughing at you, even when her lips do not smile. Their lashes are longer than yours, Miss Pluff, though I know you have good ones, and I dare say they are often admired. And then she dresses!"

The girl broke off with an expressive gesture, unable to describe the bewildering toilettes of the flighty and flirtatious Lady Norah.

"Oh! I forgot to tell you, Sefton brought me a lovely stamp album from London yesterday, and I want to show it to father. Look!" holding out her treasure, "isn't it a beauty? May I go and fetch him? He promised to give me the Bulawayo envelope that came this morning. He is always *so* interested in my stamps."

"What is the matter with father?"

The child spoke with undisguised pride and pleasure. Miss Pluff smiled.

"Yes, you may fetch your father, only be quick about it, for I must dress for dinner."

"You need not wait," replied Eva as she rushed away.

Sir Reginald Ravenscroft had insisted on Miss Pluff dining downstairs.

"You *can't* shut a girl like that up in a schoolroom alone all the evening," he had said reproachfully when Miss Pluff was first engaged.

Lady Ravenscroft had demurred, but had finally surrendered to her husband's wishes, saying:

"You know, Reggie, she's rather good-looking for a governess, but really, Sefton is so sensible, and quite wrapped up in Lady Norah, that perhaps it would not matter."

Eva returned with her father and the Bulawayo stamps.

Miss Georgina Pluff was still in the schoolroom.

CHAPTER II.

PREACHING DOWN A DAUGHTER'S HEART.

"WHAT is the matter with father?" asked Eva.

Lady Ravenscroft looked up from the book she was reading under the trees.

"He has a bad headache, and is lying down, so don't make a noise if you pass his room."

The girl watched her mother with rather a puzzled expression.

Lady Ravenscroft was one of those rare characters that think no evil. Her sweet calm face bore testimony to the placid lovable nature beneath. Always pale, but not with the pallor of ill-health, she had once been a very beautiful woman. Her smooth fair hair was parted off her forehead. She was simple yet stately, graceful in every movement, an adoring mother, a devoted wife.

"Do you think father is worried about anything?" said Eva after a pause.

"No, dear. Why do you ask?"

"Only I fancied he seemed different. He looks so dreadfully *old!*"

Lady Ravenscroft stirred uneasily.

"I am afraid his health is failing. I have tried to induce him to go to a doctor, but he always puts it off. Last week, when we were in town, I had the carriage waiting at the door to drive us to Harley Street. I put off an engagement purposely to accompany him, when a telegram came—some

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urgent business, he said. The following day he looked better, and pooh-poohed the idea of consulting Dr. Reynolds."

"Miss Pluff says it is his nerves. She noticed the change in him too."

The book slipped from Lady Ravenscroft's hands, and lay unheeded on the grass. A look of deep anxiety stole into her blue eyes. She stroked Eva's hair softly, as the child rested her head against her mother's knees.

The sound of wheels on the carriage drive changed the current of their thoughts, as a dog-cart driven by a girl came in sight.

"Why, it's Lady Norah," cried Eva springing to her feet.

"Yes, she has come to lunch. Sefton asked her yesterday."

The visitor drew up her horse on catching sight of Lady Ravenscroft under the trees, and sprang down as Eva and her mother came across the lawn to meet her. She wore a light summer driving coat, and a hat covered in brambles and wild roses. She smiled brightly under a wide white veil, advancing with a swinging gait.

They were standing by the lake.

"How cool—how ideal you looked in the delicious shade!" she cried. "And here is Sefton," as young Mr. Ravenscroft appeared. He had been listening for a voice and the sound of carriage wheels. She glanced merrily at him with those very open audacious eyes, which had already worked havoc among many of the susceptible rougher sex. She drew a brown driving glove off her right hand. Sefton's signet ring was on her second finger—evidence of the so-called "understanding." He had bought the diamond engagement ring, but Lady Norah was not yet allowed to accept it.

"Did you come over alone?" he asked, luring her away from Lady Ravenscroft on some trivial pretext.

"Yes—that is with Jennings, of course. He has taken the pony to the stables."

"You might have told me, and I would have fetched you. I thought your mother was coming."

"Oh! I am very independent. I go for miles alone. It is so nice to think, instead of talk. I am trying to train up my parents in the way they should go. I give them lectures on the necessity of freedom for the young. Give a mare her head, and she won't bolt. So take a warning, Sefton; when we are married don't try and hold me in, or the chances are I shall get the bit between my teeth, and then——"

Lady Norah gave a low whistle, and laughed one of her sweetest chimes, looking so adorable that her lover's heart beat wildly, and his eyes glowed as they rested on the flushed and rounded cheek.

She was as light-hearted as a child.

"Is that Eva's governess?" she asked.

"Where?"

"On the old tree stump by the lake," pointing to a figure in dull yellow.

"Yes; you know her, don't you?"

"Of course. We have often met, and she always gives me a shiver when I shake hands. I don't know why, unless that her palm is so fleshless, it is like clasping a thing of bone. I have a presentiment about that woman—something evil. See, she is coming towards us; what an odd slouching walk! How do you do, Miss Pluff?"

Lady Norah's tone changed as Georgina came within earshot, her gay, unaffected girlish manner contrasting with the governess's mechanical bow.

A conventional word on the weather and Miss Pluff passed, her lips compressed. She seemed like a woman moving in a waking dream. Her presence cast a momentary gloom over Lady Norah's evanescent spirits.

"Did you notice her face, Sefton? It was like a dead woman's."

"The result of a mustard gown," laughed the man. "Miss Pluff is a harmless, anæmic creature."

They were standing by the lake, Lady Norah looking down at her radiant reflection in the sunlight.

"What do you see in the water?" he asked, bending his head closer to hers.

"Two figures—mingling into one. Two figures destined for each other. Two lips—which meet!"

The last words were uttered with a little gasp as Sefton drew her to him.

"Are you happy, dearest?" he whispered.

"How can you ask? I don't suppose there is a more wildly happy and exultant being in the whole world. I am only afraid it is too good to last."

As she spoke Sefton's eyes fell on a gold chain bangle encircling her wrist.

"This is new," he said, touching it lightly.

"Yes," laughing up in his face; "an anonymous present from Captain Brooke."

Sefton's brow clouded.

"People always know who anonymous gifts come from," she continued, "at least, sensible people with guessing capacities. He was staying with us last week, and we made a daisy chain for fun, just to make believe that we were children. I wore it on my wrist until it faded. But he would not let me throw it away—he kept it. This chain is just the same size."

"Don't wear the thing," said Sefton, unfastening the clasp, "I hate the sight of it!"

Lady Norah drew away her hand with a reproving glance.

"That is just where your awful and horrible jealousy comes in," she said, shaking the roses and brambles at him seriously. "You should try and cure yourself, because it is such a stupid, childish fault."

"But you won't give the bangle up even to please me?"

"No," speaking decidedly. "I have a right to make a friend, and Captain Brooke has never said a word that even *you* could complain of."

The sunshine seemed to fade out of Sefton's morning.

"Very well," he said between his teeth; "do as you like."

Lady Norah turned away, and walked slowly towards the house. Sefton followed, ill at ease and sad.

"Was it an unkind action?" she wondered, fastening the open clasp. "A bangle was such a little thing; Sefton could not *really* mind." But all through lunch she was haunted by a string of familiar words: "You sow an action, you reap a habit; you sow a habit, you reap a character; you sow a character, and reap a destiny!"

When the dog-cart came round to take her home, Sefton announced his intention of driving to Rosemont with her, and walking back.

"It's such a long way," she said deprecatingly, "and I am sure you will be tired. Besides, I have to go back by the station to meet a friend." She coloured as she spoke.

"Is Captain Brooke coming down again?" asked Sefton quite casually.

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Lady Norah owned that he was, and Mr. Ravenscroft declared that, perhaps, after all, it was too warm to walk, and saw her off with a mist before his eyes.

"Poor dear Sefton!" she thought, "it does him good to be teased sometimes. It would never do to let him know how utterly and hopelessly I adore him. He would become a perfect tyrant."

Nevertheless she felt strangely dull and miserable driving away through the green lanes, and more than once longed instinctively for Sefton.

Captain Brooke looked train-weary and out of sorts, though he brightened considerably at the sight of Lady Norah.

She noticed he glanced at the bangle, and talked aimlessly of daisy chains.

That evening, while Captain Brooke was smoking on the verandah with her brother, Lady Norah was summoned to her father's room.

Lord Cannington did not often interfere with his daughter, who had her own way in most things, and was generally considered the wilful pet of the house. But when he spoke his word was law. In his own domain Lord Cannington was an autocrat, and even Lady Norah trembled before his frown.

"What could he have to say to her in private?" she wondered with a vague misgiving.

She found her father waiting with a fretful smile that was meant to be kind. He patted her shoulder and hesitated before speaking. Then, clearing his throat, came straight to the point.

"You go with Lady Cannington to Worboise Manor to-morrow."

"Tell me, Norah, my dear, you don't really care for young Sefton Ravenscroft; not enough to break your heart if the marriage were impossible?"

The girl raised her eyes to his full of mute terror and astonishment, her cheeks blanched, and she moved a step back to free her shoulder from his hand.

"*Care!* Father, how can you ask?" twisting the signet ring upon her finger nervously round and round. "Of course, I love him. Have I not promised to be his wife?"

"Yes, yes," speaking impatiently, "and how many others were you as ready to promise, and remain faithful to for a week—perhaps a month? You have a remarkable facility for changing your mind, and I wish you to do so with regard to young Ravenscroft."

Norah stared at him incredulously.

"But I can't," she said, with moist eyes and dry lips. "It has gone too far; besides—there is no reason."

She steadied herself against Lord Cannington's desk.

"We will pass over the reason," muttered her father testily.

"No," she replied, her breath coming quick and fast; "out of common justice I must hear it."

"Well, well, don't excite yourself; no man is worth it. Listen calmly, and I will explain; only, mind you, not a word to anyone. It isn't often I trust a girl not to chatter, but you say you care for the fellow, so I'll take the risk. I alone happen to *know* that the Ravenscroft family stand in peril of immediate ruin. So far the state of Sir Reginald's affairs has been kept secret, but any day the catastrophe may be made public property. His son will be a pauper. You are not openly engaged, but think, Norah, how far better it will look for you to throw him over *now* than afterwards. Come, take a sensible view of the case, and for once be led by your elders. Write a letter to-night, and banish the matter from your mind. We can't have *you* throwing yourself away."

Lady Norah was silent. To her, poverty held terrors innumerable. She had been brought up to regard wealth as the chief object of matrimony, to marry a poor man was a social crime, suicidal and impossible. Yet she had learnt at last to love. Men had been her sport since she was sixteen, now that her heart had gone out to meet Sefton Ravenscroft's, now that she had tasted the very wine of life, the worldly teaching of her youth stepped in, to deny her lips that intoxicating draught!

Cruel, inexorable fate! She stood staring at her father like an image of stone, trembling before his stronger will; the free will, which is the pivot on which man's complex nature turns, the will that places him above the lower creation, making him a little god upon the earth.

"Is it—quite—true?" she gasped at last.

Lord Cannington seized the opportunity to strengthen his argument. He was a shrewd, clever man, and few girls of Lady Norah's age and temperament would have failed to be "talked round."

So long as everything was made easy she smiled, and danced through life heedlessly, but when the necessity arose to assert herself, and combat misfortune, she sank beneath the load tearful, yet unresisting.

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Before the interview ended she had written the letter under her father's eye, shaken by low sobs, sealed it with Lord Cannington's seal, and fled weeping from his presence, to cry out her heart in her own room.

What did it mean? Marie, her maid—*packing!*

"*Mais oui, Mademoiselle,*" in reply to a half incoherent question, "you go with Lady Cannington to Worboise Manor to-morrow."

The floor seemed slipping from under Norah's feet.

Marie handed her a silver bottle of salts.

"Mademoiselle is *triste?*"

At that moment "Mademoiselle's" eyes fell on the gold chain round her wrist. She tore it off, as if the contact stung her quivering flesh, and flung it with a dramatic gesture through the window.

"Go, Marie," she said, "and if you find that hateful thing, keep it, but never let *me* see it again."

The maid hurried below, anxious to recover the bauble.

Norah's second finger was ringless, but she pressed it to her lips, and kissed the dent upon it.

Her brain, her blood, her whole body and soul were in a fever and ferment.

What had she done? What had that urgent, stern, yet persuasive parent driven her to? She tried to recall the words of her letter, the heartless, lying note, which pleaded a worn out affection. No tear-stain betrayed the truth, she had cast out her love, killed her heart, henceforth the beauty of life must fade and wane.

The world claimed her, the terrible world of wealth, whose god is gold, and whose creed money, power, luxury, ease! She writhed upon her bed, and beat the pillows. It had crushed her and mastered her, the wide-mouthed devourer of souls. She could no longer bask in the sunshine of love, and play on youth's fair hills, for she had fallen unawares into the cavern that lay beneath the flowers, she could only dream of the heights, and wander bereaved in the depths.

That night Lord Cannington had a dream. He thought that the unknown powers placed two human lives in his hands—to use at his will—one was that of a man, the other of a woman.

"What can I do with them?" he asked. "I will throw them together, and they will solve the problem themselves."

And when these strange living creatures met they clung to each other in a fond embrace.

"The woman has fair hair and green eyes," whispered a voice. "Can't you see it is your daughter Norah?"

So he snatched her back and held her away, and bade the unseen spirit at his side take the man and hurl him into hell.

"For Norah," he said, "will never find him there."

A chorus of weird, unholy mirth greeted this assertion.

"Women can always reach the home of sinners," mocking voices cried. "Leave this man in the world, curse him, and brand him with the taint of *Poverty*, write it about his doors and upon his person. Then your daughter is safe indeed!"

And when Lord Cannington woke he was numb with cold, though the breath of the summer night came in warm waves through the open window.

CHAPTER III.

Sir Reginald Ravenscroft was alone in his room. His face ashen, his eyes sleepless, haggard, and wild, with a real yet unspoken terror he walked slowly to and fro.

Could he trust himself to see Georgina—*his* Georgina—once again? or would the power of her fascination master the decision he had made in the still hours, alone?

The fear of life overcame his horror of death; he weighed them on the scale of his unhinged intellect; and the vague hereafter appealed to his racked brain and tortured conscience with soothing unreality.

If it might only be sleep—sleep through endless ages of restless time—if the soul might slumber on, on, in peace. Yet something told him it was not so, and then he shrank in tremulous alarm.

No wonder Sir Reginald Ravenscroft stood aghast and reluctant—half persuaded of the soul's immortality, yet clinging to the hope of annihilation. Involuntarily his parched lips muttered the appalling penalty incurred by man through disobedience: "It is appointed to him once to die, and after that the judgment."

He ceased pacing the floor, and stood as one transfixed, gazing through the open window.

He had asked his wife to leave him in solitude, that he might sleep. Little she guessed the thoughts that were ensnaring his soul, and urging it on to eternal doom.

The evil spirits that attack the weak, had glided noiselessly into the very chambers of his heart, to blind his reason, and pervert his will. He could no longer wrestle against them, as he looked back on the gorgeous yet fleeting treasures of wealth, honour, and reputation, all gone, crumbled to dust under his feet. His corrupted affections and debased reason remained the lusts and passions that worked his own destruction, while sins long accumulating had eventually provoked the vengeance they deserved. Yes, he could no longer blind his eyes, this was the climax, this the end! He had tempted God, his career had been checked and crushed. It was time to go. Suddenly as he watched the sunset fading and remembered how only the night before Georgina stood beside him, pouring forth her love, a revival of his apparently dead principle leapt into life. As though to make up for its long torpor, it arose with the resistlessness of a fury, sweeping all the clogged recesses of memory, making each slighted warning and base misdoing sting like the bite of a fiery serpent on his soul.

In a frenzy he seized pen and paper, writing one last fond line to his wife:

"Forgive me, dearest, if you can. There is, alas! no other way. They say that only cowards commit suicide, but I maintain it takes a brave man to die. Tell our son to guard well the good old name, on which, had I lived, I should have brought dishonour. God bless you and the two dear children. Good-bye."

He placed the hurried writing in an envelope, addressed it to Lady Ravenscroft, and laid it on the blotter.

Then he went out quietly, meeting Eva on the stairs.

He kissed her passionately as she passed, declared his head was better, and he was going out.

"Shall I come, too?" she asked. "I am just running up to fetch Miss Pluff."

"Miss Pluff!"

He winced at the name.

"No, no, girlie! I—I would rather be alone."

Eva, leaning over the banisters, watched his steady step as he descended.

"Yes," she thought, "father is better. But I wonder why he looked at me so strangely and kissed me—oh, as if—as if he were never going to see me again."

Then she went silently to the schoolroom, determined Miss Pluff should not follow her father into the garden.

"Lady Norah has gone," she said, joining her governess. "Didn't she look *sweet* at lunch? Sefton never took his eyes off her, and ate nothing. That is 'being in love,' I suppose. He wanted to drive home with her, but she put him off. Something about a Captain Brooke and the station. Sefton looked awfully wild, and has hardly spoken since. I think it was rather mean of her, don't you?"

Miss Pluff was not sufficiently interested in Lady Norah or Sefton to offer an opinion.

"Is your father better?" she asked.

"Yes."

Miss Pluff had just caught sight of the tall, spare figure walking towards the shrubbery.

"Shall we go out in the garden, Eva?"

"If you like; only we must not follow father. He does not want to be disturbed."

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Miss Pluff drew in her lips.

"I am sure mother doesn't know he's down. She is with Sefton in the boudoir. I think I'll go and tell her."

"I should advise you to do nothing of the sort; if your father wanted Lady Ravenscroft he could quite well have fetched her himself. When people's nerves are unhinged they are often cross and irritable, better left alone."

"Father is *never* cross," said Eva indignantly.

But Miss Pluff kept her pupil upstairs.

As Sir Reginald wandered alone in the gloomy shrubbery, his hand pressed upon something cold, he longed instinctively for human aid. Why had not his wife found the letter and rushed to stop him from his deadly deed?

But no, his fate was definitely planned—the hour had come.

Even as the thought flashed through his brain, Lady Ravenscroft was stealing on tiptoe to his door. She pushed it softly open and looked in.

Eva, leaning over the banisters, watched his steady step as he descended.

The bed, the sofa, were alike tenantless. Her husband was not lying down.

She entered the room surprised at his absence. The chair by the writing-table was pushed back, papers lay scattered broadcast, a pen had been left point downwards in the ink-pot.

Her eyes fell on the letter addressed to herself.

A horrible foreboding crept over Lady Ravenscroft. What could it mean? Why did he write to *her*?

She opened it with fingers that trembled in spite of herself, the words danced before her eyes. She looked round wildly, her blood freezing with terror, trying to cry out. Then rushing to the door her strangled voice broke forth: "*Sefton! Sefton! Help—quick! Your father!*"

The report of a gun sounded on the tranquil air, like a death-knell to her hopes.

"My God!" she cried, tottering forward, "he has done it!"

"Mother, what is the matter?" Sefton was by her side.

"Lady Ravenscroft is ill!" It was Miss Pluff's voice behind her.

"Who is shooting in the shrubbery?"

Eva's question gave her speech. "Reggie!" she muttered hoarsely. "He—he—has killed himself!"

With one accord they ran towards the spot whence the sound had come, Sefton ahead, Eva clinging to her mother's skirts, Miss Pluff alone—apart. Her hands were tightly clenched, her eyes starting from her head, her breast heaving with ill-concealed emotion.

"He would never do it," she said. "He had not the courage."

Sefton stopped suddenly, and sank upon his knees, as if to hide the terrible sight from his mother.

There lay Sir Reginald, ghastly and bloodstained, upon the moss and undergrowth, his head against a knot of roots, his hands flung back above his shoulder, his body contorted by the last grim struggle. Lady Ravenscroft viewed it in mute misery and speechless horror, involuntarily placing her hands over Eva's eyes, while she pressed the frightened child to her breast. It was the girl's arms that prevented her falling, as the two swayed together under the trees.

Then in the awful and solemn silence that fell upon their grief, a wild shriek rent the air, while Miss Pluff brushed past Sefton in her mustard dress, and sank upon the earth by the dead man's head.

Scream after scream, piercing and blood curdling, broke from her lips. She beat her brow with her hands, rocking herself to and fro in a paroxysm of hysterical, uncontrollable despair. Her tears streamed down and fell on Sir Reginald's damp hair; her face was hardly recognisable so distorted had it grown from anguish.

Her cries brought the whole household rushing to the spot—grooms, gardeners, men servants, all with white, scared faces, while the maids followed at a distance, whispering of murder in the gloom.

Mrs. Leslie, the housekeeper, advanced in rustling silk, and grasped the situation at a glance. The master was lying dead; the poor dear mistress, half fainting and stunned by the blow, stood, supported by her children, at the foot of that grim body; while Miss Pluff, the governess, moaned, shrieked and wailed, kissing him and crying over Sir Reginald's mutilated head. The shocking fatality of this sudden and mysterious death hardly horrified the good woman more than the sight of that presumptuous female, parading her grief in the face of Lady Ravenscroft.

Sefton turned to Mrs. Leslie with a pleading, piteous glance.

"Get her away, for mercy's sake; she is mad!"

Miss Pluff was conscious of a firm hand on her arm; someone drew her up sharply to her feet, and hurried her off against her will. Once she tried to dart back, but her intention was somewhat roughly frustrated by the buxom woman at her side.

"He's dead!" groaned Georgina. "Oh, my love—my life!"

Mrs. Leslie shook her with ill-natured vehemence, considering she was almost too weak to stand.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, and before my lady, too! As brazen and scandalous a scene to make as ever I saw over a poor dead gentleman! Who are you, I should like to know, to make his memory a talk among the servants? They won't have much to say for *your* character after this evening."

Miss Pluff listened dazed and stupefied. Her hysterical fit was subsiding under Mrs. Leslie's open reproaches, though she still wailed of her love in a spasmodic undertone.

"Who murdered him?" asked the housekeeper shrewdly, glancing round, as if expecting to see assassins hiding among the trees.

Miss Pluff shivered.

"I—I don't know, but he was cold. His dear eyes looked

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into mine, and their stare was glazed! Oh! how can I bear the bitter—bitter years to come?"

Mrs. Leslie set her lips, and still retaining Miss Pluff's arm, marched her on like a gaoler with a prisoner.

"Poor Mr. Sefton, he *did* look at you, as much as to say: 'Well there, who'd have thought it!'"

"You are a very cruel, unfeeling woman," hissed the governess, suddenly waking up to the realisation of the housekeeper's "insults," as she afterwards termed them. "You have evidently never known what it is to have your heart torn out, to suffer as I do to-day."

"No, thank the Lord. I have always kept myself respectable!"

They had reached the house, and Miss Pluff was conducted to her room, where she flung herself on the bed, and lay staring at the ceiling, with hands clasped on her breast, and limbs rigid.

Mrs. Leslie left her in disgust, declaring her affectation was past endurance, and anxious to return to the stricken widow and weeping, frightened child.

What passed in Miss Pluff's mind that night only herself and her conscience knew.

But sleep came not, and as she counted the hours she planned her future skilfully while still sobbing for the dead.

Sir Reginald had kindled a violent passion in Georgina's soul that left her hardened and resentful! The world was against her, and she against the world. Henceforth battle, conflict, strife!

A mounted messenger left a note.

Scruples? She had none. They should be buried with all that was good of her in the late baronet's grave.

So she laughed, and cried, and sobbed, till the morning light revealed the havoc caused by these oceans of tears.

Her face looked old and swollen; her eyes were weak, watery, almost sightless. As she viewed the sickening apparition in the mirror, she struck the glass with the back of her brush, in a fit of painful rage. It shivered and cracked from top to bottom. Georgina staggered back, sick with superstitious dread. She could not have explained the action, it seemed as if an inward power had moved her hand against her will.

"It is fate," she said. "I must fight that now." Then turning to the broken glass she addressed it in a hoarse whisper: "I challenge you, do your worst, I am not afraid."

* * * * *

Half the night Sefton sat by his mother's bed, holding her feverish hand, bathing the burning forehead and comforting her as best he could. He was gentle and considerate as a woman, no trained nurse could have tended Lady Ravenscroft with greater patience and skill. He soothed the desperate torrent of her grief, just as if his own heart was not tortured with fears, aching with pent-up sorrow, lacerated by the agony of bereavement.

He dared not ask himself what that letter meant, hinting darkly at disgrace, nor venture to suggest a reason for his father's self-sought death.

When at last she fell asleep, he crept softly from the room to listen at Eva's door.

He could hear a deep sigh, then a sob, and fretful tossing from side to side. He went in, and kneeling down, clasped the shuddering little figure in his strong arms, and whispered that she must be strong, "for mother's sake."

But not till he was alone did his manly frame break down before that human weakness, and shed in secret the tears which must fall for a parent's lost soul!

In the morning a mounted messenger left a note addressed to Sefton Ravenscroft, Esq.

It was the final drop in his bitter cup—the letter and the signet ring from Lady Norah.

(To be continued.)

BRAIN GYMNASIUM: RESULT of No. 7 Competition.

Of the competitors who entered for this competition, not one succeeded in solving all the problems. Mr. F. Clements, 15, St. Mary's Road, Queen's Road, Peckham; and Mr. J. R. Morrison, 18, Silver Street, Aberdeen, are the highest in the list, having a total of 9½, and to each of them a guinea has been forwarded. Penknives have been sent to the competitors whose names and addresses appear below.

J. R. Traill Hill, 3, Merchant Street, Peterhead; B. C. Smythe, St. Anne's House, Lewes; T. Tanner, 74, Hampton Park, Bristol; H. Coles, 37 Walnut Street, Southport; S. Vickers, 96, Bold Street, Liverpool; F. Bessant, 15, Eaton Place, Falmouth; E. Wakeford, 29, St. Agnes Place, Kennington; J. G. Usher, Baltinglass, Wicklow; Mrs. M. E. Mennie, 99, Queen Street, Peterhead, N.B.; Miss Erskine, 2, Chapel Street, Peterhead; C. B. Keston, 11, Queen's Road, Bayswater; A. Ross, 29, Pomarium Street, Perth, Scotland; H. Percival, 14, Denmark Road, Moss Side, Manchester; J. Gillespie, 105, St. Michael Street, Dumfries; J. Adams, The Cottage, The Heath, Crayford, Kent; Miss E. Champ, 16, Prospect Hill, Walthamstow; G. Adams, West View, Sharrow, Sheffield; G. W. Smith, 57, Longton Grove, Sydenham; C. H. Jones, 23, Musgrave Crescent, Walham Green; A. W. Rowl, New Road, Lower Edmonton; C. Royelle, 9, Grand Junction Parade, Brighton; Miss A. Vincent, 16, Crowhurst Road, Brixton, S.W.; Miss D. Putton, The Links, Ascot; R. Ellis, 16, Western Road, Hove, Brighton; W. J. Barter, 38, Douglas Street, Cork, Ireland.

KEY OF No. 7 COMPETITION.

No. 61.
S—nuff.
U—nder.
P—estle.
E—ver.
B—ain.
F—ool.
I—nk.
N—ot.
E—el.

The Result of the Picture Puzzle Competition will appear next week.

No. 62.

The snore, the snore, the beautiful snore,
Filling the casement from ceiling to floor,
Over the counterpane, under the sheet.
From her dainty head to her tiny feet.

No. 63.

L O I N.
O N C E.
I C E S.
N E S T.

No. 64.

a=m. e=f. i=l. o=n. u=s. l=a. h=k.

No. 65.

At 3.32 p.m. on Saturday, July 4th.

No. 66.

MULTIDENTATE.

M itigat E
U nkep T
L lam A
T urbo T
I rreligio N
D isput E

No. 67.—Orphanotrophy.

No. 68.

"Fitalubeu" or "beautiful"; value, £11 1s. 1½d.

No. 69.

Some of the best anagrams were:
A better felt hat. Fate! Better halt. That beater left.

No. 70.—65 times.

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"WAITER, AN ABSINTHE FRAPPÉE."

The Crime Confessed in a Club.

"We both loved her," my strange acquaintance continued gloomily, setting down his glass and leaning his elbow heavily upon the table, he, calmly and sedately, after his wonted manner, I, feverishly and furiously, in my way. She was worthy of any man's love. She was pure and sweet, and her cheeks were like white rose leaves.

"She favoured me; I knew that, and so did he; so did the old man, her father, he of the millions. It was this which led to the trouble between the old man and my hated rival, the nephew; the old man seemed to hold him responsible for losing the girl's affections, and was consequently enraged, because he wished the two to marry. He was always choleric and violent in his tantrums, and the night they quarrelled he was particularly so.

"Waiter, an *absinthe frappée*."

It was the third he had ordered. He drank doggedly, as suited his mood. Every drink seemed to intensify the desperate look in his eyes and the harsh expression about his lips.

Having quenched his inordinate thirst, he continued:

"I overheard part of the trouble, as did the servants in the house. The two were in the library, and the old man was storming in a loud voice. I had called at the house unknown to them, and was in the drawing-room where, standing alone near the door which led to the library, I could hear everything.

"Finally, the young man got up and went out, saying in his exasperatingly calm voice: 'You will think better of your words to-morrow.'

"'Curse you, I will not!' shouted the old man, and then a door closed gently, and I knew that he was alone.

"But still he kept on talking noisily to himself, condemning everybody to everlasting perdition—me, in particular. I heard him get up presently and go to the sideboard where he kept his liquors. Then he returned and settled himself in his chair before the fire, and I knew that he was preparing for his evening siesta. He always nodded an hour or two in his chair before he went to bed. Gradually his mutterings grew fainter, and after a time I ceased to hear his voice altogether. Then, by listening closely, I could hear his heavy breathing, and I knew that he was asleep.

"Now, it occurred to me, would be a good time to kill him. I had never before thought of murder, and the idea disturbed me somewhat, as you may believe. But there were reasons—pressing ones at that—why I wished him dead. My office as assistant prosecuting attorney of the city had cost me all the money I had saved from my practice, and the income it yielded me was not sufficient to supply all my wants. So, while I loved the daughter, I wanted the father's money, and there was only one way to get it—by putting him out of the way. Once out of the way, I would speedily effect a marriage and come into his millions.

"I reasoned out the plan well, as I stood there in the shadow of the curtains. It would be so easy to open the connecting door, steal into the library, cut the old man's throat, then steal out again and leave the house. When the crime was discovered—ha! the nephew would be charged with it! The servants would testify to his presence in the library, to the quarrel, to all the incriminating circumstances. And I—how could I be suspected? I was supposed to have left the house an hour before. Then, my position—an officer of the great city, a prosecutor of criminals, a man in whom the public had perfect confidence. *I* suspected? Never! and if I were, did I not have the legal machinery of the city at my command? Why, I knew secrets to ruin half the judges in town! They would not dare to convict me!

"'So,' I said, 'I will kill him.' I took a knife from my pocket, opened it, and tested the blade. It was very sharp. Then, with the greatest care, I opened the door, slowly, very slowly, lest I should wake the old man. He was in just the position I had pictured him, reclining in his great easy-chair before the fire, asleep, with his head on his bosom. You can imagine my feeling of exultation as I noted his helplessness. Waiter, an *absinthe frappée!*"

He waited moodily for the drink to be brought him, and said nothing more until it was drunk. Then he pursued his narrative.

"I stole cautiously to his side, and, with one swift stroke severed his jugular. He did not so much as moan. Then I retraced my steps and closed the door. The whole episode had not occupied a minute.

"As I passed out into the hall I encountered the nephew. We stared coldly at each other, and I hastened on out to the street.

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"The next morning the newspapers were full of the crime. My rival had been arrested!

"I was happy. I hurried to the house, and offered my condolence to the bereaved daughter. She was almost prostrated with grief, and I alone could comfort her.

"When the day of trial came, I was on hand with my evidence against the prisoner. As assistant district attorney, it was my duty to prosecute him. He sat before the justice with that same maddening calmness that was habitual with him, and when our eyes met he gave me a look which aroused my hatred to the depths. It was full of consciousness of his own innocence, of challenge to me to do my worst, of assurance that *I* was the murderer. Yes, he knew the truth; I saw that instantly. But what did it profit him? What could he prove? Nothing. He was in the toils, and I was free to bind those toils more firmly about him.

"I would convict him. For my own welfare it was necessary, and I swore a mental oath that he should not escape. It is not easy to convict a man on circumstantial evidence; but my case was a strong one, while the defence was weak. As the trial proceeded, I felt that victory was certain. In my speech before the jury, I spun a web of incriminating evidence about him from which no amount of legal ingenuity could extricate him. I spoke of his unsuccessful attempt to win the murdered man's daughter, of the quarrel in the library, of the fact that within an hour after the murder was discovered, of the inheritance which the nephew had reason to expect at the death of his uncle. The argument was overwhelming. It was the strongest speech I ever made, and all the while he sat looking at me in that calm, accusing manner, that made me wish for a chance to cut his throat, too.

"The verdict was 'Guilty.'

"I think it surprised him. Serene in his innocence, he had not believed it possible to fix the crime upon him. He had underestimated my powers. 'Now,' I said to myself, 'he will be executed, and his portion of the old man's money will come to me.' How I rejoiced over my triumph! You will not drink? Waiter, an *absinthe frappée!*"

I was beginning to have a horror of the man—aye, and to fear him, for under the influence of his copious libations, his face had assumed an expression which, while almost fascinating, was yet dangerous and repulsive. Was he telling me the truth? If so, he was a veritable monster. I marvelled that he had made a confidant of me, since we were practically strangers. Perhaps he was crazy? No, he did not have the appearance of an insane man. My speculations were cut short by his resumption of his strange story:

"It was the night before my marriage. I sat in my room meditating, when there came a knock at the door and the man whom I had convicted of my own crime entered. He had escaped from the prison.

"I did not rise from my chair, but sat still, looking up at him. I cannot say that I was surprised to see him, for something had told me he would come.

"'Well?' I said; adding, 'if you are cold sit by the fire, and we will talk over the situation.'

"He drew up his chair, and sat down facing me, all the time watching me narrowly.

"'I must be very cautious,' he said, 'the police are doubtless looking for me by this time.'

"'Do you think *this* a safe place?' I asked.

"'I am taking chances,' he replied, shrugging his shoulders. 'I want to talk with you. I have something of importance to say.'

"'I suppose you wish to reproach me, or threaten me,' I ventured.

"'Oh, no,' he said carelessly, 'you did only what any villain would have done under the circumstances—that is—assuming that he was clever enough. You are very shrewd. You know, I did not expect to be convicted, although I saw everything going against me. But I had no proof against you, *then*, so what could I do?'

"'Sure enough, what could you do?' said I. 'You have proof against me now, then?'

"'What's more important,' he rejoined, 'I have the will.'

"'The deuce!' I exclaimed, 'that accounts for it's not being found.'

"'So it does,' said he. 'Now, what do you suppose the will decrees?—that the money and property shall be equally divided between the daughter and me, provided—notice the provision—that we marry within six months after his death! in case we fail to marry, for any reason whatsoever, except death, the estate is to be distributed among other relatives and charities.'

"I uttered an oath. 'That's a nice state of things,' I added.

"'Yes,' he replied, 'the old man was always crazy, and this piece of business is characteristic.'

"'But the daughter could break the will,' I suggested.

"'No,' said he. 'She is not his daughter. She is only an adopted daughter, and not legally adopted at that.'

"'Now, this *is* serious,' said I, as I got up and paced the floor. 'Will you have something to drink?'

"'Thank you,' he answered, filling the glass I extended him. Waiter, an *absinthe frappée!*"

I watched his eyes as he waited for the drink to be brought him. They were positively baleful, and green—exactly the colour of the absinthe. "After all," I said to myself, "he is insane." Suddenly he resumed:

"'What effect on the case would your death have?' I asked him.

"'This will provides that in the event of the death of either of us before the marriage can occur, the survivor shall inherit all.'

"'Then,' said I, 'the case is just this: If I marry the girl to-morrow night, with you alive, I marry a pauper; if I marry her with you dead, I marry a millionaire heiress?'

"'Exactly,' said he.

"'Have you the will with you?' I asked. 'It might be destroyed.'

"'Unfortunately,' he replied, somewhat sarcastically, 'my lawyer probated it this afternoon. Now,' he went on, 'I have a proposition to make you: If you will go with me to the girl and confess the crime, in order that I may be placed in her esteem and marry her, I will give you two million francs.'

"'Impossible!' I declared; 'you would be re-arrested at once. Besides, I love her.'

"'So do I,' said he, 'and I will take all chances of being apprehended.'

"'Impossible!' I said again. 'She loves me. She would not marry you. The only feasible solution of this problem is for you to die within the next twenty-four hours.'

"'It certainly looks that way,' he admitted.

"'Don't you see,' I continued, 'that you are standing in the way of the girl's happiness? She loves me, and is happy in the prospect of marrying me to-morrow night. In case anything happened to prevent her, her disappointment would be great; likewise the loss of the

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fortune she believes to be hers. Now, if you love her, and desire her happiness, why do you not yield to circumstances and get out of the way? You are under sentence to die a month hence; what difference can a month make to you? You have nothing to live for, you can accomplish no good in that time, whereas if you die at once, your demise will vastly benefit both of us. Come, be generous!'

"'You would suggest, then,' he said, 'that I commit suicide?'

"'Capital!' I asserted; 'or, for that matter, I could kill you.'

"'But that would get you into trouble,' he smiled; 'you might fail to escape so cleverly as you did before. Then the whole plan would be baulked.'

"'True,' I returned; 'I agree with you that suicide is better. What do you say, then? Remember it is for *her* sake.'

"The appeal had its effect. He sat thinking the situation over for some time, and finally said:

"'You have got me in a very bad position. While knowing that my fate should be yours, by rights, I yet am wholly without power to compass your punishment without utterly destroying the peace of mind of her I love. Then, should I try to fasten the crime of which I stand convicted upon you, whatever proofs of your guilt I might offer, you would probably beat me and send me to the gallows; I had much rather die by my own hand, in the free air of heaven, than be executed by the warden of a prison.'

"'Sensible!' I commented.

"'I am liable to be recaptured at any minute,' he went on, in the same philosophic tone. 'I am not good at dodging the sleuthhounds of the law. Once recaptured, I am doomed to the noose. All in all, suicide seems the best way out of the difficulty. There is one thing, however, which you must promise me; will you take good care of her and make her happy?'

"'By all means,' I responded.

"'Then it is settled,' said he; 'I will die before this time to-morrow night.' He arose and went to the door. 'Good-night,' he added in farewell.

"'Good-night,' I returned, and he went out.

"'He is an obliging sort,' I said to myself. 'I should like to know if he means to keep his word.'

"I donned my coat and hat, thinking to follow him; but when I reached the street he was nowhere in sight.

"The next morning I read in the papers that the escaped murderer had been found with a bullet in his brain, in a small side street of the town, not dead, but seriously wounded and unconscious. He had been taken to a hospital.

"'Confound him! to bungle the job!' I thought.

"Then I went to the office of the probate clerk and examined the will. One passage in the singular document exercised me considerably. 'If, within six months after my death,' it read, 'either of the two individuals named marries a third person—except it be *after* the death of the other—all the property aforesaid shall be distributed to the aforesaid charities.' 'The dickins!' I said, exasperated, 'if he is not dead by eight o'clock to-night every penny is lost.'

"I made it a point to tell the bride nothing of what had happened. Busy with her preparations for the wedding, she did not look at the newspaper, and it was not until some days later that she was informed of her cousin's action. I spent most of the afternoon in the big house I was soon to be master of, and I remember how very sweet and happy she was.

"At six o'clock, just as it was growing dark, I visited the hospital to see the convict patient. He was not dead yet, I was informed; indeed, it was thought he would recover.

"I was left alone with him for a few minutes. Finding him conscious, I took advantage of the opportunity to explain to him the necessity of his dying before eight o'clock, the time set for the wedding.

"He readily agreed with me that no time was to be lost if his laudable purpose was to succeed, and suggested that I put an end to him then and there.

"'Can't you do it yourself?' said I, disliking the task.

"'Too weak,' he responded.

"I saw there was no help for it, so I prepared to do his bidding. 'I am sorry,' I said, 'but you see how it is. It's a great pity you didn't aim a little better.'

"'So it is,' said he.

"'Good-bye,' I said, and shook his hand. 'I'll not find any fault with you. You have won my hearty respect as it is.'

"Then I quickly pressed the pillow over his face, and when I took it away he was dead.

"I hastened to call an attendant, and then left the place to dress for my wedding. Waiter, another *absinthe frappée*."

My thoughts were by this time past description. The man seemed to me the very incarnation of evil. I was in a cold perspiration, and shuddered at the very sound of his voice.

"The wedding was quiet, but magnificent," he went on—"that is, the presents were many and costly, and those in attendance were all notables of the fashionable world—intimate friends, you know."

He hesitated for a few moments, sipping the emerald liquid absently. Then he threw the glass to the floor, and rose unsteadily to his feet, while his face was bent over the table until his tainted breath scorched my cheek:

"That was five years ago," he exclaimed. "Since then I have spent five million francs, mostly in absinthe! I swim in a sea of absinthe! I love it—I hate it, and I drink, drink, drink! As for *her*—oh, she died last night, drunk with absinthe! I taught her to drink it, and I'm proud of it! I've spent to-night the last penny I've got to my name, and I'm happy, because I, too, am drunk with absinthe! I'll never have enough money to buy it again, so I'm going to die while I'm happy. Good-night, my friend."

He staggered out of the club and committed suicide within the hour. Whether or not the story he told me was true, I have never been able to discover.

LE VIER.

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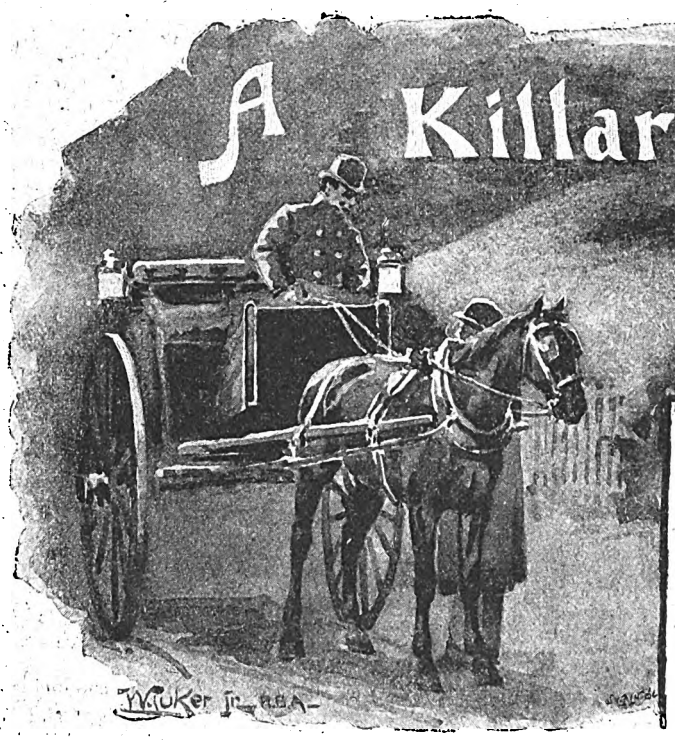
A Killarney Idyl.



Phelim McCaul was not in a particularly good humour as he strode along the rough, mountain path, whistling a faction tune between his teeth, and cutting savagely at the wayside brambles that shivered in the sharp east wind which, appropriately enough, was heralding the Lenten season down the famous Gap of Dunloe.

Judged from Mr. McCaul's standpoint, the situation was a tantalising one. Here he was, a man of thirty-four, with a tidy bit put by, a snug farm and no encumbrance whatever, actually unmarried this blessed Ash Wednesday Eve, and likely to remain so during the coming twelve months, all owing to the unreasonableness of one Thady O'Rafferty, whose daughter, Mollie, Phelim sought in marriage, the negotiations having been broken off that very evening for positively the last time.

Had Phelim been a trifle older, or a trifle more philosophic, he would have probably told himself the disappointment was simply a blessing in disguise, but being still young, and not at all a philosopher, he chafed fiercely at the broken match and heartily cursed Mr. O'Rafferty as he went.

Absorbed in bitter reflections, he did not hear the approaching rattle of gig wheels behind, and it was not until a friendly voice had thrice shouted his name from lungs rendered stentorian by mountain air, that Phelim knew he had a fellow traveller on the road. Thus challenged, he faced round, and recognising his interlocutor as an acquaintance named Lanigan, who rented a farm a mile or so from his own place, came to a halt.

"Yerrah, Phelim, boy, where are ye goin' at that rate this hour o' night?" asked the new-comer, accommodating his horse's pace to that of the young man as they moved forward together, "sure I thought 'tis down colloquing with Mollie O'Rafferty ye'd be this minnit instead of flyin' all over the county like thistle-down——"

"That's all off now!" replied Phelim sulkily, not well pleased at Lanigan's observation, but too true an Irishman to resist the temptation of chattering about his own affairs; "the mane little blaggard of a father wouldn't give a penny more than two hundred quid with the girl, an' he, after as good as promisin' three hundred a fortnight ago, an' I knowin' he had eight hundred lodged in the bank in Killarney!"

"Is it truth ye're tellin' me?"

"Oh, divil recave the lie, an' divil recave the ha'penny more he'd advance; an' I, after swearin' to his face I'd not marry any girl under five hundred!"

"Right y'are, I like your sperret——"

"Sure if I did, I'd be disgraced for ever—lavin' meself down like that, an' there's no fear me wife 'ud respect me either."

"Oh, begob, I suppose he thought that as ye were dacent ye'd the soft vein in ye too," commented the other, cracking his whip, "I suppose he believed that since Miss Mollie was at the convent for a year an' could play the pianny, the head 'ud be turned on yer shoulders."

"Faith, then he never made a bigger mistake in his life," retorted the rejected suitor, knitting his short, straight brows, "there's not such a differ between wan girl an' another as all that, an' 'twould take a keener man than Thady O'Rafferty to fool me anyway—himself an' his daughter, the cross-eyed——"

"I don't wonder at yer feelin' hurt," interposed Lanigan smoothly, as he reined up, for they had reached a spot where the road branched off in different directions, "but never say die, there's as good fish in the say as ever was caught, an' if ye're willin', ye can still be a married man this very Shrove!"

Phelim laughed bitterly, he was in no mood for wooing now.

"I have three daughters yonder," pursued the other, pointing in the direction of the undulating uplands rolling away to the heights beyond, where the Purple Mountain soared into the deepening twilight, "an' they hear tell of you, Phelim, though I don't know if any of 'em met you lately, for they're great stay-at-homes, but they have all a wish for you, an' I don't think 'twould be hard for ye to put the 'come hether' on any of 'em; so

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if ye're in earnest, Phelim McCaul, come along with me this blessid minnit, an I'll give you the pick of the three, an' I'll send across for Father Pat O'Hara—he's only a couple of fields away—an' he'll buckle ye in a jiffey, since the time is so short."

Phelim's darkening brow cleared a little; natural cunning was struggling with wounded pride, and that short-sighted longing for swift revenge which impels many a rejected wooer to fling himself away upon the first girl he meets, in order to enjoy the triumph of what is usually but a Pyrrhic victory—pride won.

"I'll go," he cried suddenly, wheeling round, "me father, God rest his soul, often said ye were a dacent man, an' sure the whole parish knows there isn't the dirty dhrop in any of ye!"

"Right you are, me bouchal," responded Mr. Lanigan promptly, "that's the talk, an' before long you'll have a chance of judgin' whether Thady O'Rafferty has all the nice girls in the country. So, just jump up here alongside o' me, an' we'll be over there like winkin'."

Phelim obeyed, and a quick trot along the winding road presently brought them to the group of whitewashed outhouses surrounding Lanigan's cottage, whose lighted windows shone hospitably through a mountain mist.

Here the proprietor begged his prospective son-in-law to wait while he went in and explained matters to the girls.

"They're bashful, poor things, since they lost the mother," he remarked confidentially, "an' maybe they'd be a bit put out if they saw you comin' in on them all of a suddint."

To this arrangement Phelim made no objection, and Mr. Lanigan, hastily passing through the kitchen, went straight to the parlour where, as he expected, he found the three Misses Lanigan placidly engaged in knitting or sewing.

At the entrance of their parent the three young ladies rose to greet him, the eldest, Kitty, a girl with dove-like eyes, limping slightly as she crossed the room.

"Girls alive, don't be flustered," said Lanigan breathlessly. "Cissy, stir up the fire; be quiet, Peg, there's a young man outside lookin' for a wife, he must get married this Shrove, an' he's waitin' at the door."

"Who is he, eroo?" asked Peggy, the youngest.

"Spake aisy; Phelim McCaul," replied her father, with a nod, at once threatening and explanatory. "I'm goin' to give him the pick o' ye, an' 'tis a long time till ye get as good a chance again."

"Sure he's runnin' after Mollie O'Rafferty," interjected Cissy, pausing in her operation of sweeping the ashes under the grate.

"Yes, but that's all broke off now," answered Lanigan; "he's tearin' mad, an' 'ud marry the divil's daughter for satisfaction. Here, don't waste any more time, 'ramashin'' there, but sit down, all of ye, about the table, Kitty here, an' Cissy at that side, an' you, Peg, at this, an' don't ye get up when he comes in, or lave on to be surprised, but be nice an' pleasant to him, for I said ye were all 'gone' after him, be jabers."

And silencing the titter with which the young ladies took their places, he hurried out to Phelim, who, when he was introduced a few minutes later, found the maidens demurely seated in the positions indicated by their fond parent.

There was a decent interval filled by improving conversation, while Bridgie, the handmaid of the establishment, brought in materials for punch, and it was only

The three Misses Lanigan placidly engaged in knitting or sewing.

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when the tumblers were half emptied that Mr. Lanigan broached the subject which occupied the thoughts of all.

"Now Phelim McCaul," he said, rising and unconsciously imitating the manner of a gentleman he had once seen auctioneering cattle in Killarney, "these are my three girls, the same I was tellin' ye about. That's the eldest, Kitty, I'll give her five hundred pounds, dry money, and there's the second eldest, Cissy, and she has three hundred pounds to her name, an' here's Peggy, the youngest, an' the man who takes her now will have two hundred. So there you are, me bouchal, an' which of 'em will you choose?"

Mr. McCaul rapidly worked a little sum in mental

Kitty suspended toilette operations a moment.

arithmetic; naturally, he decided on the five hundred pound damsel, then he glanced carelessly at her face.

"I think, ser," he remarked deferentially, "I'll take the eldest young lady, if she'll have me. The other two are very nice indeed, an' it's not the first time I heard of 'em" (he was only dimly conscious of their existence until that evening), "but I think 'tis only proper to give her the refusin' of me."

There was a brief silence, a cinder fell from the glowing mass between the grate bars, Cissy tittered furtively, Peggy leant forward, her elbow upon the table, her dimpled chin crushed in the palm of her hand, watching the episode with the pitiless eyes of eighteen. Kitty sat perfectly still, but her demure mouth was lifted at the corners, and there was a light under her half-closed lids like the gleam of a knife loosened in its sheath.

The disinterested Phelim rose and approached her.

"Will you have me, miss?" he asked gently—perhaps at that exact instant he forgot the five hundred pounds; I hope he did.

Kitty's head sank lower, there came a spot of scarlet on her cheeks.

"Oh yes, indeed," she whispered.

"Begor, that settles it!" cried Lanigan, drawing a quick breath, "she's me own favourite child, the first of the clutch, Phelim, an' I say it without any shame to the others, you've got the pick of the bunch. Sure, I don't know what we'll do at all, at all, without her; but, anyway, I'm glad she's settled, and has a good husband, an' since she was to go, there isn't wan I'd rather have her before your own self. Take her, an' God bless ye, an' may the first boy be a bishop! Cissy, girl, run an' get up the tea, help your sister Peggy avick, while Phelim an' meself settle a little bit o' business here as our heads are cool."

And over-ruling a very faint protest on Mr. McCaul's part, he drew the young man into a corner, where a little old-fashioned cabinet stood, and presently both men were deep in the examination of a bank book, greasy with long use, and also a mysterious ledger which the girls knew to be opened only upon the most momentous occasions.

Meanwhile, a sumptuous meal was hastily prepared, sumptuous according to the ideas of people whose fathers had been obliged to hide their prosperity as other men hide their crimes, and ere long the welcome sound of sizzling bacon and the "pat" of the tossed pancakes dominated the cheerful bustle around the great kitchen fireplace.

The examination of the books concluded, Mr. Lanigan remarked genially, as he pointed to an empty chair at the head of the table on whose snowy cloth the scanty array of household treasures was already glittering:

"I sent over for Father Pat as I was comin' in because 'tis gettin' late in the evenin', so ye can be married comfortably off-hand an' no bother about it; there's a fine room upstairs, an' a bed that's fit for a king, an' they're lightin' the fire there now so the smoke 'll be cleared out when ye're ready, for sweet bad luck to me if either o' ye go out of this house to-night!"

Of course Kitty, who had remained in the parlour, blushingly objected, a mere matter of detail which did not affect the arrangements in the least, while Phelim, who had made up his mind that the bargain was a good one, became properly impatient, so that when Father Pat made his appearance he found an air of undeniable festivity pervading the house, the genial spirit of the hour breathing upon all, from Murteen, the oldest farm labourer, who had got drunk with amazing celerity, to the young lovers themselves as they sat hand in hand under the fostering smiles of Mr. Lanigan while he pelted the amorous swain with appropriate badinage.

The good father, who had been that very evening anticipating a "cold Shrove," was no forbidding figure in this scene of Arcadian felicity, and after some passages of decorous hilarity, the mystic knot was tied, and Phelim McCaul, though he had entered the house only an hour before a bachelor, found himself pledged for life to Catherine Philomena Lanigan.

This important ceremony having been transacted, the home of the Lanigans became a perfect focus of gaiety, a few neighbours and a blind piper, whom very instinct had led to the spot, keeping the impromptu merry-making afoot.

Father Pat, a quaint figure not destitute of a certain pathos and dignity amid this somewhat boisterous jollity, presided in the parlour, and gave "tone" to the rejoicings; now praising Cissy's pancakes, now joking with the young, now gossiping with the old, and later on taking a hand at a quiet game of "forty-five" with Lanigan, the bridegroom, and one Corney O'Loon, a clerical student, a cousin of the family. Finally, it was he who proposed the health of the new wedded pair, in an extempore speech, winding up with a neat little quotation from Martial, which Mr. O'Loon promptly mistranslated, to his own great confusion, but the unmitigated satisfaction of his relations, who secretly believed him to be a far superior scholar to the parish priest, and soon after Father Pat took his departure, going back to his lonely house, the richer by a ten pound note, and a fresh experience in the ways of humanity.

When the priest had gone, dancing commenced in the great kitchen. Mrs. McCaul did not, however, take a

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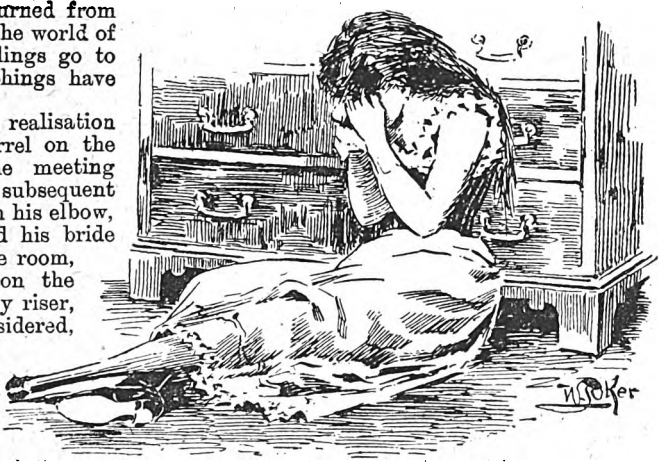
part in the proceedings, but quietly retired to her room, while Peggy footed it with the most hopeless detrimental in the parish, to the tune of the "Wind that Shook the Barley."

The next morning dawned grey and cold, but acting on a life-long habit, the bride was astir before her snoring spouse had returned from the world of dreams to the world of facts where twenty shillings go to the pound, and most things have their price.



Slowly he awoke to a realisation of his position, the quarrel on the preceeding evening, the meeting with Lanigan and the subsequent events, then leaning upon his elbow, he sleepily contemplated his bride as she pottered about the room, congratulating himself on the fact that she was an early riser, and that, everything considered, he had struck a remarkably good bargain.

After a while, however, his ingenuous brow clouded, a new expression stole into his honest eyes, and presently he gasped:

"Eroo Kitty agra, what's the matter with yer legs, sure 'tis limpin' ye are?"

Kitty suspended toilette operations a moment, taking a twist of hair out of her mouth so that she could reply.

"Yes, indeed, Phelim, dear," she answered placidly, "wan leg *is* a little biteen shorter than the other, but it's no impidiment, so you needn't be troubled about me at all."

And she limped across the room for a fresh hair-pin.

Phelim swore a bitter oath. Bouncing out of bed, he flung on some clothes, dashed to the door, flung it open, and rushed out upon the landing.

"Jack Lanigan," he shouted, "come here if yer a man!"

A head showed itself just then at the turn of the stairs below, and a moment later Lanigan himself was revealed in the act of ascending.

"Arrah, there ye are, me bhoy," he observed cheerfully, "'tis light an' airy ye are; the top of the mornin' to ye, I was comin' up to know were ye awake, how's herself?"

"See here," roared the deluded bridegroom, "why did ye give me that girl inside with wan leg longer than the other?"

"Sure, didn't you see her," retorted the father-in-law, "an' didn't you chose her from the three of 'em?"

"I know that quite well," rejoined Phelim, his eyes sparkling, "but I didn't know she limped, an' why didn't you tell me?"

"So I would, if you had only axed me," replied the other genially, "but I didn't know 'twas to run races you wanted her!"

That was all. The two men stared at one another the fraction of a second; then Phelim stepped back into the nuptial chamber and closed the door gently.

Then he found the limp consisted of a wooden leg.

LUSMORE.

6D. MELODY. 6D.

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LITERARY NOTES | MUSIC OF THE MONTH, By R. S. HICHENS.
DANCE MUSIC—OLD AND NEW, By JOSEPH BENNETT.

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TRIAL BY FIRE.

The Major was one of the many well-born Englishmen who went to California with a younger son's portion and a small monthly allowance and hope to make a fortune on a vineyard or a wheat ranch. The plan always looks feasible in England, and the agent assures his victim that the £1 000 will buy a ten-acre plot, plant vines, build a decent bungalow, and tide the owner over until the vines shall bear and bring him in a harvest of good American gold.

The Major was going the way of many of his English friends. The £1,000 legacy was gone, and the monthly allowance of £20 (which, viewed from a distance, seemed large), always grew painfully small as it neared California and the debts it was supposed to cover. The Major's little mountain vineyard had been destroyed by phylloxera, and he was living on the uncertain promise of a number of green shoots, called respectfully "the olive orchard." But the Major was not unhappy. When he was not tilling the soil he sat on a little verandah with his briarwood pipe between his teeth, and studied the long, narrow, picturesque Napa Valley far below.

It may be that the Major's failure to succeed in the grape business was not the fault of the country, but that his genial, unpractical nature was the true obstacle to success. The Major was, in fact, the most helpless Englishman who ever went to California to take care of himself. The poor fellow became so convinced of this after a short trial that he engaged a man to act as valet for himself, and, incidentally, cook the meals of both. The Major was a solitary bachelor then. The gods alone knew in what unpropitious moment he picked up Pete, to hang about his neck a millstone of inefficiency. Pete's poverty must have been his recommendation, and the Major's poverty the excuse for keeping him. Pete had about as much knowledge of laying out and caring for a man's wardrobe as the Major had of running a ranch.

When the Major married Ellie Smith, a pretty San Francisco girl, Pete was promoted to be manager of the ranch, and expended his grooming talents on the pet mule. The Major's wife was "artistic." She had studied sketching, and did some really clever bits. Her admiring husband was sure that she possessed the divine afflatus, and consequently much time was devoted to art and little time to ranching.

But this was not without protest from one individual. Not that he was disturbed by lack of work, but poor Pete was oftener than not the unwilling model for Ellen's clever studies. One day Pete posed for "The Man with the Hoe." His temper was particularly tried on that occasion, for he had taken up his tool with the honest intention of weeding the primitive vegetable garden. Though he had scudded through the back yard and climbed the rear fence, he had not counted on meeting his young mistress in the barn yard. He began to wrestle with the weeds and pretended not to see her. His education, however, had not included a sight of Millet's picture, or he would have fled down the mountain side in utter despair.

"Stop, stop, Pete; right there. Don't move an inch," called the sweet voice that drove him to madness. "Kenneth," Ellie called to her husband, "look. Isn't it wonderful? The lights, the pose, the very landscape like——"

"The Man with the Hoe," shouted the Major gleefully. "I'll get your paints, Ellie. Hold on, Pete," and before the honest son of toil had time to collect his scattered senses he found himself posing in a very uncomfortable attitude, with the Napa Valley lying at his back and the Major's familiar phrases ringing in his ears: "Fine pose—jolly good subject—delicious colouring."

After Pete had posed for a hundred or more indifferent works of art without names, he began to think of deserting his master and leaving him to a just and awful fate. But this stupendous blow was averted by the arrival of Brompton Edwards, another Englishman, who had come to learn practical ranching under the direction of his father's old friend, the Major.

After a week had been given up to driving his *protégé* about the valley and introducing him to the English colony, the Major returned to his daily routine of pruning olive trees and digging out worm eaten grapevines. Ellie soon discovered in the young man's clean-cut features and fine athletic figure an entirely new field for art study, and Edwards found the time pass more pleasantly as a model than as an embryo rancher. They were together most of the daylight hours.

When Brompton was not posing for a wild Norseman or a Greek hero, he was sitting very close to Ellie, criticising, in soft caressing tones, the sketches of himself which she had been doing. Without actually straying from the path of duty, Ellie was treading on dangerously uncertain territory. She quite frankly admitted to herself that she was pretty and charming, and, being of that mind, she did not repress comparisons between her husband and the younger man.

Matters had arrived at a state where a warm-hearted,

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but vain, young woman needed a friend with the strength to hold up a good, powerful, unrelenting mirror for her to gaze into. Pete could have held up the mirror with right good will, but he did not know how. In these days he followed the Major with dog-like devotion, and only glowered when Ellie came out to the orchard one morning with her paints and succeeded in bringing upon herself a scolding from her over-indulgent husband.

She held her head very high and stiff, and marched over the hill some distance away, where she seated herself and pretended to sketch, but was in reality nursing her injured feelings to keep them alive. The Major watched her disappear with a pained expression on his good-natured face, and then went dejectedly into the house. Pete was deeply incensed against Ellie, and made another solemn vow to desert the ranch. It was the ninety-and-ninth time that he had done so, and this time he sealed the vow with an oath.

The long grass on the Napa hills was burnt and crisp, and Ellie was daubing yellow ochre and burnt umber on her canvas with vicious strokes. She was not giving any attention to her work, however, for an athletic form stood between her and the landscape, and she was indulging in a very foolish day-dream. To do the little woman justice, she was not in love with Brompton, but her vanity had been stimulated to such wonderful activity by his youthful gallantries that she fancied he was deeply infatuated with her. She wondered if he would ever tell her that he loved her. If she could only have some test of his love, what a satisfaction it would be!

* * * * *

Over on the mountain side, a half mile away, Pete leant on his horse and watched a thread of fire crawling like a red snake through the undergrush of chaparral and manzanita. He knew only too well that no human power could stop it, and that within a few minutes the gentle breeze would cause a flying spark to fall upon the long dry grass, and puff!—the crawling snake would become a great swirling, galloping mass of flame and smoke, and would pass over the very place where Ellie sat sulking and dreaming. Pete had firmly determined to leave the ranch. He had washed his hands of these people. He would not—but the grass was on fire, and Pete made a dash for the house, yelling at the top of his lungs for the Major.

The volume of smoke was rising high when Ellie rose to her feet and sniffed the air. Before she could gather up her paints, a thin rim of fire ran along the top of the little hill above her. The small birds and insects rose from the ground with a whirr and scattered down the hillside. Ellie glanced quickly backward, and saw the fire licking up the grass as it bore down upon her, and the smoke rolling heavenward in dense, sooty clouds. She did not lose her presence of mind, but remembered a small ploughed field a short distance away, where the flames could not reach her, and ran nimbly down the hill, with her fluttering skirts gathering cockle burs and sticker weed as she sped.

When she was fairly on the ploughed ground and gasping for breath, she saw the young Englishman tearing along the hill at a frantic rate. Through the smoke he looked pale and frightened. Ellie felt a thrill of satisfaction; here was the longed-for proof of his love, he thought she was in danger and had come to her rescue. A deep blush mounted to her cheeks, and her heart beat to suffocation. But he did not seem to see her. It was evident to her that he was crazed with fear and would plunge in to the fire in search of her. Merciful God! he would be burnt.

"Brompton!" she screamed; "dear Brompton, I am here, safe!"

The fire was very close, and she had to throw herself flat upon the ground to escape being burned. She gave one more despairing cry as she felt the hot breath scorch her clothing:

"Brompton! Brompton! Brompton!"

A great wave of smoke and flame swept round the edges of the ploughed ground, and for a minute nothing could be seen or heard. Fortunately for Ellie, the dry grass burnt like tinder, and the fire was soon roaring down the hill towards the valley.

When Ellie, choked and frightened, lifted her head, she saw the thin, long, scantily clad legs of her husband bounding over the blackened earth towards her. His duck trousers were smeared with soot, and he had a wet blanket about his shoulders. He could not speak, but caught Ellie in his arms, and burst into stifled sobs.

Behind them was heard the voice of Brompton Edwards.

"Hello there, Major," he called. "I had a very narrow squeak of it. My hammock and books are burned to tinder by this. By Jove, old fellow, you are burned yourself, aren't you? Your wife was safe enough. I knew she could take care of herself."

But Ellie buried her head in the wet blanket with a shudder and burst into tears of shame and contrition.

"Well, well," gasped Pete, who had stumbled up the hill with a bundle of wet sacks. "I never was so plaguey scared in my life. Thought you'd be burned sure, Miss Ellie. Me an' the Major will have a fine time next week clearing."

For Pete had reconsidered his ninety-and-ninth vow. Indeed, it was only a week later when he was speculating if there was ever a happier couple than the Major and his Ellie. And Pete beamed as he thought of the ignoble part Brompton Edwards played on the day of the fire.

Berry Sharpe.

AHEM! Just a word. The new volume of PEARSON'S MAGAZINE is published, and it will be the more your loss than ours if you fail to get a copy.

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A Real Somersby.

LORD HARRY liked New York. It was his first visit to the great American metropolis, and after the fog of London, the crisp atmosphere and brilliant sunlight of the place affected him delightfully. And then the prevailing spirit of individual independence, which he caught at once, accorded precisely with his mood and charmed him.

Lord Harry had gone to America to be independent. He had tired of the clubs, the theatres, the balls and the boudoirs of London, and had cut loose from them for a good three months, at least. In company only with his valet, he had gone to New York for a new sensation.

He had been a slave to fashion over here. Everybody knew him and everybody courted him. Half the titled maidens in the kingdom wanted to marry him—perhaps he was young and prepossessing, but more likely because he was the possessor of an immense fortune and vast landed estates. To the best of his knowledge he hadn't the slightest sentiment for any one of them, and the prospect of a three months' absence from England was a positive relief.

The valet aforesaid was perfect in his way. He had been a Somersby servant for a number of years and was exceptionally well trained. He seemed very proud of his position and was admirably snobbish. There couldn't possibly have been a more immaculately snobbish servant in all the British realm. His particularly strong points, however, were his distinguished appearance and bearing. His master was quite his opposite in these respects. He of title was free and easy in his way, cordial, and entirely natural. At times it seemed almost as though his careless manner and *bonhomie* were assumed for a purpose, they were so incompatible with the dignity of his title. In view of the somewhat paradoxical dispositions of the two it is not remarkable that strangers sometimes found it difficult to tell which one was the real lord.

The new sensation which was sought by Lord Harry he was destined to experience without delay. On the second evening of his sojourn in New York he attended an uptown theatre, where the reigning queen of light opera was holding forth nightly to a mighty audience of enthusiastic admirers.

Forthwith Lord Harry fell in love.

That is, the sentiment that beset him was as near love as one of his variegated career was capable of experiencing at first sight. Literally, perhaps, it was not love, but it was a dangerous counterfeit, to say the least.

Of course Lord Somersby's movements in America had been religiously cabled to the London papers from the first. He was open in his attentions to the actress, and thereby furnished a continual fund of gossip. Naturally intelligence of his contemplated marriage reached his attorneys in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Of course the object of his admiration was the opera queen. His mental conclusion that she was delicious and desirable was quickly formed, after his first scrutiny of her beautiful face.

Miss Marjory Yost was the idol of the hour in the United States metropolis. Born of honest and obscure parents in some remote village, she had found a patron in a casual summer visitor to the place, who had been struck with her beauty and the sweetness of her voice, and had given her the benefit of a thorough musical education. Her professional *début* was a success, and almost at once she had flashed out into a comic opera star of the first magnitude. Now all the town was at her feet.

She was really a remarkable young woman. To her beauty and her accomplishments she added a vivacity and a charm of manner that were at once fascinating and exhilarating. In her faultless face there was no indication of the worldly wisdom which characterised her conduct of her career. And she was not married. To the best knowledge of the public she was not so much as in love.

Lord Harry kept his seat until the curtain went down in the last act, the *finale* of which was a picturesque tableau, a crescent brooch of dazzling costumed Amazons set with the rarest jewel the Englishman had ever beheld—Marjory, transcendently fair, as she posed in a flood of calcium light.

"By Jove! I must be introduced," said Lord Harry to himself, as he went out of the theatre. "I wonder how they go about such things in America. I must learn all about this lovely creature, and make a play for her trusting heart."

He was at the theatre the following night, and again the night after that.

He sent the lady rare and costly flowers, and at last a note.

A few days later they were driving together in the Park.

Not so very long after that all the newspapers had the story of Lord Harry's infatuation for the actress. And racy reading it made, for wasn't Lord Harry Somersby one of the best known noblemen in England. Whew! what rich gossip it made for the clubs and boudoirs!

The general opinion was that Miss Yost had caught a veritable brainless prize, and that if she "played him right" she could be Lady Somersby any day she chose.

It was so like a fine British nobleman to throw himself away on a creature of the footlights! British noblemen are notorious for that.

"I suppose I am a scapegrace," said Lord Harry, thinking over the situation with the assistance of a black cigar and a long brandy-and-soda. "It's a shame that I shouldn't fall in love with and marry a maid of high degree. But the fact is, maids of high degree are tiresome. There's a sameness about 'em that's pawsitively exasperating. I'm base enough to like a clever girl, like Marjory, and I'm hanged if I care what people think. Yes, I'm a scapegrace, I suppose, but perhaps I'm not a *fool*."

Lord Harry later on proved that he was not altogether a fool.

In Marjory's dainty flat, the genial Englishman was quite at home. Marjory off the stage was even prettier and more fetching than Marjory on the stage, and in the warm seclusion of her little home she was like some rare exotic that lures the lips with splendid beauty and intoxicates the senses with sweetest fragrance.

And Marjory was clever; she had fairly eclipsed herself in the manipulation of the strings attached to

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milord. She had made him welcome in her home, but his privileges were severely proscribed. He was not her lord and master yet. She allowed him to come just near enough to singe his wings without the recompense of a practical victory. She had given him to understand the futility of his dominant aspiration by the telepathy of her eyes, and they had not come to words over the repulse.

"Marjory," he said one night, "you know how much I love you, don't you?"

"No, I can't say that I do," was the arch reply.

"I love you enough to make you my wife, if you'll have it that way," he went on, looking her in the eyes searchingly.

"Nothing would make me happier, milord," she replied demurely.

She was a consummate actress, and here was a situation that called her best powers into play.

"Never mind the 'milord,'" returned Lord Harry, a trifle testily, "I heard enough of that on the other side, and I thought you Americans were too democratic to indulge in it. You seem to like the title; is it the title you are going to marry, or me?"

"Perhaps neither one," she replied, smiling at him, "but if either, *you*. I'm an American through and through, and I care no more for a title than—*that!*" and she snapped her taper fingers. Then she put up her arms around his neck and continued: "It is you I love, and if you had not a cent in the world I should love you just the same. You believe me, do you not? You must believe me! I love you more than all the world beside. I should die without you!"

So it was settled that Marjory Yost, the queen of the comic opera, was to become Lady Somersby. The news was too important and too advantageous from the box-office point of view to remain secret long, and presently the newspapers were prattling over it like magpies.

To all of which the devil-may-care lord paid not the slightest attention, further than occasionally to read through a paragraph that amused him.

All of a sudden, in consequence, his lordship was brought up with a round turn. A letter came one morning with the London postmark that had a suspiciously business look. James brought it up with his lordship's breakfast.

"Read it, Jimmy," said his lordship irreverently.

"It's from your attorney's, sir," said James, scanning the missive. "It says they have heard with much interest and surprise of your lordship's matrimonial intentions, and they beg to remind your lordship of a clause in your father's will which declared that if your lordship marries beneath your rank you shall forfeit the £20,000 a year which constitutes your income from all the estates, sir. And they beg to remain your very humble servants."

"The dickens they do," said Lord Harry, for want of something better to say. Then after a silence, he broke out with:

"I'd forgotten all about that cranky business of the governor's—that is, if I ever knew it. I suppose I heard it read with a lot of other legal nonsense when I stepped into my distinguished progenitor's shoes five years ago, but since I have never had the remotest idea of ever getting married until now, it has never come up. Well, this settles it, by Jove! there's not a woman living worth £20,000 a year. The question is how on earth am I to get out of it with Marjory? Poor little girl, she loved me, and will take it pretty hard."

After another silence, about an hour in length, he called James and delivered his ultimatum like a statesman.

"James," he said, "I'll now see Marjory again. Now I've got a scheme I want you to work for me. You're a fine looking man, James, if I do say it myself, a real swell, by Jove! You've helped me out of many a scrape, and I want you to get me out of this little entanglement. Suppose you go up to Marjory's and tell her that I'm not the real Lord Somersby at all, but that *you* are the real *bona fide* blue blood, and so forth, and that out of consideration for her you have taken it upon yourself to tell her the truth. Do you see—as they say here in New York?"

"But, sir, why should I say I am the real lord? What reason could I give for the deception upon her and the public?"

"Say that you exchanged places with your valet for the sake of a novel experience. In escaping from London, where you were sick of being run after by Society, and coming to America, where you were utterly unknown, you conceived the idea of humbugging everybody into leaving you to enjoy yourself in peace and allowing your valet to pose as Lord Somersby. Ha, ha! Good story, eh? I tell you it will go! Why, I'll have it put in the newspapers. That sort of thing has been done in America, I know. You see, James, I've got to quit Marjory short off, and this does it without any sort of scene, or trouble, or talk. Twenty thousand pounds a year is at stake! Here's a hundred for you, James. Now the case is yours. I'll see that you are backed up by the newspapers. Do your prettiest, old chap!"

It was hard, of course, to give Marjory up, but evidently it was the only thing to be done. He didn't have the heart to go to her himself and break with her.

Loving him as she did, she would make it hard for him to say good-bye to her for ever. It was better to kill her love for him at a blow by making her believe that she was the victim of a cruel deception. And he would go back to England forthwith, and never see her again.

As for his love for her, and his disappointment, he would try to survive them. But he should always remember her as the one woman of all others he had met that was utterly pure and sincere.

Just how the absurd story that the Englishman who had been known as Lord Somersby's valet, was communicated to the Press, it would be hard to say. But the papers made a sensation of it.

With the first paper that contained it in his pocket, James presented himself at Marjory's well-known apartment.

He was immaculately dressed, and very imposing in appearance. Why, anybody with half an eye should have known instinctively that he was the real Somersby, all the time.

As I remarked before, this valet was perfect in his way.

That he entered fully into the spirit of the duty before him was manifested by his eager manner.

The queen of comic opera was at home.

"Poor little Marjory!" his lordship was saying, as he paced his room.

* * * * *

A few hours later Lord Harry was given a telegram, which read:

MY LORD,—The story was a perfect success. I have yielded to temptation and eloped with the lady.—JAMES.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" was all that Lord Harry could say.

T. R.

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The Mountebank's Love.

She was a remarkable young woman. One rumour was that she was the daughter of a famous statesman, and had gone on the stage to retrieve the fallen fortunes of the family. Another dubbed her a daughter of the slums, who had made her first appearance in an East-end gaff. Still another declared she had been married three times and divorced twice. No one knew the truth. Everybody told a different tale.

And when the summer was done and the autumn season had opened, when critics had praised her marvellous voice and the town had gone wild over her beauty, her acting, and her flawless face, Beatrix, at the summit of her career, with everyone at her feet, every wish and ambition gratified, laughed in the faces of the men making desperate vows to her, drove her manager to drink by her whims and caprices, and yawned with *ennui*.

"Any life would be better than this," she mused as she stood one day looking out of the window at the slowly falling snow, dropping quietly and sadly down like the tears of a sorrowing woman.

The room in which she stood was a luxurious nest, with its cushions, divans, silken hangings, perfumes and flowers Over a chair hung a mantle of fur fit for a duchess. On the dressing-table glistened the sheen of silver and the polish of ivory. An open fire gave the finishing touch of comfort, and before it was drawn a velvet couch heaped high with cushions from which she had just risen.

But instead of revelling in this delightful sybaritish room, Miss Osmond continued to stare out of the window at the snow drifting down, down into the filth and mud of the streets, where it was speedily trodden out of sight under the heels of the passers-by.

What did Beatrix see through the misty veil of those slow-dropping snowflakes?

Many things.

An old-fashioned garden choked with weeds and brambles; an old red farm house, the doors and windows of which were nailed up, two graves on the hillside on which the snow was falling—falling.

Miss Osmond gave a little start and turned from the window. The rosy firelight danced and beckoned to her, the spacious couch held seductive arms to her; the lilies on the mantel, the orchids on the table laughed and smiled at her. She paid no heed, but went over to her desk and opening a drawer, took out a time-stained envelope and carefully opened it. From it dropped two locks of hair—both grey—one short and bristling, the other, a long curling tress. She stared blindly at them for a moment, and over her pretty, painted cheeks tears slowly dropped, even as the snow was dropping down over those two lonely graves far away on a bleak Yorkshire moor.

* * * * *

Tom Bohannon, mountebank, was Beatrix's most devoted admirer. He chanced to be, for the moment, the favourite jester of the fickle populace. He was so hopelessly ugly, he was fascinating. Popular, too, especially with the gilded youth, who like to be seen in the company of well-known actors. Tom was a man of the world, unquestionably, but in spite of his stormy, reckless existence, down deep in his heart he had kept an ideal or two. From the moment he set eyes on this ravishing woman he loved her, knowing full well that his passion was absolutely hopeless.

Cupid and Tom Bohannon! Preposterous pair.

Strangely enough, however, this disdainful beauty, who spurned men's hearts like footballs, was always gentle to old Tom. His touching devotion—the devotion of a dog—moved her far more than the savage pursuits and the deliberate, skilfully directed sieges of which she was the object. Nothing delighted her more than to thwart the consummate devilry which everywhere encompassed her. The *roués* of the town were on their metal. All sorts of traps were set for her; all sorts of gilded propositions made her. Beatrix continued to lead her pursuers to the very threshold of love; then coolly locking the door in their faces, mocked at them from the window. But to poor old Bohannon she was always as gentle as a sister.

Tom wanted Trix to leave the stage. "You've got a great start," he was wont to say. "Your voice is superb, and your beauty has carried London by storm, but you are not one of us. You are as proud as a princess. You walk over the necks of the crowd. You must marry. I'd marry you myself, Trix, poor buffoon—mountebank that I am," with mock heroics, "were it not for the fact that I'm wedded to my art."

All this, with a glass of champagne in his hand, a smile on his lips, and an ache in his battered old heart.

One snowy March morning, as Trix sat at the piano running over some new music which had just been sent her, Bohannon was shown in, looking in his flake-strewn fur coat like a big Polar bear.

"Hallo, little girl," he cheerfully called. "Well, you are simply out of sight this morning. Gad! that's a pretty gown. Where did you get the flowers?" plunging his nose into the mass of white heather on the piano.

"I bought it myself," said Trix.

"Never!" cried Tom, "it isn't possible that you have come to that."

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"Yes," said the girl, "I bought it because they reminded me of—of my old home. There was a great clump of it under mother's window."

It was the first time Bohannon had heard Trix refer to her past life, and something in her face forbade any questions or jests. But, thinking to direct her thoughts from the sombre channel towards which they appeared to be drifting, he rattled on at a lively pace, retailing the gossip of the Rialto.

"I had a deuce of a shock this morning," he said, "thought I'd struck a ghost, but it was substantial flesh and blood after all. I don't believe you ever knew him. No, he was before your time. But Lord! Lord! how he used to set the town ablaze when he played 'Armand' to Nelly Dorchester's 'Camille.' He's just back from Australia—handsomer than ever—I declare he looks like a prince of the blood royal."

"Who is this phenomenon?" demanded Miss Osmond, turning languidly round on the piano-stool, and idly drumming with one hand on the keys.

"Charlie Singleton," replied Bohannon, helping himself to a sprig of heather for his coat. "Here, Trix, pin this on for me. Did you know him?"

"Charlie Singleton," said Beatrix in a queer voice. "Tom, you must have been mistaken."

"No, child. We walked down the Strand together and had a drink—why, Trix, how your hands tremble. Good Heavens! what is it?"

He caught her in his arms, for he thought she was falling. But in a moment she recovered her self-possession, and went on fastening the sprig of heather in his coat.

"And what do you think he told me? You see Charlie never got on with his wife. That was one reason he went out to Australia. Two months ago his wife died, and he hurried home to look after the child—a sweet, bright little girl."

Miss Osmond's nerves were hammering now, and the blood was rushing to the white face. Tom gabbled on: "It seems he isn't discouraged, though, for he's going to marry again, and never could you guess the girl. It's this soubrette that's coming over to join your company—what's her name? Gwendoline Clarendon—he met her in Sydney——"

"Tom, Tom," a sharp cry of agony broke from the lips of a woman who had flouted so many lovers, "stop, stop, I can't bear it."

"Trix, what is this?"

"I loved him long ago," she said mournfully. "I broke my mother's heart—my father died insane from grief—I was only a girl—an innocent, trusting girl—Tom, he is the man who made me the woman I am, selfish, heartless, soulless."

"You loved him," he said dully, "and he spoke of you this morning. Said he had a great curiosity to see you—had heard so much of your beauty. He's going to appear at the 'Thespian Hand' benefit next week—I suppose he'll speak to you—you'll talk over old times,"—he started up fiercely at her cry of pain.

"No, no," she moaned. "Oh, Tom, dear Tom, you are the only friend I have on earth. I beg you never let him approach me—never let him touch me."

There was a gasp, a sigh, silence.

Like a lily broken from its stalk, the girl huddled in an unconscious little heap at Bohannon's feet.

* * * * *

It was a great bill that was offered that season at the annual benefit performance of the "Thespian Hand Society."

The house was packed, and Miss Osmond, as Thisbe, received an ovation. She went through her *rôle* as though inspired. Long after the sweet tones of her lovely voice echoed in many a heart. Never had she looked so beautiful. Her cold, statuesque, marble-like loveliness was specially marked.

"She looked like an angel," a ballet girl said afterwards.

Immediately upon the conclusion of the scene from *Pryamus and Thisbe*, the stage was set for the historic drama in which Singleton was to make his reappearance. The house fairly rose at him, the old idol, who had been away so long. Flowers were tossed him, and jewelled hands saluted him.

Beatrix stood on the wings watching him handsome, graceful, full of divine fire, a little older and greyer than in the old days, but, oh, how dear!

She idly marked his superb costume. It was very pretty. That lace on the sleeve was worth a small fortune. How still the hour. What was that noise? She looked up.

Singleton stood directly under the huge piece of "batting" which came crashing down from the flies. He would surely have been killed had not that slight figure rushed from the wings, pushed him on one side, and then gone, face downwards, under the heavy wooden footpiece of a drop.

A groan ran through the house as the audience half rose. There was a momentary glimpse of a motley crowd rushing from all the wings on the stage; ballet girls in flimsy skirts; minstrels pale through their burnt cork; the great actress herself wringing her hands and pouring forth French hysterics and profanity.

Then the curtain fell. The orchestra struck up a popular topical song, but ceased after a bar or two when Dick Adams, the stage manager, came before the curtain and said in a dazed sort of way that, owing to the deplorable accident which had just occurred, the performance would be concluded at once.

Behind the scenes all was confusion and chaos. The physician summoned from the audience held a limp, little white hand in his a moment, slowly shook his head and said gravely to the terror-stricken group about:

"It's all over."

There in a tangled mass of soft white draperies, whose snowy surface was stained with blood, lay Beatrix dead. Across her sweet breast was a spray of crushed white heather, whose fragrance stole softly upward. At her side, his hands clenched, his face ghastly with horror, stood the man for whom she had given her young life. He knew that young face reproaching him with piteous, sightless eyes—with a groan he stooped to lift her to his heart.

But a man with a face as livid as his own and blazing eyes, thrust him back.

"Do not dare to touch her," he said, "she asked me once never to let you touch her and—I shall keep my promise to the dead."

There is another grave in the little lonely Yorkshire burying ground behind the desolate farmhouse and the old-fashioned garden full of weeds. At its head every spring blooms the white heather, and over it falls the snow as quietly as the tears fall down a woman's cheeks.

And the only visitor this lonely grave has is an ugly-faced buffoon—a fellow of infinite jest, whose quips and gambols are wont to set the table in a roar.

Gaskell Lynn.

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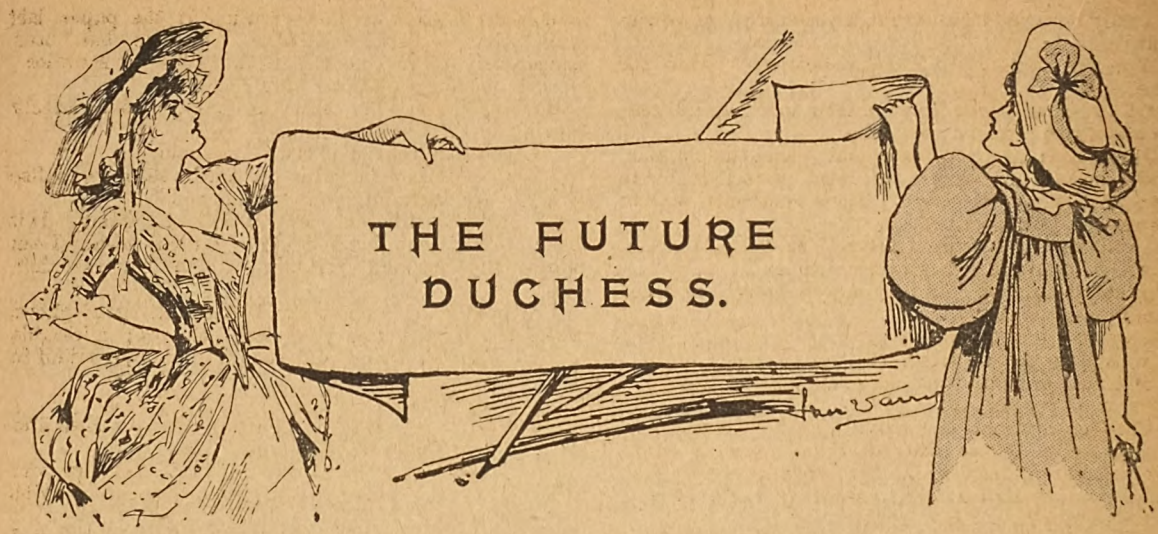

THE FUTURE DUCHESS.

"Mrs. Chester!"

As the door of Phyllis's boudoir opened, and this name was announced, she sprang from her low chair, and turned paler in the gathering gloom.

"How do you do?" advancing somewhat nervously. "Turn up the lights," addressing the servant.

The visitor winced at the sudden electric glare, and shaded her eyes. She was an elderly lady, dressed in deep mourning. Phyllis wore a widow's gown, exquisitely fitting, and highly becoming to her beautiful features.

"I have heard the news," said Mrs. Chester, a hard ring in her voice.

Phyllis drew a chair forward for her mother-in-law.

"I had hoped it would not leak out," she replied.

"I should have thought you were sensible enough to know that was an impossibility. When a widow, whose husband is barely cold in the ground, becomes engaged to a Duke old enough to be her grandfather, and foolish enough to betray her secret, when out of sheer decency——"

"Spare me your opinion—and that of the world," said the future Duchess, drawing herself up proudly, though a mist of tears dimmed her eyes. "I know what it must be already."

"And when will the wedding take place?" asked her mother-in-law bitterly.

Phyllis started.

"Not yet," she said, passing her hand over her brow.

"I suppose you intend waiting the conventional year, though it hardly seems necessary. At the present moment you are living on the Duke's bounty, since my poor boy left you penniless. In the face of this, the sooner you marry the better—Society will forgive much to a duchess."

"Do not speak so harshly," replied Phyllis, looking steadfastly at Mrs. Chester. "I have suffered greatly, and the duke is good and kind—an honourable man. You think I have forgotten George—that I am insulting his memory, but you don't know—you don't understand!"

"Oh, yes," retorted Mrs. Chester, "the old story—the lust of gold—take fortune at the flood—I can imagine the thousand excuses behind which you shield yourself." As she spoke her voice shook suddenly, and the tears coursed freely down her cheeks.

A struggle passed in Phyllis's mind, as she gazed with infinite compassion on the stricken mother.

But she forced back her own emotion, combated the temptation to speak the truth, and took Mrs. Chester's hand in silence as she rose to go.

"Good-bye, Phyllis—in the future we may not meet, but I shall try to think of you only as George's wife."

"Thank you," she answered softly, re-echoing with a sigh: "as George's wife!"

When Phyllis was again alone, she paced the room restlessly.

"I dared not speak," she murmured, "it would be too dangerous!"

Another ring at the bell—footsteps in the hall.

Phyllis advanced smilingly to greet Lady Almina.

"My brother begged me to fetch you," she said. "The carriage is waiting: will you come?"

Phyllis hesitated.

It was just one of those glorious summer evenings that George had loved.

"The garden is very tempting," continued Lady Almina; "I envy Adrian his London trees. I am nearly roasted in Grosvenor Gate."

"I'll come," declared young Mrs. Chester.

A few moments later they were driving to the Duke's house.

"You did not tell me Adrian had friends with him," said Phyllis, as a group of men on the lawn caught her eye.

"Only a few 'casuals' who have dropped in since I left."

"How pale Adrian looks!" murmured his *fiancée*.

"Yes, he suffers terribly; his health is a perfect scourge."

"Ah! Phyllis," he exclaimed, hobbling forward with the aid of a stick, "as fresh and charming as ever!"

His companions scanned the future Duchess critically. She was divinely fair—too fair to sell herself for wealth and position. One man advanced, and held out his hand to Mrs. Chester. At sight of him her lips blanched, a sudden indefinable terror crept into her eyes

"You have not forgotten me," he said slowly.

'No," she replied, with a forced smile.

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"I only returned from America yesterday," he vouchsafed.

"You have met Mr. Vincent before?" cried the Duke.

"Oh! yes," answered Phyllis, then in a lowered tone, "he was a friend of my husband."

"James is bringing my bath chair," said the old man, "and I am going round the grounds. Don't trouble to come, Phyllis, you look tired. These gentlemen wish to make a tour of inspection."

"I will stay with Mrs. Chester," said Mr. Vincent. "It will be pleasant to talk over old times."

Phyllis shuddered. As they moved away, she faced John Vincent defiantly.

He was the first to speak.

"What does this all mean?"

Scorn and contempt rang out in his tone.

Phyllis bit her lip.

"I can explain, but for mercy's sake don't betray me! you know how I have suffered—the secret of my life is in your hands—I despise and hate myself—what I am doing is loathsome and repugnant to my whole nature—but the sacrifice is for George!"

"For *him!* Good gracious, Mrs. Chester, I did not expect to hear you joke at such a moment."

"You don't believe me?"

"How can I, when I find you here, the affianced wife of my host, knowing as I do that your husband still lives."

"Be careful what you say!" glancing round anxiously, "and I will explain everything."

He smiled sarcastically.

"Go on, I am most interested."

His tone of superiority aroused Mrs. Chester's ire.

"It was through *you*," she began, in a low vibrating voice, "that my husband first got into trouble. He was easily led, and your bad influence took hold of him; you dragged him down to your own wretched level! George and John Vincent were in the mire together, only he sank and you swam. Where would you have been now if your uncle, Lord Ivison, had not died opportunely and left you a fortune? He, poor fellow, had no such good luck to help him out of overwhelming difficulties, and so he is still in hiding, while the world believes him dead. I dare not go to him, but soon he will return to me."

"How so?"

"Listen. The Duke, as you know, is fabulously rich; he gives me everything I desire—money, jewels. Bah! it sickens me to talk of it."

"Yes, yes."

"Don't you follow me? Can't you see that in this way I am saving my husband? Adrian's money will restore him to life and freedom!"

"But the price?" whispered John Vincent.

She turned to him with flashing eyes, no trace of shame was there, only the martyred love that memory kept green.

"I am paying it now, in this miserable living lie."

"How long is it to last?"

"Only a short while. George," with a vivid blush, "knows what I am doing, and before the wedding day he will return unexpectedly from the dead. We have invented a story that may be believed, but it matters little then one way or the other."

There was a strange expression in her listener's eyes; he spoke banteringly.

"Oh! George's reported death can be easily explained; they had a detailed account of mine in the paper last week after a carriage accident. Say he has been dangerously ill for months in the wilds of America; work it out like a plot in a novel."

He laughed harshly, and the sound was strangely horrible to Phyllis Chester.

"So you comprehend at last?" she said.

"Yes, only too well! But you hardly seem to realise how you are degrading your womanhood."

"People take different views of right and wrong. If it *is* sin, think what I am doing? By this means I can release my husband from that which is worse than death."

"By practically robbing the Duke. Ah! you ignore, Mrs. Chester, the injury wrought on your miserable decoy. I am his friend, and therefore in duty bound to defend him."

She started visibly.

"You will never betray me, after I have worked and striven; you could not be so cruel."

He rose, and towered above her, with set lips and glittering eyes. "Have you forgotten the past—Phyllis—the old score?"

"No, you loved me once, in the name of that love I implore you——"

"Enough!" He held up his hand warningly. "For seven long years have I smarted under the sting of that old wound. You betrayed my confidence then, forsook me for my friend, worked as you are working now, to harm me for his sake. You never grumbled at my gambling, so long as I won money enough to pay your lover's debts. When that failed, you cast me aside like a broken toy. It was then I grew to hate where I had loved. These things are not allowed to happen twice in a lifetime. I do not intend to stand quietly by and see another man outraged as I was."

Her face was set and motionless, she tried to speak, but her voice died in a strangled sob, approaching voices warned her to keep calm.

Her enemy gazed remorselessly into her frightened eyes. The game was up, she shivered, as if with sudden deadly cold.

* * * * *

The Duke fell dangerously ill. John Vincent did not know that he had suffered before from a paralytic stroke, when he dealt him the blow that brought on another. For weeks he lay helpless, unable to raise a hand, or speak, while Phyllis watched by his bed-side night and day in an agony of remorse and self-accusation.

Sometimes he gazed at her with such a depth of misery in his eyes, that she would break down and sob at his side, till his pitiful expression forced her to control her emotion.

One day he rallied, his senses returned to him, clear as before the fatal malady.

"Phyllis," he said, a wan smile flickering over his tired face, "come nearer, give me your hand—I want to speak to you."

"Adrian, I am listening."

"I made a will in your favour," he murmured, "I shall not change it. I am dying, Phyllis, with the stain of this money on my soul—the wealth that might have done so much good. I want you and your—your husband, to start life afresh, and try to compensate for my failure. Let me kiss you—once."

The woman bent down and laid her burning cheek upon his frozen lips.

WINIFRED GRAHAM.

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LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 12.—Taught by Texas.

"MIGHTY likely it's a week after Rainbow Sam dies off," said the old cattleman, in a tone of confidence, "when the camp turns in an' has a little jest with the Signal Service sharp. You see, we're that depressed about Rainbow cashin' in we needs relaxation that way, so we all nacheral enough diverts ourse'fs with this signal party who comes trailin' up all handy.

"Wherefore I ag'in remarks that Wolfville is a proper peaceful place, an' its little joke with the Signal Service party needn't be inferred against none as its daily programme.

"This yere gent has been goin' about casool ever since the stage comes in, an' his air is soopercilious like he looks down on the entire camp; an' it's all a heap irritatin'. He's been pesterin' an projectin' about the post-office for mighty like an hour when all at once he crosses over to the 'Red Light' an' fronts up to the bar. He don't invite none of us to likker; jest himself, which bad manners is shore received invidious.

"'Gimme a cocktail,' says this Signal sharp to the barkeep.

"As they ain't mixin' no drinks at the 'Red Light,' for man or beast, nor yet at 'Hamilton's Hurdy Gurdy,' you can begin to suspect that this sport in the blue uniform don't get no cocktail.

"'Can't mix no drinks,' says the barkeep.

"'Can't mix no cocktails?' repeats the Signal Sharp. 'Why, what a band of prairie dogs this yere hamlet is! What's the matter with you all, you can't mix no cocktails? Don't you know enough?'

"'Do we all know enough?' says the barkeep some facetious that way. 'Stranger, we simply bulges an' suffers with what we knows. But that's a law agin cocktails and all mixin' drinks. You see, a Mexican female over in Tucson is mixin' drinks for a gent she's a-harborin' idees agin, an' she rings in the loco on to him, an' he goes plumb crazy. Then the Legislature ups an' makes a law abatin' of mixed drinks. This yere bein' Gospel trooth, you'll have to drink straight whisky, and drink it outen a tin cup, too.'

"As he says this for a balzer, the barkeep, which it was Sandy McAuliffe, sets up a bottle and a tin cup, an' slams a six-shooter on the bar at the same time. Whereupon the Signal Sharp takes a gulp or two of straight nose paint an' don't say nothin' more of cocktails. But he looks skeered an' ugly.

"'Whatever is the damage, anyhow?' he says to Sandy, as soon as he quits gaggin' over the whisky, which tastes some raw an' vicious to him, an' him with his ladylike throat all ready for cocktails instead; 'what's thar to pay?'

"'Nary cent,' says Sandy, moppin' up the bar plenty complacent, 'not a sou, markee. That drink's on the house, stranger.'

"When the Signal sharp goes out, Enright says he's got mighty pore manners, an' he marvels he's still walkin' the earth.

"'However,' says Enright, 'I s'pose his livin' so long arises mainly from stayin' in the East, where they don't make no p'int on ettyquette an' bein' polite, an' runs things looser.'

"'Whatever's the matter of chasin' this insultin' tenderfoot around a lot?' asks Texas Thompson, an' havin' fun with him. 'Thar ain't nothin' doin', an' we oughter not begretch half-day's work educatin' this party. If something ain't done forthwith to inform his mind on the subjects of his social dooties while he stays in Arizona, you can gamble he won't last to go East no more.'

"As what Texas Thompson says is correct, it ain't no time before there is a general desire to enlighten this yere Signal party. As Thompson suggests the idee nacherally he goes for'ard to begin its execution.

"'But be keerful, Texas,' says Enright, 'an' don't force no showdown with this Signal gent. Attainin' an education is one thing, an' bein' killed that way is plumb different; an' while I sees no objections to swellin' the general fund of this young man's knowledge, I don't propose that you all's goin' to confer no dieploma an' graduate him into heaven on high with a gun at one an' the same time.'

"'None whatever,' says Texas Thompson. 'We merely toys with this tenderfoot, an' never so much as breaks his crust or drors blood the slightest morsel. He's taking life too trivial; an' all what we all p'ints out to do is to sober him up an' teach him decorousness some.'

"So Texas Thompson goes sa'nterin' up the street so as to cross the trail of this Signal party, who's headed down. Jest as they passes Texas turns as ferocious as forty timber wolves, an' clasps his hand on the shoulder of the Signal party.

"'How's this yere, I demands to know?' says Texas, shakin' back his long hair. An' he shorely looks bad and hardened.

"'How's that?' says the Signal man, some astonished.

"'You saveys mighty well,' says Texas. 'You fails to bow to me, aimin' to insult an' put it all over me in the presence of this yere multitood. Think of it, gents,' goes on Texas, beginnin' to froth an' a raisin' his voice to a whoop, 'think of it, an' me the war chief of the

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Texas Panhandle with forty-two skelps to my credit, to be sot on an' insulted by a puny shorthorn like this. It shore makes me wonder be I alive.'

"'Stranger,' says Texas, turnin' to the Signal party an' his hand on his gun, 'nothin' but blood is goin' to do me now. If I was troo to myse'f at this minute I'd shorely split you like a mackerel, an' leave you on both sides of the road. But I restrains myse'f this far; I don't notice no gun on you. Go, tharfore, an' heel yourse'f; for by next drink time the avenger 'll be ha'ntin' your trail. I gives you half-an-hour to live. Not on your account, 'cause it ain't comin' to you; but merely not to ketch no angels off their guard, an' to allow 'em a chance to organise for your protection. Pendin' hostilities I shall rest myself in the "Red Light," permittin' you the advantages of the dance hall, where Hamilton 'll give you pen, ink, and monte table, whereby to concoct your last will. Adios.'

"By the time Texas gets off this long, big talk, an' starts over to the 'Red Light,' the Signal man is lookin' a heap perturbed. He's shorely alarmed.

"'See yere, Amigo,' says Dan Boggs, breakin' loose all at once, as Texas p'ints out for the 'Red Light,' 'you're a plumb stranger to me, but I takes a chance and stands your friend. Now, here's what you do. You frame yourse'f up with a Colt's 44, an' lay for this Texas Thompson. He's a rustler, an' a hoss thief, an' a murderer, who, as he says, has downed forty-two men, not countin' Mexicans an' Mavericks. He oughter be massacred; an' now as it's come your way prance in an' spill his blood. This camp'll jestify an' applaud the play.'

"'But I can't fight none,' says the Signal man. 'It's agin' the rools an' regulations of the army.'

"'Which I shore can't see none now you're goin' to renig,' says Dave Tutt. 'This felon Texas is due to shoot you on sight. Them army rools shorely ought as permit a gent to scout off to one side the strict trail a little when it's come down to savin' his own skelp.'

"One way an' another Tutt an' Boggs makes clear to black paint to the Signal sharp that thar's only two cards in the box; either he downs Texas Thompson or Texas gets him. The Signal party says it is what he calls a dread alternative.

"The Signal party says he's thankful he's found friends in Boggs an' Tutt, an' tharupon they all lines out for the dance hall, where they gets drinks, an' the Single man, who's some pallid, puts it up he'll write some letters an' some other papers, an' sorter straighten up his game. Boggs observes this is a good move, an' that Tutt an' he'll take an occasional drink an' ride her herd on his interests while he does.

"Tutt and Boggs has got their brands on mebby two drinks, when over comes Doc. Peets plenty severe an' says:

"'Who all represents for this gent who's out for the blood of my friend Texas Thompson?'

"'Talk to me an' Tutt,' says Boggs, 'an' cut her short; 'cause it's the opinion of our gent this criminal Thompson infests the earth to a p'int where it's a case of over-play an' he's longin' to begin his butchery.'

"'In five minutes, then,' says Peets, 'you all organise your gent an' come a-runnin', I must canter over to see how Thompson's linin' up. He's that fretful a minute back when I leaves him he's bitin' hunks outen a white-ash card table like it's ginger cake, an' moanin' for blood. Old Monte's ridin' herd on him; but I better get back, as he might in his frenzy that away fetch loose any moment, an' come a-curvin' over yere an' go to killin' your gent without orders; which the same would be onelegant an' no delicacy to it.'

"As soon as Peets is started for the 'Red Light' agin, Tutt turns to the Signal party, who's settin' there lookin' he'pless an' worried like he's a prairie dog who's come back from visitin' some other dog, an' finds a rattlesnake's done pitched camp in the mouth of his hole while he's out.

"'Now then, stranger,' says Tutt, 'if you all has accomplished that clerical work me an' Dan 'll lead you to your victim. When you gets to shootin' aim low an' be shore an' see your hind sight every time you cuts loose.'

"The Signal party looks some grey an' haggard, but not seein' no other way gets up, an' after stampedin' about a trifle nervous, allows, since it's the best he can do, he's ready.

"Old Monte has spread a blanket over in front of the 'Red Light,' an' as Tutt an' Boggs starts out with their Signal party thar's a yell like forty Apaches heard across the street.

"'That's Thompson's war yelp,' says Boggs, expoundin' of the noise to the Signal party. 'Which it would seem from the fervor he puts into it he's shorely all keyed up.'

"As Doc. Peets comes out a-leadin' of Thompson it's noticed Thompson's got a tin cup.

"'Whatever's your gent a-packin' of that utensil for?' demands Tutt, mighty truculent. 'Is this yere to be a combat with dippers?'

"'Oh, no,' says Peet, like he's tryin' to excuse something, 'but he insists on fetchin' it so hard that at last to soothe him I gives my consent.'

"'Well, we challenges the dipper?' says Tutt. 'You all will fight on the square or we remove our man.'

"'Don't, don't,' shouts Thompson, like he's agitated no limit; 'don't take him outen my sight no more. I only fetches the cup to drink his blood with; but it's nothin' but a small detail which I relinquishes readily before ever I allows my victim the least loophole of escape.'

"When Peets goes up an' takes Thompson's cup the two debates together in whisper. 'Thompson's gettin' mighty hot an' furious,' at last Peets says to him, 'which I tells you such a proposal is irregular an plumb to one side of the trail. But since you insists, of course, I names it. My gent yere,' goes on Peets to Boggs an' Tutt, 'wants to agree that the survivor's to be allowed to skelp the deceased. Does the bluff go?'

"'It's what our gent's been urgin' from the jump,' says Boggs, 'an' therefore we consents with glee. Round up you man now an' let's get to shootin'.'

"I don't reckon I ever sees anybody who seems as fatigued as the Signal sharp when Boggs an' Tutt starts to lead him up to the blanket. Thar's a expression in his face like he don't think it's a game worth comin' to Arizona to set in to. While they're standin' up their folks Texas Thompson breaks loose ag'in, because it's a fight over a blanket an' not a handkerchief, as he calls for.

"'What's the meanin' of a cold an' formal racket sech as this?' he howls, turnin' on Peets. 'I want to go close to my meat, I tells you, where it is warm.'

"But they don't proceed none. As Tutt turns to his Signal sharp, who's all but locoed by the shoutin' an' has to be detained by Boggs from runnin' away, Jack Moore comes chargin' up on his pony, an' throws a gun on the whole outfit.

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"'Hands up, yere!' he says, sharp an' brief, 'or I fixes the coyotes for meat for a month to come.'

"Everybody's hands goes up, an' it's plain Moore's comin' ain't no disapp'intment to the Signal person. He's that relieved, he shows it.

"'Don't look so tickled,' growls Boggs to him, as Moore heads the round-up for the store. 'Don't look so light an' gay about it; you mortifies me to death.'

"Moore takes the gang over to the store, where Enright's settin' as a jedge. He allows he's goin' to put 'em all on trial for disturbin' of Wolfville's peace. The Signal sharp starts to say something when Peets interrupts, an' that brings Boggs to the front, an' after that a general uproar breaks loose like a stampede.

"'Gimme a knife, somebody,' howls Texas Thompson, 'an' let me get in on this play. Am I to be robbed of my prey like this?'

"But Enright jumps for an old Spencer seven-shooter, an' gives it out cold that he's goin' to down the first gent that opens his mouth or talks back to him a second time. This ca'ms 'em, an' the riot sorter simmers.

"'Not that I objects to a street fight,' says Enright, discussin' of the case, 'but you all talks too much. From the jabber that was going on over that blanket out thar, it shorely reminds me a mighty sight more of a passel of old women at a quiltin' bee, than an outfit of serious gents who's pullin' off a docel. To cut her short, the public don't foster no sech rackets as this, an' I yereupon puts Texas Thompson an' his Signal party under 50,000 dol. bonds to keep the peace.'

"Texas Thompson is set loose with Peets an' Cherokee Hall on his papers, but the Signal sharp, bein' a stranger in town can't put up no bonds.

"'Which, as thar's no calaboose in camp to put you into,' says Enright, when he's told by the Signal party he can't make no bonds, 'an' as it's plumb against the Arizona constitootion to let you go, I shore sees no trail out but to hang you; I regrets the necessity which leads a poor tenderfoot like you all to the halter, but you see yourse'f the Union must and shall be preserved. Mr. Moore, go over to my pony an' fetch the rope. It's a new half inch manilla, but I cheerfully donates it to jestice jest the same.'

"When Moore gets back with the rope an' everybody's lookin' plumb serious that away, it shakes the Signal party to a degree he has to camp down on a shoebox an' allows he needs a drink. Boggs says he'll go after it, when Tutt breaks in an' says he's got a bluff to hand up; which that done, the same bein' agreeable he at once makes good.

"'If I was dead certain,' says Tutt, surveyin' of the Signal party a heap doubtful, 'if I was shore how this gent wouldn't leave the reservation none, I'd go his bond myse'f. But I'm in no sech fix financial as makes it right for me to get put in the hole for $50,000 by no stranger, however intimate we has been. But yere's what I'm willing to see go. If this Signal sharp wears hobbles (chain with cannon balls attached) so he can't up an' canter off none, rather than see a young gent's neck made a foot longer, why, I goes this bail myse'f.'

"The Signal party is eager for hobbles, an' he gives Tutt his word to sign up the documents, an' he won't run away a little bit.

"'Which the game bein' now settled all congenial an' legal,' says Enright, when Tutt signs up, 'Moore'll he'p the gent on with his hobbles, an' the court will stand adjourned till further orders.'

"After he's all hobbled an' safe, Tutt an' the Signal party starts over for the post-office, both progressin' some slow an' reluctant, because of the Signal party's hobbles holdin' him down to a shuffle. As they toils along, Tutt says:

"'An' now that this affair ends so successful I'd shore admire to know what you and that cutthroat Thompson takes to chewin' of each other's manes for anyway. Why did you refuse to bow?'

"'Which I never refooses once,' says the Signal party. 'I saloots the gent with pleasure, if that's what he needs.'

"'In that case,' says Tutt, 'you make yourself comfortable leanin' agin this buildin', an' I'll project over to Thompson an' see if this imbroglio can't be reconciled a lot. Mutual 'pologies an' whisky looks like it ought to repair these dissensions easy.'

"So the Signal party leans up agin' the front of the post-office and surveys his hobbles some melancholy, while Tutt goes surgin' over to the 'Red Light,' to look up Texas Thompson. It ain't no time when he's headed back with Thompson an' the balance of the band.

"'Give us your hand, pard,' says Texas Thompson, as he comes up to the Signal party. 'I learns from our common friend, Dave Tutt, that this yere's a mistake, an' I tharfore forgives you freely all the trouble you causes. It's over now, an' plumb forgot. You're a dead game sport, an' I shakes your hand with pride.'

"However, we rips off his hobbles, an' then the outfit steers over to the 'Red Light,' to be refreshened an' regaled after all the hard work."

JUMBLE STORY COMPETITION.

No. 2.

Below will be found particulars of a new form of Competition which will take the place of the Picture Puzzle.

Four Prizes, one of £2 and three of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the opposite page, in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, and the first line is in its correct position, but the title and signature are jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story."

All competitions to be in by Monday, July 13th.

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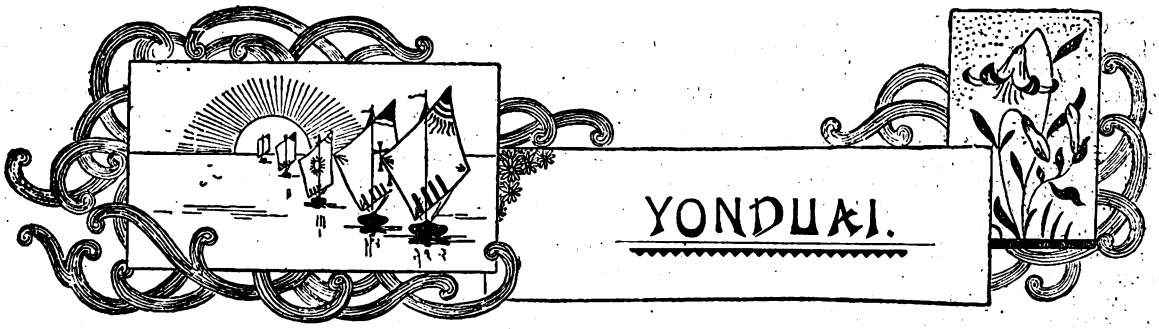

A MAN and a woman. A pathway white with the red as those roses sleeping within reach of her fingers, the shadows hid her white gowned figure, and she was bereaved.

The man gazed rapturously on the beauty of her face. But the fire of love burnt still in his soul, and at last speak, but his voice was choked by emotion. This was the woman's husband.

Lovers. Oh, yes—or why was her cheek stained yellow in her hands. She was beautiful in death as in crumpling her lover's letter with suppressed passion.

"I shall remember," she whispered, "always! You have been all the world to each other—you and I.'

"I have gone where no one will discover me. Justice and I have been more than all the world to each other, more.

The woman untangled her fingers, and passed them to Er gland, to lose my soul in yours. I return to-morrow, a shudder.

Yet, good or evil, he loved her; and the fragrance milky pallor of the moon. Shadows lurking on every falsehood and treachery. Let them love there, if they embrace.

"If you love me, why in the name of——"

The woman raised her eyes, her lips, and the anguish over her brow.

She had found what she sought, rest and repentance! which were locked in the man's palm? He tried to addressed to his dead wife in her maiden name. He had side, emblematical of their two lives.

Between his trembling fingers he held a letter, of parting was forgotten in the ecstasy of a long life.

The grass was wet with dew, and there were drops of the crime, written by the slayer's hand, telling them How pure it looked in the pale light! What a mask has been done, that is enough——"

"You have come for my wife," he said slowly, "she it is inevitable. I have two things to seek, Heaven only gave and denied. Remember your own words: 'We knows if I shall find them."

One word broke hoarsely from her lips: "*No!*"

These three words were repeated in lingering accents, lost in mystery.

"And age spells death," murmured the woman with agony upon her forehead.

"What?" he questioned.

But she clasped her hands, intreating silence.

"Why must you go?" he asked fiercely, "you have beauty horrible in his eyes. Vengeance was turning his feet."

"Ask for no explanations. Would I had never come to the earth.

The lover staggered back, and fell heavily with a groan and one hand stretched across his face hiding the wife."

As she spoke she broke away, rushed wildly on, till he wrote to the woman who had said, "No."

"Stay," he answered passionately, "life is only an address in New York City.

"I must follow you" (he penned the lines feverishly) where to find the murdered man.

* * * * *

Two men stood face to face. A lover and a husband.

A woman was lying dead, with roses white and what a mockery!

Beside her still image sat her husband, his head bent, that faltered and ended in a sigh.

That morning's mail made the cold form of marble shrivel up, and we shall be old."

Only a cloud of smoke rose between his body and you and I!"

The following day she sailed, and the man saw her no sinewy hand seemed bursting through the flesh, while the seas will bring me, I will come to kneel at your good-bye.

"He shall follow her to her home," he muttered, his parted lips were dry and bloodless.

He only treasured a few parched rose leaves, and her soul to gall, mingled with the awful jealousy of the can."

"Rest and repentance!"

* * * * *

No horror crept through the murderer's veins.

Two days later the police received a detailed account of his wrongs.

"They are together now," he said, "in the land of woman's home before she marries? Stay, and be my awful expression thereon. But the veins on that hour; take all that it can give while love is in your soul. Cable me the single syllable, 'Come,' and as fast as To-morrow the summer may be over, the flowers will only just opened it.

One with hope in his heart, the other maddened by no tie in New York! Your home? Bah! What is a the woman had deceived were buried in oblivion.

"You need not seek for me," he wrote in conclusion. of the summer night was creeping into his very being; everything spoke of hitherto undreamed is not here, but you shall go to her."

Here the writing ceased abruptly, and the two men "to your home, dearest, and plead again for the love you possibilities.

Then he wrote the cable: "*Come!*"

FRED GAIRHAMWIN.

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In - Beauty's - Guise.

For a moment he stared in dazed wonder at a pair of fat cherubs pictured on the canopy stretched between the four tall posts of the old-fashioned bedstead on which he lay. The room was in semi-gloom, but the cherubs stood out in bold relief from their white background. Then he looked about him and endeavoured to collect his thoughts.

Eagerly he groped back after straws that would direct his puzzled memory, and presently, his eyes becoming more and more used to this dim half-light, he caught sight of a red coat, torn and muddy, lying across the back of a great armchair near the door. With this there suddenly came to him a vivid recollection of a scene; far off, it seemed in the years long gone, but sharp, clear, and well-defined.

A rough stubble-field, over which a score of horses, each mounted by an enthusiastic huntsman, are madly flying at the top of their speed. Himself in the front, he hears the others following him closely, while just ahead there is the chorus of the hounds in full cry, and the fox itself may be seen darting across the open, not fifty yards in advance of the foremost of its pursuers.

One hedge more to take and the hunt will be over. The brush will be his. It is but an instant, and he feels the horse beneath him leave the ground.

Up, up, he is going as though he never meant to stop, and then—a sudden breath-taking plunge forward. Even as he braces himself for the shock, in less than a heart-beat, he knows that the animal has stumbled; that the horse and he are falling together, and he instinctively struggles to free himself from the stirrups.

Then darkness, black as Egypt, and after that—the fat cherubs on the canopy of his bedstead.

The torn, mud-spattered red coat on yonder chair told him that he had been brought to this room directly from the field, and with this link forged he began to run along the chain and to try to read the story of others.

He wondered as to the time that had elapsed since the accident; whether his injuries were serious; to whose house he had been carried; under whose care he had been placed. He made an effort to raise his head to look about him, but as he did so, a sharp pain, excruciating and cruel, shot through every nerve of his being, and he cried out in the fierce agony of the moment.

Then he became conscious that a woman had risen from a place close by his bedside, and was standing, looking down at him, with great, dark lustrous eyes, in the depths of which he descried an unspoken passion. Tall, slender, and with a dignity that was regal, she seemed to him the quintessence of feminine grace and queenly beauty.

Her face was pale as marble and stern as Fate; but in her wondrous eyes was a longing that wooed him; that brought his breath in quick, convulsive gasps; that made his heart beat faster, and that spread over the pallor of his cheeks a flush that burnt like fever. He stretched forth his hand and clasped her long, taper fingers and held them, cool as stone, in his feverish grasp.

When, some time after, the doctor came in to rearrange the bandages on his injured head, and found him with his eyes open, gazing, a pleased smile on his lips, and his fingers nervously reaching out for the hand which had suddenly eluded him, the professional man looked grave, and a tear trembled for a moment on his lashes.

"Doctor," the patient pleaded, in a voice so weak as to be scarcely heard even in the stillness of this darkened room, "tell me her name. She is my nurse, is she not? She will not leave me. Not for a moment, doctor. Don't let her go from me."

The doctor, in kindly tone, humoured him as best he could.

"She will be with you always," he said, and then his face grew still more grave, and other tears followed the first, rolling down his furrowed cheeks, and dropping on the counterpane.

When at last the doctor withdrew into the curtained embrasure of one of the windows to await the end, which now appeared to him inevitable, she returned and knelt by the sufferer's bedside, listening eagerly to the murmured love passages which he addressed to her, to snatches of amorous verse and quotations from the prose and sentimentalists of all times and all climes.

"Tell me your name," he urged, as he pressed his lips to her chilled hand and stroked her long, shining black tresses; "tell me that I may rhyme it with tender words of true love and deepest devotion."

She smiled as she denied him.

"No, no," she said, "do not ask me. It is because you do not know me that you care for me."

But her refusal made him all the more eager. His voice had become still weaker, but in disjointed sentences he continued his pleading. His hands were reaching now nervously towards her face, which he longed to caress.

"Come closer," he whispered, "closer—and tell me—your name—and that you love me."

She moved nearer to him, the passion in her eyes blazing, her thin cold lips parted. About his racked and bruised body she stretched her long white arms, enfolding him in her strong embrace. Her mouth was close to his.

"I love you," she said, and the words sounded to him like sweetest music.

"I love you," she repeated, and her lips were on his.

His frame quivered under the fury of her caress. His breast expanded with a long, deep-drawn breath; in his eyes was the staring frenzy of mad desire.

"And my name," she went on, as she clasped him still more closely in her long, ravenous arms, "and my name is——"

The doctor finished the sentence. The deep-drawn breath had reached his listening ears. He had risen from his place in the curtained embrasure and had approached the bed.

"Death!" he said.

Edith Summers.

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By John K. Leys, *author of "The Tenth of June," etc., etc.*

CHAPTER XXI.

Concerning Mr. Beaumont.

"I have found out something this time!" cried Harold, as Mr. Daunt rose to greet him.

The lawyer looked grave when he heard what the young man had to tell. "I can't say I think your news is favourable," he observed. "Don't you see that Miss Unwin and your friend are now brought together again, just when it seemed as if we had succeeded in separating them? It seems as if your friend left the girl temporarily, intending to rejoin her when he and Beaumont had said all they wanted to say to each other."

Harold's face fell, and for a minute or two he was silent.

"I can't understand Vere's getting tipsy," he said at length. "A more temperate man, as a rule, never lived."

"The knowledge of what he was about to do—break his sweetheart's heart and disgrace himself beyond redemption—was enough to make him drink," observed the lawyer.

"Or he may have been drugged," suggested Harold.

"Possibly. But dinner is waiting. I, too, have learned something. But it will keep. Dinner won't keep. Therefore let us have dinner."

Kenyon would infinitely have preferred to reverse this order of things; but he curbed his impatience, made an excellent meal, and afterwards lit a first-rate cigar with which his host provided him.

"Pull in your chair," said Mr. Daunt, drawing his own chair up to the fire, "and I'll tell you what I've heard about this young man Beaumont. To put it shortly, I've heard no good of him. He was articled, rather late in life, to a Mr. Rogerson, of Rogerson and Payne, Old Bailey—not a first-rate firm, by the way. The young man was a good deal addicted to cards and such like follies; but just before the end of his articles he did something, or was mixed up in some disreputable transaction, which made old Rogerson refuse to sign the young fellow's papers. It must have been something pretty bad, I can tell you, to have such an effect on Johnnie Rogerson, whom I have known aforetime. But eventually the old gentleman consented to sign, rather than have certain other matters brought out; and the scandal was hushed up.

"I tried hard to penetrate a little deeper into the matter, but I could only learn this:

"Among Rogerson's clients was a wealthy old man, who lived in a large house near Richmond, a man named Pascoe——"

"Pascoe!" interrupted Kenyon; "where have I heard that name? Heard it lately, too. I have it, sir! That was the name of Mrs. Unwin's employer—Jane Unwin's mother's master! It was at Mr. Pascoe's house that Jane and my poor friend Vere met each other. Isn't that rather singular?"

Kenyon had sprung to his feet in his excitement.

"Just sit down again, and let us look into the thing quietly and soberly," said Mr. Daunt. "We don't know that the girl Unwin and this man Beaumont were even so much as acquainted. Mrs. Unwin will be able to tell you that. But I did find out that this Mr. Pascoe had a nephew called Abbot, a young man who was supposed to be his heir."

"Mrs. Unwin mentioned him, I think," said Harold; "and I'm sure Vere has spoken of him in his letters to me—but I beg your pardon, sir."

"Well, this Abbot was a scamp; and by and bye the old gentleman found this out, and cut him off—not exactly with a shilling, but with a comparatively small sum of money. And then began the devilment. It was said that Beaumont had allowed Abbot to make use of him to play some trick about the new will which Mr. Pascoe intended making. What the trick was I could not learn; and I don't think it matters. Whatever it was, it was something very rascally, for the old man turned his nephew out of doors; and Beaumont was for a time under a particularly black cloud, as I told you. Pascoe finally made a new will, leaving his property to those who should prove to be his next of kin, excepting Joseph Abbot."

"And to whom did the money go?"

"Some cousin's children are claiming it, and I suppose they will get it."

"I don't quite see how this bears on Vere," said Harold, after a pause.

"Not directly," answered the lawyer; "but at least we know this—that Beaumont and Jane Unwin may have been, probably were, acquainted with each other, and that Beaumont was a man who was willing to join in a nefarious project."

"I hardly see how this girl could have bribed him to help her."

"I don't suppose she bribed him with money. But he may have had some interest that coincided or harmonised with hers. It may have suited them both that Vere should have disappeared for a time."

"Vere couldn't have been a relation of Mr. Pascoe, do you think?"

"I should say not; but on that point also Mrs. Unwin will be able to give you information. I don't quite see how it matters, for whoever might get the old man's money, Joseph Abbot could not possibly touch it."

"It was a hard fate," said Harold. He was thinking of Abbot.

"I fancy it was richly deserved," said Mr. Daunt. "But what is your next step to be?"

"I shall go to Mrs. Unwin," said Kenyon promptly, "and try to find out whether there was any love making, or even ordinary acquaintance, between her daughter and Beaumont. Perhaps, also, she may be able to tell me whether my friend and her late master were related to each other. It is just possible, too, that she may be able to tell me where

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Beaumont's friends live, or put me in the way of tracing him."

"You are very sanguine to expect so much as that," said the lawyer, smiling. "Still, she may be able to give you some information worth having; so I advise you to see her as soon as you can."

"You may depend on it, sir, that I will," answered Harold, as he thanked his host warmly, and bade him good-night.

CHAPTER XXII.

What Mrs. Unwin had to Tell.

There was no difficulty in finding Mrs. Unwin. She had said at the inquest that she was now employed as housekeeper by a gentleman who lived in the neighbourhood of Hampstead; and the tragic occurrence had made some stir in the district, so that she was rather a notable person.

The widow received Kenyon in a small, cheerless room, which looked into a courtyard. It was plain that she was a woman of strong passions. Her large dark eyes looked boldly into those of her visitor, as if challenging him to say one disrespectful word of her daughter.

Nothing, of course, was farther from Harold's mind. But he found it difficult to begin the conversation. How was he to ask the mother of the murdered girl to aid him in establishing the innocence of the man who was believed to have murdered her?

"I suppose you don't remember me," he began; "I gave evidence at 'The Spaniards.' It was I who was so unlucky as to find the revolver case."

A dry suppressed chuckle escaped from the housekeeper. She put her right hand on her knee, palm downwards, and placed her left hand over it.

"As to the revolver," she said, smiling grimly, "I might have given them a hint about that, if they had asked me."

"I'm afraid I hardly understand," said Harold.

"Well, a young gentleman may have two revolvers, or half-a-dozen, for anything I know; but I remember Mr. Vere leaving one behind him at Mr. Pascoe's."

"But the one found on the Heath may have been that very one!" cried Harold.

"I should say it was very possible."

"And why did you not tell this to the coroner? Why allow an innocent man to be charged with murder?"

Harold had risen to his feet. Mrs. Unwin followed his example.

"Innocent!" she cried, her dark eyes flashing, and her voice ringing with scornful indignation. "First he ruins my poor child, then he murders her. And you call him innocent!"

At that moment a new idea occurred to Harold; an idea which might prove important. But it was not yet time to bring it forward. He must first try to calm the mother's angry feelings. He sat down again, and spoke looking up at the indignant woman.

"It seems to me," he said, "that you are unjust to your daughter, as well as to my friend. How do you know that the relations between them were not innocent enough?"

"Because he killed her to get rid of her."

"But how do you know it was he that killed her? The Coroner's jury relied on the evidence of the revolver. But you have just told me that he left a revolver at Richmond. He was not likely to have a second one. So you see, it is not proved, or anything like proved, that my friend is responsible for your daughter's death."

Mrs. Unwin had never heard of reasoning in a circle; but she was clever enough to see that the case against Vere was not so strong as she had supposed it to be. Yet she was not convinced. She felt puzzled and uncertain.

"If he did not do it, who did? There was no one else to do it. Don't tell me," she burst out suddenly, "that Jane took her own life! I won't have it! I won't believe it!"

"You remember the doctor said that if she herself had fired the pistol, her dress would have been scorched," said Harold calmly.

"So he did—so he did. And there was no one but your friend to harm her."

"Are you sure of that? Do you know a gentleman named Beaumont?"

"Mr. Beaumont? Yes. What of him? Is he mixed up with it?"

"I am certain that he is. And what I want to know is—were he and your daughter acquainted with each other?"

"There was a Mr. Beaumont came down sometimes to the house at Richmond," said Mrs. Unwin after a pause. "He was a friend of Mr. Pascoe's nephew. I won't say he and my daughter never met. It may be they knew each other by sight. But I'm certain they never were intimate."

"They may have become intimate after your daughter left you."

Mrs. Unwin shook her head.

"When Jane left Richmond, she went straight to Devonshire," she said.

Harold had been building many hopes on the supposition that Beaumont, not Vere, had been Jane's lover. But it did not seem as if the idea was borne out by the facts. There remained, however, a second alternative, one that had occurred to him within the last few minutes.

"I don't see," he said slowly, "why we need suppose that your daughter and Mr. Vere were living together during the time that elapsed after she left Wythecombe."

Mrs. Unwin looked hard at her visitor, and her face worked strangely.

"If you could prove to me, sir," said she, "that my daughter died an honest woman, even though she fell under the power of a villain who took her life, you would do me the greatest kindness a——" She stopped, steadied her voice, and went on—"the greatest kindness a heartbroken woman like me could receive."

"Well, let us begin by thinking that your daughter was pure and good. There is really no reason, no sufficient reason, for thinking anything else. Suppose she simply wanted to live very quietly for some time, to what friend do you think she would betake herself? Whose house would she go to?"

Mrs. Unwin pondered a moment, and then shook her head.

"She would go and live in lodgings," she replied, "the first that might turn up. She was always very reserved, was Jane. She had no young lady friends. She might have gone—no. Surely she never would go *there*."

The last words Mrs. Unwin uttered in a whisper, as if speaking to herself. All the more, therefore, they attracted Harold's attention.

"Had your daughter no cousins?" he asked. "No uncles or aunts?"

"No, none."

"What, then, did you mean when you said she would never go *there*?"

For the first time during this interview Mrs. Unwin hung her head.

There was some discreditable relation in question, Kenyon felt sure. Suddenly he had an idea.

"I remember your saying you were not really a widow, Mrs. Unwin. Do you mean that your daughter might have been staying with her *father*?"

"I didn't mean that she *might* have been there. I said it was impossible. She wouldn't demean herself so far."

"Demean herself!" Harold could not comprehend the woman. "If you want to see your daughter's name cleared of the stain that rests on it," he cried, "you will tell me your husband's address."

Mrs. Unwin gave a convulsive start, but said nothing.

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"I will simply inquire whether Jane, your daughter, had been living under his roof, or under his protection, for the few days that preceded her death. There can't possibly be any harm in that."

"Promise me," she said, "that you will not betray me to my husband, that you will not let him know where I live."

"Certainly I will not."

"Then you can go to the 'Black Swan' at Deptford and ask—ask for Robert Teagle."

"Isn't his name Unwin?"

"That was the name I was married in; and I believe it is my husband's true name. But he's generally known as Teagle. If he's not at home, ask for Ralph Masters, his nephew. Now, I've put my reputation, it may be my life, in your hands."

"I will be careful of the trust," said Harold gravely, "and if I find that your daughter has had less than justice done to her, you may be sure I will do my utmost to restore her good name."

In less than half-an-hour, Kenyon was on his way to Deptford.

CHAPTER XXIII.

At the "Black Swan" Inn.

It was without any clearly defined plan of campaign that Kenyon went to Deptford. It seemed natural to make inquiries at the house of Jane Unwin's father. It was possible enough, he thought, that these inquiries might end in clearing away the cloud which had rested on Jane Unwin's good name ever since her disappearance. And in that case Vere's character would be cleared also, to a certain extent. But he had little hope of finding any evidence that would tend to clear his friend of the more serious charge of murder.

Arrived at Deptford, Harold proceeded at once to the "Black Swan."

He found it a large rambling house, which had evidently been in its best days a hostelry of some importance. Long since, however, it had fallen into decay. Two rows of blank, curtainless windows faced the street; the whole place had an unmistakable air of disrepute and neglect; the ground floor seemed to be neither more nor less than a common pot-house.

Altogether the "Black Swan" looked so very black, that Kenyon thought a few preliminary inquiries could do no harm.

He went, therefore, to the best hotel which the place afforded, and ordered luncheon. Having satisfied his appetite, Harold told the waiter that he wanted to ask a few questions about the old inhabitants of the town, and said he would be glad to hear of anyone that could answer them. The waiter advised that recourse should be had to Long Joe, the ostler, a man of wide and varied information.

It was not long before Long Joe was found; and a little hospitality expressed in terms of current coin made it easy for him to speak. The substance of what he said was this:

The landlord of the "Black Swan" was a very doubtful person—more than doubtful, indeed, seeing that he had been "away" for some years—in other words, had been in penal servitude. Before that happened he had married, and had had a child; but his wife and he had not agreed—some folks said he ill-used her badly—and the end of it was she left him, taking the child with her; and no one knew what had become of them. That was before he was sent away; but no doubt his wife knew he was a thief soon after she married him.

When he returned from penal servitude Unwin changed his name; and, managing to conceal his past history, obtained the post of manager of the "Black Swan." He had lived there many years. His wife's name never passed his lips, but he had been heard to speak of his daughter. He had a nephew named Masters, who acted as barman at the "Black Swan."

For some months, however, Teagle, or Unwin, had been showing signs that his days, whether for good or evil, were numbered. He had not been able to do more than potter about the place, and prevent his nephew from transferring the contents of the till to his own pocket.

Such was the account Harold received of the "Black Swan" and its occupants; and he saw pretty clearly that it was Masters, rather than old Unwin, to whom he must address himself.

Entering the tavern, Harold called for a pint of bitter ale. It was handed to him by a stout young woman, and Harold immediately asked for Masters. The girl replied by ushering him into a kind of parlour boxed in between the outer bar and the real parlour of the establishment. Here a loutish young fellow was sitting, poring over a greasy account-book.

"Are you Mr. Masters?" asked Harold.

The young man eyed the stranger as boys at a fourth-rate school eye a new boy of doubtful aspect.

"Yes," said he. "What do you want with me?"

"Is this where Miss Unwin stayed, about a week ago?"

The man's jaw dropped, and he stared at the stranger as if he had seen a ghost.

"I see this is the house," said Harold quietly. "Can you tell me when she left?"

"No! I know nothin' about it. Never heard such a name i' my life."

"That is not true. Your uncle's name is Unwin, and Jane, his daughter, is dead. Did you not know that?"

"No; and I don't believe it. I never knew he had a daughter. Come, get out o' this, or I'll chuck y' out. Wot ye comin' here questionin' an' spyin' on honest folks for? Get out."

"Will you tell me when Jane Unwin came here, whether she came alone, and when she left?"

"No!" roared the human animal at the table, and starting up he sprang on his questioner like a wild beast.

Harold was ready to knock the fellow down; but recognising that a row in a low tavern could do no possible good, and could only bring disgrace upon him, he hastily opened the door and stepped back. It was the wrong door, as it happened; but at the end of the passage into which it opened there appeared the light of day. It mattered nothing to Harold which door he left the tavern by, so he went straight on, meaning to return later in the evening and question the old man or the barmaid.

He had barely reached the outer air, when he heard a shout behind him.

"Come back, you——!" yelled Masters.

Kenyon paid no attention to him. He had crossed the threshold and found himself in a small disused court, used to give light to the bedrooms in the rear of the building.

He was looking about to find a means of exit from the court, when he happened to throw his eyes upwards.

Next instant a cry, half shriek, half roar, echoed through the empty court; and Kenyon had turned, dashed into the passage, floored the barman with one blow of his fist, found the main staircase, and had mounted to the second floor before Masters had risen from the ground. For there, in one of the upper windows, Kenyon had seen the pale, spectre-like face of Launcelot Vere!

"Vere! Vere! Where are you?" cried Harold, pounding at one locked door after another. At last a weak voice answered him. Harold rushed to the door and tried to open it. It was locked. Kenyon threw himself on it, once—twice, and the lock gave way.

"Vere, my poor fellow, what madness has caused you to hide yourself away like this? Why, how ill you look! You are worn to a skeleton, and you are trembling from head to foot!"

Vere was indeed a pitiable object, his clothes dirty and disordered, his face unwashed, thin, and hollow-eyed.

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"Get your things at once, and come with me," said Kenyon.

"I—I don't think I can quite go with you to-day, Harold. But to-morrow, perhaps, or next week, when Jane comes back——"

Kenyon started.

"Could the poor fellow be mad? Could the cruel imprisonment have affected his brain?"

He looked at the colourless face more closely, and as he did so he became conscious of a peculiar odour in the room.

"Launcelot," he said gravely, "you never told me you were fond of opium. You have been smoking opium ever since—never mind. You can explain later. Come with me now."

"You leave that gen'l'man alone. He's soft in his head and we take care of him," said a hoarse voice at the door. It was Masters.

"Indeed? Then you have laid yourself open to another charge, and a very serious one, I can tell you. Let me pass, fellow! Can't you see that the game is up?"

With a hearty curse Masters saw them depart.

In less than twenty minutes he was an inmate of a cell at the police-station; and detectives were searching the "Black Swan" from top to bottom.

* * * * *

Kenyon's first care was to place Vere under proper medical supervision. It was some days, however, before he was able to give a full and satisfactory account of what had befallen him. What he then told Harold was a strange, yet evidently a true story.

"About three years ago," he said, "I was much troubled with neuralgia, and took a great deal of opium. I was ashamed of the weakness, and hid it even from you. Beaumont knew of it, however, for he had surprised me in the act of smoking the stuff. He encouraged me to try and do without it; and in the long run I did break it off. In fact, I was cured—never touched it for two years and a half.

"I must also tell you that about two years ago, I had a—well, a flirtation that threatened to become serious, with the daughter of my patron's housekeeper. She sat to me as my model. You know the sort of thing. I behaved badly, no doubt. At the same time Jane Unwin—that was her name—was quite old enough to take care of herself; and if I did wrong I have been well punished for it. You have seen Miss Denvers. You know what I have lost.

"Two days before the day fixed for my marriage I got a bogus telegram, asking me to meet Winnie at Paddington. Of course I went. Instead of Winnie there appeared Jane Unwin, who said a great deal I need not repeat. She threatened to kill herself at the church door as my bride and I passed out of the church; and I was horribly afraid she would do it. I walked about with her for a time trying to calm her. At last I saw Beaumont, with whom I had an engagement for that evening, so I made an excuse to Jane, who went off more readily than I expected, and I joined Beaumont.

"We dined together somewhere, and then we went to his rooms. He gave me a cigar and a cup of coffee. One or both of them must have been drugged; for I don't even remember falling asleep. I was conscious of being taken a long drive in some vehicle, with Jane Unwin at my side, as I thought.

"When I came to myself I was in a large, bare, badly furnished room—the place you found me in, and I have been kept a prisoner ever since. Jane was constantly at my bedside. She was very tender and loving to me—said she would help me to escape, and we would go to Italy and get married, and all that—but she was constantly dosing me with opium while she pretended to nurse me. The fact is, I often hardly knew what I was saying or doing. I believe on my honour her idea was to weaken my will till I should consent to do what she wanted, apparently of my own accord. She was always taunting me with the fact that Miss Denvers would have nothing more to do with me; and——"

"Don't be too sure of that, Lancelot," interrupted Harold.

"Do you mean that there may be a chance for me yet?" cried Vere, springing to his feet.

"I do. Only prove that you have quite shaken yourself free of that detestable drug, and so far as Miss Denvers is concerned, I should say there is good hope for you."

"She is an angel! You may imagine how I got to *hate* Jane Unwin. At last I think she came to get tired of her task, for she left me."

"Why did you not try to get free?" burst in Harold. "Why not shout, struggle?"

"I did so, my dear fellow, when I was not under the power of morphia. But no one ever heard me. I would have burst open the door, but it opened inwards, and was very strong itself. And I was sadly weakened by the opium. Sometimes, I confess, I smoked it, oftener they gave it me in my food. I got quite afraid of my gaolers; and I fear my will to escape had been worn out for some time. I could not make an effort for my release. That cub and I have a fine account to settle when I get back my strength. As for Jane Unwin, if ever I see her again, which is not very likely——"

"Vere! Don't you know? The poor creature is dead."

"Dead!"

"She was found on Hampstead Heath with a revolver bullet in her heart."

"My God!"

Vere shuddered and covered his face with his hands.

"And you, Vere, stand charged with murdering her!"

(To be concluded.)

In an early number of Short Stories will appear the opening chapters of a new serial story by Mr. George Manville Fenn. No comment is needed on the personality of the author. As regards the story, we only advise you to read the first instalment, and use your own judgment as to its merits.

POST-CARD COMPETITION.

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Two sentences of seven words each, in this week's number of SHORT STORIES, are identical. Which are they?

A prize of One Guinea will be forwarded to the sender of the first correct answer. All attempts must be written on post-cards, and must reach this office not later than the first post on Monday, July 13th.

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SUMMER HEAT AND OBESITY.

"Summer heat, with the out-door enjoyments which come in its train, is a source of unmixed delight to all whose physical condition is sound. The full feast of pleasure to which hospitable Nature at this season invites mankind is not, however, for those whose infirmities forbid them to undergo, without serious discomfort, a considerable amount of bodily fatigue. To those in particular who are the victims of excessive corpulence, the arrival of the genial summer warmth serves chiefly as a painful reminder that, for them, the delights of long woodland rambles, the climbing of mountain tops, and all the adventurous ways of flood and field are prohibited joys. The palpitating heart, the reeling brain, and the possible deadly sunstroke, which are the concomitants of obesity, banish all the pleasant anticipations which once came with the advent of the glad summer tide How much of this deprivation of enjoyment and positive misery is absolutely and easily avoidable may be learned by consulting Mr. F. Cecil Russell's 'Corpulency, and the Cure' (256 pages), a little work whose popularity is proved by the fact that its eighteenth edition has just been issued. This fact, too, indicates, in some degree, the wide area now covered by Mr. Russell's wonderful success as an expert in the reduction of excessive fat. His process, which is absolutely safe and pleasant, is so rapid in its operation, that any over-corpulent lady or gentlemen can easily get rid of all unnecessary weight in a very few weeks, so as to be able, before the autumn is with us, to enjoy the delightful feeling (and the appearance too) of renewed youth and energy. Mr. Russell makes no mystery of the nature of his curative preparation—apparently miraculous as are its effects in simultaneously reducing weight and increasing appetite—the consequently larger amount of food being consumed with impunity. He prints, therefore, his recipe in his singularly suggestive book, which may be obtained post free, by sending two penny stamps to his offices, Woburn House, 27, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C."—*Gloucester Standard.*

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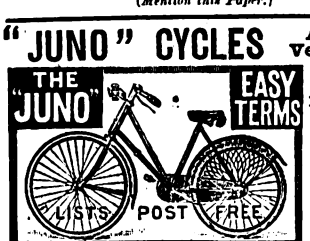

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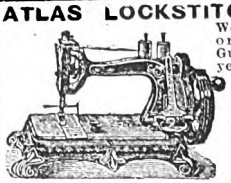

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 394.] For the Week ending July 18th, 1896. [ONE PENNY

In the Moment of Triumph.

ONE evening in June, in a large house in one of the fashionable streets of London, a big entertainment was going forward. It was a concert, and one of the most perfectly carried out in all its details that the London world had enjoyed that season.

The long, brightly-lighted and flower-decked drawing-room ended in a cool and shadowy conservatory in which two women were sitting on a sofa, under the palms, screened from the view of the multitude. The liquid notes of a beautiful voice floated across to them from the music-room beyond—rose, fell, and died into silence.

"Ah!" said the younger of the two, with a deep breath of longing—a young girl with the bloom of youth on her flushed and rounded cheek, and the sparkle of enthusiasm in her bright eyes—"to sing like that! To give pleasure such as she has given me! To stir the emotions of one's fellows. That is life!"

The elder woman, whose delicate, sensitive face betrayed more of a yearning pain than pleasure as she sat listening, turned curiously to look in the face beside her. "And you wish for 'life' as you call it, of that kind?"

"Wish?—that is a poor word to express what I feel. Even to know personally a few of the people in the world who have *done* something with their lives, people who write the books that move us! That would be best of all."

"I know some of them. In my wanderings to and fro I have come across more than one celebrity of the book world."

"Have you?" said the girl eagerly, "do tell me about some of them. I have always wondered," she went on, after a short pause, "what the feelings of an authoress would be in the moment of triumph—when, after much struggling, she has attained her first success—has awakened to find herself famous in fact, such as the author of 'The Dark Sea,'" alluding to a book by an, as yet, unknown writer which had lately taken the world by storm.

"What they feel at the moment that fame comes to them," echoed her companion with the worn face, dreamily.

A sudden light flashed into her eyes, and she said:

"I can tell you if you like."

"Oh, please do. How I envy you meeting the interesting people that you do!"

"Yes," was the answer, in a curiously constrained voice, "I am an enviable person, I suppose. I know the authoress you speak of particularly well, and will tell you how she attained success, if you care to listen."

The conservatory led into a square walled-in garden beyond, and the doors dividing the one from the other were wide open to the warm June night. Outside sat two men smoking cigarettes, and carrying on a desultory conversation. As the elder woman began to speak, one of them stopped short in the middle of a sentence and remained silent until her voice ceased also.

"She is over thirty now," she was saying, "an age when success, if it comes and she is a lonely woman, makes her feel lonelier than it found her. Almost from a child she had had it in her to write, and, long before

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she had conceived any definite idea of writing a book. she had made a habit of putting down on scraps of paper, describing as well as she could anything which made her feel—a beautiful view, a sunset, a child's face—any strong emotion she experienced

"After some years of a more or less happy girlhood she met a man, younger than herself, who, in his boyish, urgent fashion made love to her and—well, none of that is to the point, or will interest you. Nothing came of it except—except that it broke her heart." Her lip quivered, and the unshed tears brimmed her eyes. Someone was singing in the room beyond,

Douglas, Douglas, tender and true,

that old song which has a power to reach our heart always; and, set to Lady John Scott's exquisite music, "does bring the tears unbidden to our eyes."

She went on: "Troubles followed thick and fast after this, and to cut the story short, she at last found herself in London, living on a pittance—her portion from the wreck of her father's fortune—and with her face set steadily towards making a name for herself in literature; uphill work as all know who have tried it. From the smart house, the many servants, the clothes, the enjoyments of the life that had been hers, she passed by short transitions, after eating for a time the bitter bread of charity, to the one-garret life that is the fate of so many breadwinners. She was not thirty then, and the hopes of youth, and the longings of youth, were not quite dead within her; they still made themselves felt from time to time in spasmodic jerks and tremblings—on lovely spring days when she allowed herself a rest from her labours to stroll through the lilac-scented paths of the Park, too exhausted from semi-starvation and over-work to think very deeply of anything connected with the future that lay so dark in front of her. Rather she let her thoughts wander back into the past—her steps straying over the burnt-up grass, to the glinting Serpentine beyond—to the long-ago evenings when she and her brother had so often drifted lazily down the river in the sunset glow.

"But she did not completely give up society in those days of dreary monotony, nor clothe herself in the hopeless eccentricities so much affected by all grades of artists and writers. She did what she could to keep up her friends, often going without food to buy herself a decent pair of gloves, or a new hat."

"Do you really mean," interposed the girl, with wide eyes and lowered voice, "that—that she really was hungry?" In her sheltered life it seemed so strange and so monstrous a thing that another girl, a lady like herself, should want actual food.

"Yes,"—and the woman's eyes shone—"she used to try to live upon a shilling a day, and you don't know how difficult that is to a girl brought up daintily as you or I have been—till you have tried it! She could not eat what those in a lower class would have fattened on—coarsely cooked, unappetising food. Her one room was very small, and dark—hot in summer, freezing in winter, when she sat in all the warm things she possessed, to save a fire, and wrote and mended. And most nights she felt very empty and hungry and solitary when she went to bed."

"How terrible!" said the girl gently.

"But it was not like that all the year. Sometimes in the autumn she paid visits in the country, and there she met people who interested her and kept her life from stagnating. She had a certain charm of her own which men felt; and in her, as in every other woman that ever was born, the craving for sympathy and protection and the strength that the love of a man gives to a woman was strong in her—apart, if you know what I mean, from the longing for the particular love of any one individual. It was the natural instinct every woman feels to lean on someone stronger than herself. All this she put aside, in the instances where it might have developed itself into the thing she craved, until her purpose should be accomplished.

"Once it went very hard with her and she almost succumbed to the temptation, for as such she viewed it, having vowed a vow unto herself.

"He was a very different man from the other; he was tender, chivalrous, gentle with women as towards something to be shielded, protected, cared for; and his wonderfully keen perceptions enabled him to see further into her complex nature than anyone had ever taken the trouble to see before. I know, because he has since told me so much about those days; he often says that the first moment he looked in her face he loved it for the tale of repressed suffering he read in it."

"And she?" asked the girl quickly.

The man who was listening so intently in the dark garden, where the few stars twinkled down through the whispering leaves of the big lime, threw away his cigar and turned his head towards the open door where the cool tinkle of the miniature fountain broke the waiting silence, and waited for the answer.

"I have said," replied the woman, "that she had a purpose, and, wisely or foolishly, perhaps she herself did not know, would think of none of these things till her purpose was accomplished. All that was best within her rose up and responded yearningly to the unspoken feeling he had for her. But, long ago, she also had gauged the depths of an even more complicated character than her own, and in the midst of her misery had seen, clear and certain, the one dominant fact that that which would have power to move him, and that alone, would be the accomplishment of something that the world would applaud to the echo, and which, further, would place her beyond his reach.

"She was always conscious of a strong instinct which told her he and she would meet again—that in some way her book would bring them together and also that then, and not till then, would the last scene of the play be played out, and who knows," she went on dreamily, "what that scene will be?

"Do you think," she continued after a pause, "that every time she looked in the glass and traced the new faint lines that privation, cold, suffering and anxiety were drawing round her eyes and mouth, and saw still another grey hair added to the number that already streaked the dark, that it did not further her determination to succeed in the task she had set herself?" There was a bitter ring in the woman's voice as she proceeded. "She had not striven so hard and so long to give in for the first strong temptation that assailed her.

"After this episode she went back to London and her garret, and all through the long cold winter, when food was scarce and fuel scarcer" ("Good God!" murmured the man in the garden, under his breath, his deep set eyes gleaming like the stars above, under the broad band of his dark eyebrows) "worked on at her book, which was her life, and was written, to use a true, if, perhaps, highflown metaphor, with her heart's blood. It had not been without a struggle that she had elected to make 'copy' of her most sacred feelings, her bitterest agony; but she guessed rightly in her inexperience, that it is truth alone which makes the only real success in the

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literary world, though ephemeral shams may endure for a night.

"With what a sinking of the heart she saw, time after time, the return of the 'rejected manuscripts' of some of her small magazine ventures you may imagine when you reflect on the loneliness of her life at that time.

"She almost persuaded herself of the fallacy of this truth which she had deemed so all-important a factor of success, for these small attempts were also written from her heart, things she had known and seen around her in the life she had done with and yet the editors would have none of them. 'Too fantastic,' 'unreal,' were some of the criticisms bestowed upon them by the kinder members of the brotherhood, those who had at least given them a reading.

"At last one wrote: 'There is so much that is good in your articles and yet they are not altogether what will "take." I would advise you to try your hand at something that shall be simpler, less full of the workings of manifold and complex emotions in your characters, fuller of the common surface—details of the ordinary story-teller.'

"The evening that she received this was thundery, and the heat of her small room intolerable. All through the long hot night she sat at her little table writing; her feet like stones, her head burning; and as the red sun stole up the summer sky the last word was written of the commonplace article that was to begin the work of her initiation into the world of print."

"Oh, I am glad!" broke in the girl, "I am glad she succeeded in the end. But, tell me, what became of the man, the first one—did he marry?"

"He married," answered the woman, in a toneless voice, and her eyes wandered into the dark of the garden.

"And did she ever see him again—has she seen him since she became famous?"

"To the best of my knowledge she has never seen him since," replied the woman again mechanically.

"But to go back to our original starting-point, what are her feelings after so much trouble and so much hard work, on becoming famous?"

"It is not many days since she said she felt only a strange and indefinite sense of waiting—waiting——"

The last long-drawn-out notes from under Wolff's wonderful magical fingers in the far room are sobbing through the vibrating silence. The distant hum of London echoes faintly as from a long way off. A dark shadow fills the open doorway. The woman starts, and a sudden horror as of a deadly fear, dilates in her grey eyes as they meet the sombre fire in the man's. He comes quickly forward and drops into a seat beside her. His companion saunters on into the drawing-room, and the girl looks from one to the other and keeps silence.

The slow flush that travels painfully over the woman's worn sweet face, fades and leaves her pale.

"I hope you will forgive an old friend's unconscious eavesdropping," he begins lightly, but with evident effort in the constrained tones as he proceeds. "You tell a story well, and I grew so interested that I quite forgot that such an unpleasant word might be applied to me, therefore I came in to make myself known. Please go on. She was waiting—waiting, for what?" The fire in his eyes deepens, his voice has a ring of command, but the ghost of a smile hovering over his finely-cut lips makes the dark face a very beautiful one.

Her eyes do not move from his, and the life of all her face is concentrated in them; he can see, as the hanging lantern above their heads casts its dimly religious light on her white cheeks.

"I said it was some days ago that she felt like that. You must remember fame is short-lived, and all its stages ephemeral. I believe she no longer has that strange feeling. It has reached the stage beyond—the last scene."

"Yes? you interest me. What do you suppose would occur if, when they meet again, she should learn that the wife he married almost in his boyhood, as you said, had left him soon afterwards for a better world, to mourn her loss in the pitiless light of a disillusion which the short experience of married life had furnished?"

The girl, sitting there beside the two, apparently forgotten by both, noted the faint flicker of the heavy eyelids over the steady grey eyes, as the man's voice ceased—no heightened colour came again to mark another high-tide of emotion.

"She would pity the man, I believe."

"Pity him—pity him—*only?*" In the low tones there lay a passion that seemed altogether superfluous to the quiet tenor of the conversation.

"Men make mistakes," he went on. "Do you mean that the woman who could write 'The Dark Sea,' and feel all that she had written, would yet have nothing more than *pity*, after all those long years of her lonely faithfulness, to give the man who had caused her all that sorrow;" (she shivered; he had struck, with, maybe, unconscious cleverness or intuition, a sensitive chord in woman's nature, and one which seldom ceases to vibrate in every true woman's heart) "the man who *knew* that once he had made a *great mistake*."

The stars were paling, the dawn was rushing gloriously up the palpitating sky. Its rays fell full on the tired face, almost haggard now in the pure and lovely new day, as the man's senses were quick to note, and yet—a great hunger grew in his strange eyes, a strong agony crept into his dark face. Her hands lay still in her lap, but the fingers were strained over one another. She neither raised her voice nor altered its tone as she answered slowly: "There are, in heaven and in earth, mistakes which never can be rectified—mistakes which have gone too deep for tears or—for restitution. Come," she added, suddenly to the girl at her side, "your beauty sleep as well as your chaperon will be waiting for you, and I am sure you must be tired of my long story; but I can tell you the end before we go in to the others if you like," standing up with her face to the radiant dawn—her pale sad face in which, also, a new day had dawned, so that the old day could never reign again. "The moment of that woman's triumph arrived—the moment for which she had starved, and striven early and late; the moment that had eaten up her youth in its advent—it came in actual detail as she had always known it would, and, coming, found her—desolate. Come." And they moved together into the lighted room, leaving the man alone, looking up at the day which had dawned for him also.

VERNER FENTON.

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ARABIAN NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT, No. 102.

One morning the harem guards, on opening the garden gate of Razhib Pasha's magnificent palace on the shore of the Bosphorus, were alarmed to find the dead body of a handsome youth propped up against the portal.

Examination of the body elicited the following facts:

The youth had been stabbed with some pointed, sharp-edged weapon, apparently a knife or dagger, for two wounds were found in his left side, both evidently caused by the same weapon. One of the wounds was a flesh wound, and by no means dangerous, as if some weak and unskilled hand had dealt the blow; the other went straight through to the heart, and must have proved fatal on the instant. In addition to these terrible marks there was, on the neck of the dead youth, the deep impression of two rows of human teeth—two sharply defined rows, without the slightest blur or defect visible.

In the belt of the murdered man were found his pistols, their ivory butts handsomely inlaid with silver, and his dagger, with hilt of mother of pearl, sheathed in a richly jewelled and enamelled case. On his fingers sparkled costly rings, and in his turban was his purse, containing five-and-twenty gold *zechines*.

Evidently this was not a case of robbery, but of murder, actuated by hatred or revenge.

The murdered youth was recognised as Alnuman Aga, only son of the great general, Razhib Pasha, and was known throughout the city as the flower of Turkish gallantry, the petted favourite of the ladies, the pride, hope, and comfort of his proud and ambitious father.

During three whole days trumpets were sounded and drums beaten in streets, squares, and market-places, and town-criers gave notice to the populace of Stamboul that whoever should denounce the murderer of Alnuman Aga, or give him up to justice, would receive ten bags of money and a free pardon for all complicity in that or any other crime committed, as well as protection against all danger arising from his denouncement of the principal murderer.

One bag of money meant one thousand piastres; accordingly ten bags, ten thousand piastres; and at that time the piastre was worth sixteen times as much as it is at present. Verily, a goodly price for a single word—the name of one man.

Of yet weightier consequence than the promise of money was that second promise of free pardon to any accomplice in the deed; for, no doubt, there was an accomplice. A single man could not have killed Alnuman Aga, who was a sturdy youth, well built and muscular, highly trained in all bodily exercise, and brave and skilful in fight.

But the surest proof of the existence of an accomplice was found in the ugly mark on the neck of the dead man. Assuredly there had been two—one who bit fiercely and stabbed weakly, and the other who thrust home with one fatal blow.

It is an old saying, and generally found true, that a secret shared by two is no secret at all, for sooner or later one of the accessories is sure to betray it. Moreover, here was the double inducement of pecuniary gain and immunity from punishment. Surely, whenever those two look at each other, the one cannot help considering how much the other's head is worth to him, while the other suspects the thought, and naturally tries to anticipate the action in order to save himself.

Yet, in spite of that clear calculation, in spite of drums, bugles, and town-criers, the murder remained a mystery, for it had never entered the head of the wise speculators that there exists in life a tie which unites two individuals in one. Husband and wife, although two in person, are in soul and mind but one.

The quarter of the Seven Minarets is the chosen settlement of the Armenian residents at Stamboul. Of the celebrated seven minarets at present only four remain standing, three of them having been destroyed by an earthquake; but the azure-coloured copper globes of the remaining four shine far out into the distance, as the rays of the setting sun fall upon them.

In the vicinity of these slender minarets, the Armenian church stands, a plain, modest, unassuming edifice. It

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has no steeple, no sculptured images of saints, nothing to adorn it save coloured painting within and without.

Attached to the church is a smaller stone building, the residence of "The White Priest," the pastor of the Armenians.

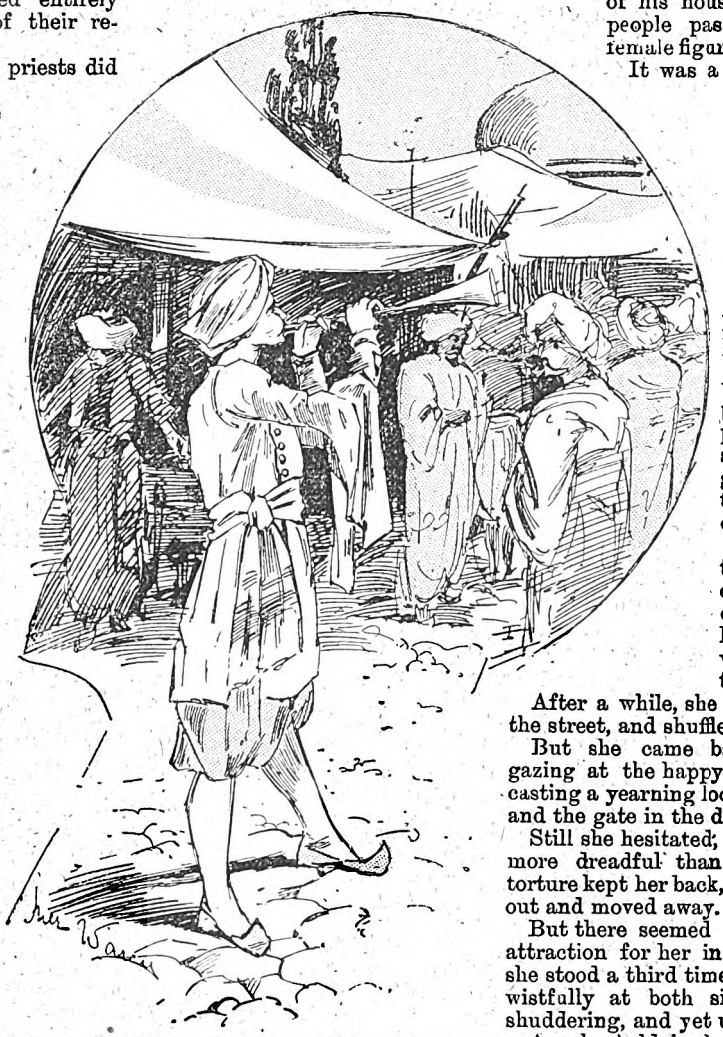
The Armenian church was poor, and had no worldly possessions whatever. No tithe was paid to the priest, no fee was due to him. He had no other income than the voluntary offerings of his flock to their shepherd, and his worldly welfare rested entirely upon the strength of their religious ardour.

Still, some of these priests did very well, as, for instance, Makarios, the white priest of the district of the Seven Minarets. Not only was this district one of the largest and wealthiest, holding the most prominent and prosperous Armenian citizens of the town; but, as a priest who was keenly alive to the duties and the interests of his vocation, Makarios had found means to make his holy office an unceasing fountain of gain; so much so, indeed, that there soon was not one sheep in his flock which was not sorely aware of the religious zeal of his shepherd.

This ingenious man had impressed upon his parishioners the urgent necessity of yearly consecration of their dwellings, for which ceremony a certain sum of money had to be paid to the officiating priest. Marriages, christenings, funerals, etc., had each a complicated number of new rites and observances, for the execution of which the priest was duly paid. Masses for the benefit of the departed souls were read, messages to heaven or purgatory accepted and dispatched, responses given—and all for a pecuniary consideration, which was levied in accordance with the means of employer.

Of course, the fee for absolution was in accordance with the sin committed, and with the wealth of the sinner. With a poor man, a great crime became an insignificant matter, whereas, with rich folks, a small error grew into a horrid sin, which could not be bought off too dear.

From the sky-blue cupolas of the remaining four minarets the last glimmer of sunlight had faded away.



Trumpets were sounded.

The noise in the streets had ceased, the whip-cracks of the camel drivers, and the shrill cries of the water sellers gave way to the barking and howling of the stray dogs which infest the streets of Stamboul at night; and the sand of the streets, disturbed by busy passers, and whirling about in clouds, began to settle down again—the sure forerunner of night.

Makarios, the white priest, was looking out through the grating of his iron gate into the vault-like entrance of his house, and watching the people pass before it, when a female figure caught his attention.

It was a most striking figure, remarkable for ugliness.

The woman's gait was halting, and she leant heavily on a stout stick she carried; evidently she was very lame.

Over one of her eyes she wore a big, black patch or plaster, showing that she was half blind, and her face was marked with the purplish scars of small-pox, while her scanty, soiled and tattered garments showed her to be poor almost to destitution.

She stood before the paintings on the entrance wall shuddering visibly as she looked at the wretches writhing in purgatorial flames.

After a while, she sighed, turned out to the street, and shuffled away.

But she came back again, this time gazing at the happy lot of the redeemed, casting a yearning look at the confessional and the gate in the dark background.

Still she hesitated, as if something yet more dreadful than fear of everlasting torture kept her back, and again she limped out and moved away.

But there seemed to be some powerful attraction for her in these paintings, for she stood a third time before them, looking wistfully at both sides, trembling and shuddering, and yet undecided.

As she held in her hands a couple of fowls tied together with a piece of twine, she was evidently contemplating confession, for poor people pay for their shrove-tickets with poultry; but her hesitation showed that her conscience was burdened by some heavy sin, and that she was afraid of the penance.

As she stood thus, undecided whether to give way to her conscientious scruples, or to listen to the cautioning of policy, one of the cocks which she held in her hands began to crow, and, startled by the sound of St. Peter's warning, her resolution was confirmed.

She drew herself up slightly, sighed, and then went boldly towards the grating to crave admittance of the priest.

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Makarios had hastened to his box, and was already waiting for her when she limped in, and knelt down before him.

"What sin burdens you?" asked the priest.

"I have taken human life," sobbed the woman.

"Wilfully or accidentally?"

"Wilfully."

"A man or woman's?"

"A strong man's."

"What was your motive—revenge or robbery?"

"Self-defence. He assailed me, and I killed him to free myself."

"Have you known him long?"

"He was my constant persecutor."

"Was he a Christian or a Jew?"

"Neither; he was a Turk."

"And do you think that such a heinous crime can be absolved for a couple of cockerels?"

"I am poor. My husband is a porter in the bazaar, and I sell soup at the corner of the Médres. Still, I have some savings, and have brought them with me in this purse. Pray, take it."

Makarios took the soiled and worn purse, and emptied its contents in his lap. The piastres, as they lay on his white robe, looked strikingly red.

"This is all counterfeit money," said he to the woman.

"If it is I did not make it," said she; "I got it, as it is from my customers."

"So you sell soups? Did you say at the corner of the Médres?"

"I said so."

"Then you told me a lie. The breath of the woman who sells soups at street corners is foul with the smell of garlic, and not sweet with the odour of roses, as yours is. The wives of bazaar porters and carriers do not eat rose-confections to perfume their breath. It is the habit of rich women, and you are one of them. You meant to deceive me, but you have deceived yourself; for, if I had listened to your confession, and absolved you in your disguise, that poor, lame, blind, ugly woman at the corner of the Médres, whom you have painted yourself to resemble, would have been admitted into Paradise and feasted with St. Basil, while you would have gone to the purgatorial flames. Therefore, if you are really repentant, and wish to be purged of your sins, go you to the well in the courtyard, wash off those painted scars from your face, take off those black patches from your eyes, and leave off your pretended limp. Then, if you return to me, I shall listen to your confession."

The woman did as he directed. She went to the well as an old, ugly, crippled hag, and she returned as a young, fair and graceful woman, proud in bearing, and conscious of her beauty.

"Now I know you, my daughter," said Makarios, recognising the fairy in rags; "you are the handsome Zabella, wife of the wealthy Tafruj, who could call himself a Zariadri, if, by bearing the famous old name, he did not fear to offend the Turks. Now, kneel down, and tell me your tale. You have murdered a man—a Turk. Who was he?"

"His name was Alnuman Aga, and he was the only son of the mighty Grand Vizier, Razhib Pasha."

"H'm! h'm! Alnuman Aga, indeed! But how did it all happen? Stay, let me question you. If I am not mistaken—and I certainly am not—you sell plate, jewellery, and costly weapons in the bazaar, and your beauty serves you as a bait to lure youthful and gallant buyers to your stand? Confess truly; Alnuman Aga was drawn on by your sparkling eyes, and the smile which showed him your pearly teeth. You pressed his hand, and whispered to him, so that he would buy your precious wares without haggling over your prices. Don't shake your head, for you cannot deny it. You left a printed copy of your sharp-edged teeth on the neck of the murdered youth, when you sucked his life-blood, you vampire!"

"As God is my witness," sobbed the woman, "I tell you the truth. I never lured Alnuman Aga to our shop—never noticed him at all. He sent an old woman with the *naame* to me, before I ever set eyes on his face."

"Aha, the *naame*!—the embroidered purse full of dried flowers, which speak in their own language to fair women, and are understood. You picked out those you wanted to keep, and returned the rest as an answer?"

"No; I returned the *naame* without breaking the seal, and I told the old woman never to come to me again. But Alnuman Aga did not take that for an answer. He watched for my husband's departure from the bazaar, and then he came and began to recite flower-rhymes and love songs to me."

"And you listened with delight?"

"I made the sign of the cross, and said: 'Begone from me, Satanas!' But he laughed, and tried to win my favour by presents of corals and pearls, sparkling gems and rings, set with precious stones."

"Which you accepted, and hid from the eyes of your husband?"

"Which I threw at his feet immediately. I even tried to spoil my beauty, so as not to attract him."

"You acted foolishly. You should have accepted all his presents, and brought them to me, your confessor. The gift of the libertine would thus have become the offering of an ardent soul."

"He threatened me; he told me that if I would not accede to his wishes he would kill my husband; and my Zariadri is such a gentle, tender-hearted man that he could not kill an animal, much less do harm to a human being. I am sure that if a thief should steal his money he would not find it in his heart to have him prosecuted for the theft."

"You mean to say that he is a coward?"

"He is as brave as the best of men, but his heart is kind, and his disposition gentle. When Alnuman Aga threatened to kill my husband, I told him I should go to Razhib Pasha and tell him of his son's wishes and intentions."

"Razhib Pasha would have served your impudence rightly if you had dared to carry out your threat."

"Razhib Pasha loves my husband."

"Yes, as I love these nice fowls. Go on with your confession."

"Alnuman Aga laughed again, and said he would come to visit me when my husband would be absent from home. I told him that in such cases my husband locks the house and takes the key with him, and that I was not one of those women who keep rope-ladders for the accommodation of lovers."

"Don't praise your virtues to me: I sit here to listen to your vices."

"Four days ago, in the evening, I was at home alone, I was standing at the window of my room, looking out into the garden. I watched the butterflies hovering round the pomegranate blossoms, and my mind was so pure and tranquil that I am sure I had not one sinful thought."

"Thou art never sure of that, daughter. Watching butterflies is in itself sinful in woman."

"If so, I have heavily atoned for the sin. While

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standing there, suddenly I felt a strong arm about my waist, and turning round in affright, I beheld the glowing eyes of Alnuman Aga. 'What have you done with my husband?' I cried in dismay, endeavouring to extricate myself from his arms, and trying to avert my face from the sickening gaze of his eyes. 'He is in the wine shop,' said he, laughing, 'and I stole from him

"I watched the butterflies."

the key to your room. Now you are mine!' As he uttered these words, a deadly faintness crept over my heart, and I felt as if I should sink down dead at his feet. My eyes closed before the demoniac gaze of the fiend before me, and I broke down, while the hot breath of the victorious scoundrel swept my face."

"Go on, don't stop—go on, I say."

"In that awful moment, my dying senses caught the sound of well-known footsteps in the adjoining hall; the door to my room flew open, and Zariadri Tafruj stood before me—not intoxicated by drink, but proud, and stately, and handsome, as in the blessed hour of our betrothal. The invigorating blood rushed to my heart, ecstatic delight, triumphant joy, filled me with giant strength; I forgot that I was a woman and weak. Violated love and fidelity, the presence of my wrongly-accused husband, all tended to increase my hatred, my thirst for an immediate and deadly revenge. Alnuman Aga wore a dagger in his belt. Swiftly I seized it, and stabbed him in the side. But I saw the blow had been too weak, and, with the fury of a tigress I encircled his neck with my arm, my teeth went deep into his flesh, and, drawing the dagger from the wound, I leant the hilt against my bosom, and, pressing the struggling wretch to me, drove the dagger deep into his treacherous heart. This is the story of the murder of Alnuman Aga."

"And is this all? Have you nothing more to confess?"

"What more should there be to say?".

"Did not your husband help you in this fatal business? Did you do all and he stand idly by?"

"The deed is mine alone. After it had been done, and could not be helped or undone, we swathed the corpse in sheets, seated it on a mule, and brought it to the gate of Razhib Pasha's garden, where we left it. Nobody had seen us, nobody would have suspected us, and the secret would have remained a secret for ever if my conscience had not troubled me ever since. I have no rest, no peace, night or day. Waking or sleeping, I see the distorted features of the murdered man, and through his parted lips an expiring cry seems to ring for ever and ever in my ears. It is as if I could see his soul, rent from the body, soar, like some frightened bird, above my head. I hear his dying groans, and my hands are reeking with his streaming blood. No human tongue accuses me, but my conscience cries out; and what help is it to me if nobody knows it, when the Almighty has witnessed my crime? For four days the phantom of my sin has haunted me, and I can bear it no longer. Here I have come to you, my confessor, the earthly representative of my heavenly Redeemer. You can help me. Absolve me of my crime, and give me back peace of conscience, tranquility of mind and soul!"

"My daughter, what you ask is not so easy. It is an awful crime—the cruel murder of the Grand Vizier's only son. That cannot be atoned for and bought off by a little fasting or praying, a pilgrimage, a couple of fowls, and a petty purse of bad coins, of which the silver is almost entirely worn off, and nothing left but the copper."

"I am ready, for any penance and sacrifice, if you will only tell me what to do."

"That is right, and now listen. For nine days you shall eat nothing to appease your hunger but a piece of bread, and drink nothing to quench your thirst but the drops of dew that you can gather from the leaves of the aloe in early morning. Thrice daily you must attend holy service at church, and each time you come you must kneel down before the altar, and make the circuit of it on your knees seven times. Finally, you must send five bags of money—but, mind you, good, full, weighty piastres—this very evening to me, to be used for the clearing of your soul. You may go."

Zabella went home, and Makarios received the five bags of piastres the same evening.

When, on the next day, the woman appeared at church to begin her penance, the priest watched her, and after service, called her to him, and said:

"I was mistaken yesterday, my daughter, in thinking that the slight penance which I laid on you would suffice to wash away your sin. Your crime is so heavy that

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it cannot be bought off for less than five more bags of money."

Makarios received the required sum, but by the next morning he had found that again five more were necessary, and so on for nine subsequent days, until the wealthy Zariadri Tafruj had become a beggar, and the handsome Zabella had given up into his hands the last piece of her jewellery—her pretty earrings, her heavy bracelets, and her costly pearls.

Still Makarios' coffers were not filled, his greed not satisfied, for when, at last, the weeping woman said: "Now, father, this is the last you can take from me. I have nothing left that is worth the asking or the keeping. These are the last things of value in my possession. Now give me your absolution and the shrove-ticket, for which I have paid with hard penance and the loss of all my earthly possessions"—he made

"Give me your absolution."

answer with a mocking smile, laying his clumsy, fat hand on her dishevelled locks.

"Not so, my daughter. You are not yet stripped of all valuables, for this beauteous head of yours is worth ten bags of money to one who means to have them."

The poor woman shook the hand of the priest from her head, rose from her knees, and went home.

Ten bags of money had he said—that was the price offered by Razhib Pasha for the head of the murderer of his son!

Makarios was not a lazy man by any means, and he lost no time in betraying the secret of Zabella's confession to Razhib Pasha.

The Grand Vizier listened as the priest related the story of the murder, and, after it was finished, he said, with a grim smile: "I believe that thy tale is true; therefore, stay here, and wait for the reward which thou hast merited; it shall not fail thee;" and with that he led the priest to an inner room, where he left him in the guard of Tsoglani.

Razhib Pasha filled the foremost position among the four hundred grand viziers of the Osman realm, and he was one of the exalted two hundred who could not die at the hand of the executioner. His government was renowned for the perfect order he established throughout the whole dominion, and for the skill with which he managed to keep the treasury of the State at all times well filled. As a man, he was notorious for cruelty and the extraordinary ingenuity which he exercised in devising punishments for his victims. It is related of him that, when appointed governor of Egypt, he kept the death sentence of twenty-five infidel boys, leaders of the reigning class of their time, a secret for nearly four years. During all that time he counselled with them, dined with them, and so on, until, at the end of the fourth year, he finally got all twenty-five of them together at his hospitable table; when, after the coffee had been served, he had all their twenty-five heads cut off in one pretty row.

This was the man to whom Makarios, the white priest, had denounced the fair Zabella for the murder of Alnuman Aga. A Christian woman, who had killed his only son—the flower of Turkish youth, the gallant hero of battles, own grandson to the Sultan Mahoud; for Szalika, wife of Razhib Pasha, the mother of Alnuman Aga, was a daughter of the Badishah.

After Razhib Pasha had left Makarios, and re-entered his own room, he at once sent for the Armenian bishop.

When that holy man arrived, the Grand Vizier asked:

"Is confession a sacrament with you?"

"Certainly," replied the bishop.

"What punishment is meet for the priest who betrays the secrets of holy confession?"

"He is condemned to be burned to death," said the bishop.

"Very good," said Razhib Pasha; "here, take my tablets, and note down your sentence."

* * * * *

Zabella's heart was full of despair as she left the white priest, and bent her steps homeward.

Arrived at her house, she told her husband of the threat Makarios had uttered, which involved her death sentence.

"So this pretty head is not yours any more?" said Zariadri, tenderly caressing her soft cheek, and pressing her burning forehead to his bosom; "will you give it to me, then?"

"Take it, and do with it as you will," said she, kissing his caressing hand.

"Then shut your eyes, and open your mouth."

The woman obeyed, wondering; but hardly had she done so, when his fingers were at her teeth, and, with one deft movement, he had extricated one of the white pearls from the upper front row, leaving an ugly gap in its place.

The startled woman had had no time to cry out; the operation was already performed, and, without a word of explanation, the man left the house, leaving her in a state of utter bewilderment.

Zariadri went straight to Razhib Pasha's residence, and asked for admittance.

"What do you want of me, my son?" asked that illustrious statesman, when the Armenian was brought into his presence.

"I have come to give up to justice the murderer of your son."

"You are too late," said the Pasha, "another has

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preceded you, and I already know who committed the deed."

"Impossible! As nobody else was present at the deed, nobody else can know the name of the doer. You have been deceived, and I am here to convince you of it. Know, then, that I, Zariadri Tafruj, killed Alnuman Aga, your son."

"You! Zariadri Tafruj! You tell me that you slew my son? Are you not afraid of the tortures of purgatory? The liar goes to the flames, as well as the murderer; have you not been taught this lesson?"

"What I have told is the truth."

"It is not the truth. Your wife killed my son; the marks of her teeth are on his neck."

"Of my teeth, oh, Pasha! Look—the marks on your son's neck were made by two entire rows of teeth, such as mine; my wife has a gap in the upper row of her front teeth, as you may see for yourself, if you like. I repeat it, I am the murderer of your son."

"Well, well, Zariadri Tafruj! You are a good husband, but consider whether it is well for a Christian to love his wife more than his soul's salvation. Are you not afraid of Satan and the flames? Possibly you are a sceptic as I am. Our sages tell us that of all human bones the hip-bone alone does not decay, and remains entire until the day of resurrection, when, according to the size and shape of this bone, the whole body will be reconstructed. Now, I have seen many of these bones, and not one of them showed any marks of having been in the fire. Accordingly, I do not believe in a purgatory. You smile? You had better wait until I have finished. I have told you that I do not believe in the flames beyond this world, and as I am resolved that the murderer of my son, if he be a man, shall not escape infernal torment, I have made sure by transporting it to this world. As you know, the moment of death, or, to speak more properly, of dying, is bad enough in itself; yet its agony can be increased or lessened, and its pain and duration are different in individuals. Now, for instance, if the murderer of my son should be a woman, she would certainly be put to death; but as no man delights in torturing a woman she would simply be thrown into the Bosphorus. A few bubbles would rise to the surface of the water, and if, as you Christians will have it, woman also has a soul, those airy bubbles would possibly rise higher than human eye can see. But that would be the end of all. Whereas, if the murderer of my son be a man, he may well curse the day and hour of his birth, for I shall send him to perdition, indeed. He shall take such a journey that the infernal regions beyond shall appear as a place of rest and recreation to him."

"So this pretty head is not yours any more?"

"I know that, and am prepared for the worst," said Zariadri firmly, though his face was very pale.

"No, you are not; but you shall presently understand me better. Go out into the courtyard of my palace, to the square of the Tsoglani. When Sultan Achmed fastened the sign of the half-moon to the cupola of the Aga Sophia—the church of the celestial wisdom—he had the double cross and the ball on which it rested brought to the ground, and carried hither to this place of the Tsoglani at our palace. This double cross and the ball on which it stands are both of thick copper. Ever since the day of my son's death, that ball and cross serve the purpose of a furnace, and are heated till they glow like the live coals inside them. This is the fiery torture which I have prepared for the murderer of my son, if he be a man. With metal chains attached to this terrible structure, his hands shall be manacled, and his body raised up upon the fiery cross. Go out, I say. Look well at the preparations I have made, and then, when you have taken time to consider, return to me, if you dare, and remind me of the confession you have made to me! Until then, I shall forget it."

Zariadri Tafruj went out as the Pasha had commanded him, and strolled slowly down to the square of the Tsoglani, where the cross of the Aga Sophia had, in consequence of its enormous weight, already sunk down deep into the ground whereon it rested.

Only one-half of the huge ball and the second cross rose up high above the lawn.

At this time, the grass was singed off all round, and half-nude assistants of the executioner fed the fire in this giant furnace. Smoke, flakes of ashes, and glowing cinders were flying about, and the atmosphere, heated and thinned by the fire, invested this awful object of Christian faith with a flickering red haze.

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Tafruj stood trembling before this wild scene.

Razhib Pasha had not exaggerated, and there was no doubt that the man who was to give up his soul on this glowing cross would suffer all the pains and tortures which pandemonium can inflict. Verily, the unhappy

The women of fashion appeared on their favourite promenade.

victim of the Grand Vizier's revenge must be a saint, if that endless hour of horrid agony, without the relief of merciful unconsciousness, did not make him blaspheme God and curse mankind and their fiendish inventions.

Long, long did he look on, watching the molten gold drip down, like glittering drops of perspiration, and listening with a sick heart to the clumsy jokes of the brutal hangman's slaves.

One of the fellows asked him if he had no inclination to touch the images of the saints of the fiery ball. He turned away shuddering; and yet it was only the tip of his finger that they asked him to lay on it.

It was late in the evening when he entered the palace again. He was at once received by the Grand Vizier.

"Well, my son, how do you like death in that form?" asked Razhib Pasha.

"It is terrible."

"Are you afraid?"

"I shudder and tremble."

"And what have you come to tell me?"

"I have come to deliver myself up into your hands. Much as I dread this terrible death, I am a man—and I love my wife. Do your worst, Pasha. I am the murderer of Alnuman Aga."

At a motion of the Pasha's hand, a sedan chair was brought into the room.

"Sit down in this chair," said the Pasha to the bewildered Zariadri, "for I am going to keep my promises. First of all, you will find in this chair ten bags of money, which you have earned, for you have given up the murderer of my son into my hands. But, even if he were guilty himself, I cannot harm you, and you need fear no danger from me or anybody. And now let me give you this warning: your wife, whom you love well, and who deserves your love, you shall henceforth keep locked into your own house, so that her dangerous beauty may not cause the death of more youths as Alnuman Aga, my only, my dearly beloved son;" and two tears trickled down the Pasha's cheeks, and rolled into his grey beard.

Tafruj, dumfounded, and hardly in possession of his wits, was borne out by the Tsoglani; and, at every movement of the chair, the silver money in the bags gave a soft, musical clink.

Through gloomy halls and dark corridors they reached the courtyard, and there, vividly rising out of the dark night, stood the spectral apparition of the glowing cross.

In a wide quadrangle round it, a file of soldiers stood, forming a wall, so that from the outside it was impossible to observe what was going on in the interior of the quadrangle.

On this place, the Tsoglani set down the sedan-chair with the frightened Zariadri, who, looking out, beheld the form of an *imam*, standing on a high pile of stones, just opposite the fiery cross.

Presently the Turkish fifers blew a solemn choral, and the all-significant tune froze the blood of Zariadri's veins, for this was the air which accompanied the doomed criminal to the place of execution.

When the last shrill note had died away, the *imam* on the stone pile took out a leather scroll from his belt, unfolded it, and, in a monotonous chant, read its contents aloud as follows:

"The great Bishop, the Saint of Mount Ararat, the Messenger of Salvation at Etzmiatzin, has pronounced the following sentence:

"'The priest who betrays the secret of Holy Confession, shall be brought from life to death by fire!'

"This sentence is confirmed and ratified by the Glorious General and Grand Vizier, Razhib Pasha, and is to be carried into instant execution."

The *imam* nodded, the kettle-drums sounded, and in the next instant, a human form was raised up by chains, and placed upon the fiery cross.

No, not a human form; but a ghastly spectre in white, which, with the writhings of a tortured fiend, rolled on the glittering cross, managing by fearful exertions to jump from it, only to be thrown back again.

Each time the wretched body fell back, a black cloud of smoke rose from it; a hoarse, brutal roaring, as of a wild beast in the utmost pain, accompanied by terrible oaths, cursing Heaven and earth, conjuring up the Evil One, and then again crying out for death and mercy, rent the air.

Gladly would Zariadri Tafruj have escaped witnessing this horrible spectacle, but the door of the sedan-chair was locked on him, and the Tsoglani kept him a prisoner.

To the ghastly end he was compelled to stay, and look at the tortures to which he had resigned himself, and to which he would have been delivered if Razhib Pasha had not loved justice as he, Zariadri Tafruj, loved his wife.

When at last the mangled body of Makarios, the white priest, had ceased to writhe, when the beastly howls had died away on the lips, the vivid flames broke

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forth between them, enveloping and consuming the spectral form, the sedan-chair, with Zariadri Tafruj, was taken up again by its bearers, and conveyed to his own house, where he and his ten bags of money were put into safe care and custody of the happy Zabella.

Thus did Razhib Pasha, of whom Turkish historians proclaim that he was *insrani kamil*—a perfect man—deal out justice.

* * * * *

On the next day Razhib Pasha issued the decree which, under the pain of death, ordered all Turkish women, without distinction of rank, wealth, or position, to wear the *feredshe*—that ugly garment which hides all beauty of form and face, and sheathes the wearer like a wooden casing. And ever since, all the bewitching finery of Turkish fashion—the embroidered slipper, the graceful scarf, the transparent veil, etc.—are, under pain of death, strictly confined to the interior of the house.

Not that the women have not tried to ridicule the decree, and show their opposition.

On the very day of the proclamation, the women of fashion appeared on their favourite promenade—the bank of the Bosphorus—clad in their utmost enchanting garments, showing off their own beauty and the splendour of their attire.

The lovely pero, Sheytan Emisnezy, was foremost among them, and a new and ingenious invention of hers—to use the glow-worm of Mount Hasmus to illuminate her toilet—drew a train of admirers to her elbow, and struck envy to the hearts of the other women.

"Go home, my beauty; do not wait for the *meuzzin* to sing out the evening," said Pelvem Aga, the giant leader of the Imperial guards, to the fair Siren, as she playfully slapped his hand with her peacock-fan, and made a trumpet of a copy of the Sultan's decree, which he had showed her as warning.

What do you think of "The Rajah's Treasure" in the July "Pearson's."

But she laughed at the "pain of death," and waited for the evening to show her illuminated dress to the greatest advantage; and like her did all the other idle, frivolous, and vain women mock at the awful threat, and so did the throng of their foolish admirers.

But when the *meuzzin's* song had announced the hour of night, and Sheytan Emisnezy again stood before Pelvem Aga, the guard, showing him her marble shoulders, that giant caught her up at her gridle, and with a powerful effort hurled her into the Bosphorus, so that, as Tzi, the historian, says, the blue waves of the sea clad her beauteous body.

This was the signal for the guards to set to work, and each of them caught one of the crying, frightened, silly women, and hurled her into the sea. Thus three hundred young, fair, and fashionable women met with sudden and terrible death.

Since that night no Turkish woman appears in the street without the *feredshe*.

And this is the story of that garment.

S. J. M.

BRAIN GYMNASIUM: RESULT of No. 8 Competition.

Of the competitors who entered for the BRAIN GYMNASIUM, No. 8, not one was entirely correct. Mr. T. Tanner, 74, Hampton Park, Bristol, Mr. C. Sutton, 11, York Road, West Hartlepool, and Mr. S. Mason, Hawkhead Terrace, 31, Seahill Road, Paisley, succeeded in answering nine out of the ten, and, therefore, to them has been forwarded the prize of fourteen shillings each. The following are the names and addresses of those to whom we have awarded consolation prizes:

P. H. Arme, Panama House, Drayton Road, Leytonstone; S. A. Howe, Lowfield Boarding School, Sheffield; W. B. Scholefield, 42, Rawcliffe Road, Walton, Liverpool; L. W. Judd, 2, Alfred Villas, Stanton Road, Barnes; H. Wightman, 251, Park Lane, Tottenham, N.; A. M. Trivess, 4, Graham Road, Southsea, Hants; Mrs. K. Lamb, 45, Lord Street, Crewe; M. Senior, 585, Abbeydale Road, Sheffield; C. H. Jones, 23, Musgrave Crescent, Walham Green; S. A. Green, Well Close House, Fenton, Staffordshire; J. B. Crane, 183, Hollydale Road, Peckham; H. Cheeseright, 40, Granby Street, Liverpool; Miss E. Pinnel, 42, Ainger Road, N.W.; B. Smith, 8, Hemans Street, Liverpool; J. Manby, 1, Upper Bow, Edinburgh; C. B. Keston, "Woodville," Christchurch Road, Bournemouth; W. G. Ayers, 86, North Birkbeck Road, Leytonstone; Miss E. Hill, "Fair Lawn," Castlenau, Barnes; H. Beswick, 36, Gilmore Street, Stockport; Mrs. Dwelly, 266, King's Road, Kingston Hill; M. Griffith, Plasnewydd, Ruabon; F. Croft, Plas Power Colliery, near Wrexham, North Wales.

KEY OF No. 8 COMPETITION.

No. 71.

O	mnibu	S.
U	na	U.
T	ornad	O.
R	ecapitulat	E.
A	chin	G.

No. 72.

a=1. e=2. i=3. o=4. u=5. b=6. c=7. s=8. d=9. t=0.

Some months before his death, he placed in my hands a large old-fashioned pocket-book, bidding me lock it up and keep it safely for him.

No. 73.

1.
Y	O	U	R.	
O	G	R	E.	
U	R	G	E.	
R	E	E	D.	

2.
W	I	L	L.
I	D	E	A.
L	E	N	T.
L	A	T	E.

No. 74.

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      C
    R O E
  C A N D Y
P R O C T O R
D U C K L I N G S
  W R O U G H T
    M U D D Y
      L E A
        D
```

No. 75.—Attention, 181.

No. 76.

3 hours 24 minutes from the time of opening fire. 1,984 British Guardsmen left.

No. 77.

A pre-occupied man assimilates every word that is spoken to the subject of his own pre-occupation. When he enters into tender confidences, he speaks in ambiguously bashful hints, not in the precise language wherewith he would draw up his will.

No. 78.—Roundabout.

No. 79.—£4 12s. 6d.

No. 80.—1,055

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THE HALF-BREED.

An Out-of-the-Way Romance.

"CLAVERING—Herbert Clavering."

Carhart put out a hand, with a rush of incoherent words. Of all men, to find Clavering here!

Clavering gave him but little opportunity to put questions. His surprise had been less demonstrative than his friend's; but a twitching of the muscles of the mouth denoted that this meeting had not quite left him unaffected. He began to question Carhart himself—rapidly, a little nervously, scarce waiting for his replies. He was travelling? He had come with a view to making some study of the Indian settlement still taking up the farther slope of the mountain? A sketching tour? And so he still kept these things up?

"You are my guest for to-night, whatever your plans. In any case, those clouds bode no good to travellers in these wilds. I can't give you hotel fare. But, perhaps, you will put up with something plainer for the sake of old friendship and old days."

As he spoke, Carhart was realising the full change that had befallen the man who once—and that but a few years before—appeared so placid amid the great ranks of active strugglers, and so endowed for the brilliant work and the glittering results of life, that his rapid climb to wordly eminence was accounted one of the inevitable sequence. Alas for the rock against which this promising career had shivered almost at its outset! But why desert? That was what Clavering had done. Better, Carhart thought, as he looked at him, have made an attempt to float the ship anew to weather the gale.

With the life of the natives, he had adopted their mode of dress and something of their gait and manner. This seemed to Carhart to have been done out of a sort of bravado—as a species of flaunting assurance that he was amply content with the changed conditions of existence he had chosen. He had aged in these five years. There were on his face bitter lines and hard lines, that silently spoke the disappointment he would have doggedly denied. Carhart saw that however much he might regret the rash step which had led him to leave his native England and the world, and bury himself in these mountain wilds, he would never open his lips in confession of his mistake.

The black cloud had rolled downward, blotting the further peaks from sight, and in the deepening purple light that filled the air, the small loghouse stood out in sharpened relief beside its patches of stunted pines, vividly green.

Carhart dismounted from his horse and followed Clavering across the threshold with some singular sensations. The latter caught the fleeting expression on his face.

"You don't get over your surprise at finding one at this remote distance from your vaunted civilisation."

"Of course I am surprised. You left no tracks behind you."

"My determination to break with all your sophistication was clearly enough announced."

"Yes, I knew the life you meant to lead. Nevertheless I was surprised to find you here."

"You did not believe I would carry out my resolve?"

laughed Clavering shortly. "You see that you were mistaken."

The rain had come on in a sudden rush of wind that chased whirling leaves wildly before it. The taller pines bent and swayed; it had grown sombrely dark in the bare room.

Clavering—a powerful figure in high boots, loose flannel shirt, short jacket—stood an instant in the doorway, and looked out at the fierce conflict of the unchained elements. Then he turned and hung up his soft, wide-brimmed hat against the wall.

"As I told you before, you will have to put up with plain fare." Then Carhart became aware of the entrance of a young girl into the room. She was slim and supple as a willow bough as she moved, making deft preparations for the simple meal, with the smooth, sliding, grave step of the aboriginal race—the races that live close to the soil. Her straight black hair was bound up into heavy hanging braids. Her shy eyes looked out from under straight, black brows. She was very light—almost white.

Carhart had never believed in beautiful half-breeds. His eyes fastened themselves upon her until he felt their persistence an impertinence. His fingers itched to be at pencils and brushes and canvas.

When the storm passed away, it left an uneasy, shifting mass of torn clouds. A watery moon looked out in fitful gleams. Already the clayey soil was sucking up the moisture rapidly.

The two men stayed in the faintly illuminated darkness before the door. The short pipe in Herbert Clavering's bearded lips gave out at intervals a throbbing spark of pale red light.

There was a long silence. It was fraught, for Carhart, with anxious self-questionings, with hesitation. Finally he spoke.

"I shall be going on to-morrow morning, Clavering, and our meeting again is, I suppose, as things are, at least always a doubtful matter. So I have decided to touch upon a topic which it is possible you may prefer not to have broached. Whatever you may think of what may seem my interference, I think that I mean well. Leonora Ashley's husband has been dead two months. Did you know it?"

For an instant it was so still that the rasping of a cricket near by seemed to fill the whole night. Then—

"No, I did not know it," said Clavering. His tones were husky, strained. He controlled himself. But it had been a shock—it had been a shock!

Again there was a silence. At last, conscious of the tumult going on in the breast of the man beside him, Carhart could bear it no longer.

"I always thought you made a mistake—nay, more, that you committed a terrible folly, Clavering, five years ago!" he cried, all the latent irritation hot within him, and bred by the wantonness of his sacrifice of a brilliant life, breaking forth.

A groan burst from Clavering's lips.

"Sudden financial ruin had overtaken me; and—well, you know what she was to me, Carhart!"

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"Yes, I know that marriage and your money troubles together made you desert. For it was deserting. The place for a man like you is in the thick of the fight! What matter that a financial break-up had come to you! There was that in you which would have forced Fortune's favour anew. As for the other trouble—we are men, not children, Clavering!"

Suddenly, fiercely Clavering turned upon him.

"Why do you say all this now? Would you have me now go back to the thick of the fight, as you call it?"

"Why not? What right have you to hang back?"

Clavering gave a caustic laugh.

"I could tell you that the stragglers who have that much philosophy are doing the great army of strugglers, all intent on getting to the top, the most inestimable kindness! But I prefer to ask you what you think I could do in the centres of active life? I—who am out of time and touch with all men and things?"

"You have lost five invaluable years—yes. But to say that your mistake is irrevocable is an absurdity."

And then Carhart started, paused, forgetting his arguments, the hard-headed man of the world in him routed by a rushing forth of artist's soul that constituted the other side of his dual nature.

There a few feet away near the corner of the house, was that exquisite girl again. He was about to speak, to ask some question concerning her, when the man of the world came to the front anew, he said nothing.

The last impression he carried away with him from the log-house the next morning was that of the girl hanging back within the door as they rode off. Clavering accompanied him part of the way towards the Reservation. Her eyes followed them with a silent question; it seemed almost to Clavering, imaginative as he was, with a silent doubt, a silent anguish.

It was two weeks later, and Carhart was preparing to draw his sketching tour to an end. Looking up suddenly from his breakfast, he saw Clavering enter the inn, which here, fifteen miles from the Reservation, was dignified with the name of a hotel.

Carhart felt this coming significant. Had he any lingering doubts they were immediately dispelled.

"When do you start?" said Clavering. "I am going back with you."

There was a pause; then Carhart stretched out his hand across the table in silence.

* * * * *

The sun rose and set over the mountain. The days wore away. Flaring touches of crimson began to show against the cool green of the leaves.

At the log-house, amid the stunted pines, a silent figure went in and out. The girl shed no tears. He was gone. She had known always that some day it would be so. More than ever she had known it when that friend of his had come, the friend who belonged to the great world beyond the Reservation, beyond the mountain, of which she had learned at the mission school.

For she had been to the mission school, and she fell to trembling a little when she thought of the missionary—a gaunt, pale man with a holy fire in his eyes—who had baptised her. Ah, how good he had been! He had prayed over her, and adjured her steadfastly to walk with Christ.

She cowered on the doorstep, her slender hands against her cheeks.

Two strangers rode leisurely up in the mellow September afternoon. They talked lazily, their voices drifting towards her.

"No, marriages among whites and half-breeds are not common in this section. It would perhaps be better if they were."

The girl rose and went into the house. A fire of oak logs had been burning on the hearth. She sat down beside it, her arms clasped about her knees, her hair falling forward over her face. The afternoon wore slowly away. Through the glistening needles of the pine trees shafts of nebulous golden light began to stream. Near her was a large chest. She lifted the lid and slowly, reverently, took certain objects from it and laid them on the bed.

They were things he—Herbert Clavering—had given her. There were the fine little handkerchiefs marked with her name—"Annie," the name they had called her when she had been baptised at the mission chapel; and the yards of some soft light muslin she had never made up; and a pair of little shoes such as the women in town wore; and the trinkets he had said made her look like a young Eastern princess.

To her cheeks there had come a faint rose-like colour. Her eyes were like still water, in which the reflection of a star had sunk. She began to deck herself with the things she had taken from the chest. She was clothing herself in a strange freak of fancy for a mystic—a mythical marriage. If he and she were to be married this evening—married as once she had seen two people at the mission chapel, would she look like this? A small, blurred mirror threw back to her a picture she did not know. She had wound the yards of soft muslin about her body; she placed the trinkets about her neck and in her ears.

Athwart the long bar of sunlight that lay from the threshold of the open door across the floor a shadow had fallen. Annie looked up; she looked into his eyes—into the eyes of Herbert Clavering. They stood a moment thus—he motionless, she holding back with both hands the braids of her wavy hair. Then he spoke:

"Annie, I have come back."

She said nothing; she only trembled.

"Annie, I have come back to marry you."

Then only she gave a little, low cry.

"I am not worthy," she said.

His brow darkened.

"Never dare to say that. I thought I could go from you, Annie. I tried to. I meant to. I loved a woman once, and I heard four weeks ago that she was free. I thought to go back to her—to win her now if I could. But I was mistaken in my own heart. That love was dead. I did not see her. I came back to you, Annie. I will repair the wrong."

Herbert Clavering came nearer. He put out his hand and touched the geegaws on her arms.

"Take these things off. You shall have better than those. What were you doing arrayed in them? We won't live here, Annie. When we are married we will go elsewhere. I shall never belong quite to the active world again. But I can do better than this. There must be a new life. Kiss me, my wild flower."

* * * * *

In the course of a few weeks Carhart received a letter over which he sat long pensive.

"Well, who shall say it was not better so?" he murmured at last. "She was beautiful. Clavering was never like any other man. He will seek some new frontier town and make himself a power yet, perhaps. What eyes she had! Ah! one can never get those effects on canvas!"

And the artist sighed.

AGNES GIFFORD.

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Told at the Club.

Yes, I have been in America. A year or so ago I had occasion to make the trip, primarily with the idea of studying the tariff laws of the United States, a subject in which I was much interested, in view of my becoming a probable candidate for an English constituency, and, secondly, because I wanted a holiday after successfully carrying through a very long and arduous law case, which has become world-famous. Among other places I visited were the Yosemite Valley and San Francisco, and, while mixing with Chinamen, Mexican "greasers," and miners, I became desirous of obtaining a gold nugget in quartz. A stranger had, however, little chance of securing such a thing at a fair price, and after several attempts at dealing, I intrusted the commission to the clerk at the hotel at which I was staying, the Mercede Il Capitaine. We have no idea in England of the manifold duties and infinite capacity of the American hotel clerk; nothing seems impossible for them to obtain, no task too difficult for them to perform—if they are well paid for it.

My clerk in due course found me a nugget, for which I paid him £120, and placing it in a neat cardboard box which I deposited in my dressing bag, I journeyed back to New York.

Arriving there, I proceeded to the Hotel Brunswick, and again re-questioning the hotel clerk, I deposited with him the cardboard box containing the nugget.

At the back of the desk in the hotel office stands the large iron safe in which the hotel clerk places any articles of value deposited with him by visitors to the hotel, and here I saw my cardboard box put away.

A stay of a few days was all I made prior to returning in the *Alaska*, and I remember that on the day she sailed I was somehow very much behindhand, and left the Brunswick in a great hurry. So much so that I forgot my nugget, and it was not until I was several streets away that I recollected it. I tore back, and the clerk opened the safe and handed me a box. Thanking him, I once more started off.

I will draw a veil over my passage home. It was winter, the voyage was very rough, and I was very ill. I hardly ever left my berth, and was entirely oblivious as to what happened to my belongings, which were scattered about all over the floor of my cabin. On my arrival at Liverpool, being still very weak, I scrambled them all together, and so they remained until I arrived at my chambers.

When I reached home, one of the first of a heap of telegrams and letters waiting for me that caught my eye was a cablegram. It was from the proprietor of the Hotel Brunswick in New York, and ran as follows: "Have given you wrong box. Do not part with it except as against your gold quartz."

This did not trouble me very much, and I only reviled the stupidity of the hotel clerk in giving me someone else's property, thinking of the trouble I should probably have in getting my own box and nugget in exchange for the box I had. Indeed, so little did I think of it that after a casual search for the box had ended unsuccessfully, owing to the mixed state in which my things were, thanks to the pitching of the *Alaska*, I postponed a further examination for a day or two.

A thorough overhauling ended in its discovery among some soiled linen, where it had probably fallen during the voyage. The box was almost identical with mine, but how different were the contents! I am no judge of precious stones, but I don't think I ever saw so magnificent a collection of unset pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds all jumbled together in this wretched box, barely strong enough, one would have thought, to have held a dozen collars together. I am a very cautious individual, and my first thought was to discover the worth of what struck even an ignoramus on the subject, like myself, as being exceedingly valuable.

I closed up the box again and took it to an old established jeweller in Bond Street, who confirmed my conjecture as to the jewels being exceedingly valuable. He made a schedule of the contents, and roughly valued them at forty thousand pounds. Then, with overcaution, I took the box, this time inclosed in a cash-box, to my bankers and left it with them.

My next step was to cable to the manager of the Brunswick, thus: "Have box safe; cable particulars," and waited events. In two days the reply came: "Morgan, owner of property, left by *Servia*. Do not part with box except against your nugget."

I would here ask you to remark the repetition of the instructions not to part with the property of this man, Morgan, until he handed over my box and the gold quartz. There was probably nothing in it, but it struck me as peculiar, and I again cabled to the Brunswick for more information. The answer came shortly and brusquely: "Deliver property to holder of your nugget."

I must confess that my cautious nature rebelled against delivering up such valuable articles to an unknown person, even though authorised to do so by such a respectable person as the landlord of the hotel, who, judging by his last cable, was evidently angry at my pertinacity.

On the arrival of the *Servia* at Queenstown the

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following Saturday, I received a telegram signed Morgan, informing me that he would be at my chambers the following Monday. Very reluctantly I withdrew the box from my bank, and bringing it home, had a last look at the gems. I had by now almost begun to look upon them as mine, and it was with a sigh that I returned them to their inclosure.

Punctually to his appointment did my visitor arrive, and my servant handed me a card, inscribed: "R. Morgan, Kansas City, U.S.A."

Morgan himself was an ordinary looking man, not undistinguishable from a score of other Americans I had seen in the bar at the Brunswick. He was fairly well dressed and possessed of easy manners. He handed me a note from the proprietor of the Brunswick, briefly introducing him as the owner of the property, and a dealer in precious stones, who brought my gold nugget against which I was to deliver his precious box. This seemed all right, and there was no doubt about my nugget, which he took out of the box and showed me. There seemed nothing left for me to do but to hand him the jewels, and yet, somehow, for the life of me, I could not prevail on myself to do so. I made the excuse that the stones were all safe at my banker's, and if he would call in a couple of days I should be happy to hand him his property.

He seemed somewhat surprised, and not a little vexed, which, perhaps, under the circumstances was natural, and before he left impressed upon me the necessity of his property being handed over when next he came.

After he had gone, I admit that I felt I had behaved somewhat foolishly. Everything seemed perfectly straightforward, and I had erred on the side of over-caution.

Morgan came punctually again, but this time he was less patient, and more fidgety than before, and evidently bore with my chatting with difficulty. Making an excuse, I left the room and quietly considered the matter, finally arriving at the conclusion that I had no excuse for not returning the property. This I at last proceeded to do, offering him as well some refreshment which he declined, politely, but firmly.

He was all through somewhat reticent, and surprised me by taking no trouble to verify the schedule of the stones, but one thing which puzzled me he easily explained. I could not understand why property of such value was carried in an ordinary cardboard box, a fit covering for a German toy or puzzle, but scarcely suitable for forty thousand pounds' worth of uncut stones. At my mention of their value his eyes certainly glistened, but his explanation was simple; there is an abnormally high duty on diamonds and precious stones imported into America, and dealers who go there often have to resort to all sorts of subterfuges to hoodwink the Customs officers. A cardboard box would be far more likely to escape the lynx-eyed searchers than a strong box. Finally we parted with every expression of goodwill, mutually regretting that we should both have incurred so much trouble through the stupid mistake of a hotel clerk.

* * * * *

It was the very next morning that I received another cable inquiring: "Do you know what is contained in Morgan's box?"

To this I replied as briefly as possible, and in the very smallest space of time imaginable came this dispatch: "Ten thousand dollars reward has been offered for his apprehension."

Scotland Yard had been duly informed, I learnt, and I ascertained, moreover, the full particulars of the case. Morgan had murdered and robbed a Maiden Lane jeweller, who had been his *compagnon de voyage*, and for weeks the New York police had been looking for him.

Inside of twenty-four hours the so-called Morgan was arrested at an obscure hotel in the East-end, and in due time was extradited.

What is, however, the curious part of the story is that the so-called Morgan with very little difficulty proved upon his trial that he was not the *compagnon de voyage* of the Maiden Lane jeweller and never saw him. Moreover, the Brunswick clerk swore positively that he was not the man he knew as Morgan, and that it was not he that deposited the box of gems in his keeping.

In consequence of this, the fellow was acquitted of the charge brought against him, and I believe the matter remains a mystery to the New York police to this day.

My own theory is that the accused man, while not the murderer of the jeweller, was a murderer, nevertheless, and that Morgan suffered the fate that he had inflicted upon the original owner of the gems.

I argue that when the real Morgan discovered that he had been left with the wrong box, he made a tremendous fuss in the bar of the Brunswick, and, no doubt, any number of strangers heard the facts, and even witnessed the writing and dispatch of the cable to me. Morgan was then watched, and when murdered, the letter of introduction, his card-case and papers, and, above all, the box containing the nugget, were taken from his body.

J. E. C.

Post-Card Competition.—No. 3.

A Guinea is offered to the first person who points out the longest word in this issue of *Short Stories* (not including cover) in which no letter occurs with a tail or a head—such as p, b, t, d, j. Example words: occurs, issue, manners. The word selected, *written on a post-card* (letters will be disqualified), should reach *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., not later than Monday, July 20th.

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BY MISS WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

PAUPER BLUE BLOOD.

SUMMARY.

Georgina Pluff is a governess in the employ of the Ravenscrofts. Her charge is Eva, daughter of Sir Reginald and Lady Ravenscroft. Sefton, the only son, is engaged to Lady Norah Cannington, whose father, hearing on good authority of Sir Reginald's impending ruin, compels his daughter to write a letter to Sefton, saying that the engagement must be broken off. Before the financial crash arrives, Sir Reginald commits suicide in his own grounds, and Sefton's cup of bitterness is filled by the arrival of Lady Norah's letter.

CHAPTER IV.

The Sins of the Father.

Surely in the whole world there could not have been a sadder home than Ravenscroft Park. Not only had death lowered the blinds and darkened the doors, but death self-inflicted, and the utterly unexpected loss of wealth accompanying it.

Sefton had not torn the heartless note from Lady Norah, and flung it aside in disgust, he was too numb and petrified for anger. He folded it with trembling fingers, and placed it against his heart, feeling that everything in life had ended for him, the worst had come, he was broken—crushed—done for. It mattered not now what became of him, he felt reckless, desperate. Norah loved him no more—Norah was false. She would smile into other eyes, other lips would press the soft, sweet cheek. She would be the wife of another man. Oh! hateful thought, unbearable, galling. But for his great reverence and affection for his mother, and the memory of those haunting words: "Guard well the good old name," he would gladly have sought the gloomy spot on which his father died, and followed that parent's example.

Instead, he curbed the frantic longing, replaced mechanically his signet ring on his finger, and opened letters of condolence without grasping their meaning. It was always another ending, a different signature, he saw photographed in words of flame above the actual writing.

"Yours no longer,

"Norah Cannington."

Miss Pluff kept her room till after Sir Reginald's body had been laid in the ground, then she demanded a private interview with his son.

The request astonished him, for he had hoped she would leave quietly without showing her face again, and the idea of talking to her was distasteful to Sefton.

However, he came at her bidding, thinking to save his mother unpleasantness, and intending to request her to leave without bidding Lady Ravenscroft good-bye.

He found Miss Pluff standing in a defiant attitude in the middle of the room, gowned in black, her face strikingly

Sefton bowed his head.

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pale and altered, her hair dressed becomingly, her hands clasped.

She looked straight into his eyes without wavering, advanced a step, then addressed him in a low, determined voice:

"I want to speak to you," she said, "*seriously*, on a very important matter."

Sefton bowed his head. He did not wish her the conventional "Good-morning."

"First of all, let me tell you how deeply I feel with you for the great calamity that has fallen upon this house."

He held up his hand.

"I have no need of sympathy from *you*."

His tone was hard, he had set his face like a flint, and no sign or ordinary courtesy betrayed itself. A faint flush crept into the governess's cheeks.

"Very well," she retorted, drawing herself up. "Perhaps it may surprise you to hear that Sir Reginald had taken me entirely into his confidence. While you were all living on in blissful ignorance, I *knew* that ruin was impending, but my counsel and advice were useless, I could only comfort and console. I have all Sir Reginald's secrets, I know the reason of his suicide, with its accompanying disgrace. Oh! yes, you would hush it up and keep it from the world. You are proud, you Ravenscrofts, but even your high standard must fall beneath the glaring light which *I* could throw on your father's past! Listen," and she glanced round as if the very walls had ears, then stealing to his side, with the strange slouching step that Lady Norah had remarked upon, she whispered something in his ear.

The young baronet started, his face paled, in his excitement he seized her shoulder, and stared down into her eyes.

"You know *that!*" he muttered fiercely.

"Yes, and more."

"Then for the sake of the woman you have wronged; whose husband you would have stolen; for the sake of the little girl he loved; in respect for the dead; in pity for the living; never let it pass your lips again."

Miss Pluff's strange face smiled, yet at the same time the expression was so intensely sad, that even Sefton marvelled at it.

"You—you want a bribe?" he asked. "Money?"

She shook her head.

"Oh! no. I have not forgotten the loss of your fortune. But I still remember that the name of Ravenscroft is dear to me—that the blue blood, paupered though it be, runs in your veins. I care not for wealth, but I want position. Give me this as the price of my silence, or, as there is a heaven above, your father's memory shall be disgraced; his name dragged through the mire!"

She spoke vehemently; the fires of Hell seemed alight in her eyes, the gaunt form swayed and quivered, while her hands clung to Sefton's arms, as a vampire clutching its victim.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, too thunderstruck to push her from him.

"*Mean!*" she laughed wildly; "that I demand marriage with you, Sir Sefton, that you will have to make *me* Lady Ravenscroft to save the family honour!"

He gazed at her like one demented—the power of speech fled. Her long fingers were still seizing his sleeve.

"See," she whispered, "that will explain all. Who will question my despair at witnessing the shocking scene of my lover's father, shot dead in his own grounds. Was it not natural, that being hysterical, I lost my head, and mingled my grief with his?"

As Sefton listened, he sifted the complicated situation in his mind with sudden, calm deliberation. The honour of the Ravenscrofts lay in the hands of Georgina Pluff. A great, a tremendous, sacrifice on his part alone could save it. His life was nothing to him now, but the name was everything. Norah had given him up, she cared no longer. His love had been heedlessly cast aside, henceforth all natural affection in him was dead, except the love he bore his mother. To save her husband's memory from a slur, to obey his father's last command, surely this must bring some faint compensation, some atom of relief to his over-wrought and strained senses. Besides which, pique crept in, the

"Have you nothing more to say?"

thought of the false and heartless Lady Norah. Why should *she* guess his sufferings?

He turned to the woman, and glanced at her weird, magnetic smile. It filled his soul with repugnance.

"Is there no other way?"

"None. Your wife, or your enemy? Which is it to be?"

"Give me time to consider."

"*This* is the time," she answered. "Leave me without your promise, and I go from your house to-day, this very hour, and Sir Reginald's secrets go with me. The society papers are always glad of information regarding the blue blood of England. Make me one of yourselves, and I will guard your family secrets as my own life. Sefton, you cannot refuse!"

A terrible crisis was at hand. The man was young, and sorely tried, shaken by recent storms, reckless and bewildered.

The necessity for this sacrifice came almost as a relief. He heaved a deep sigh and thrust her from him.

"I promise," he muttered. "You ask a long price—a life-time. Do you realise what it means?"

"Perfectly."

A strange betrothal, truly! The woman trembling and triumphant, the man cold, with a terribly passive expression in his white face, turning away without another word from his newly-affianced wife.

"Have you nothing more to say?" she asked as he reached the door.

He glanced back.

"No."

"Your word is your bond, Sefton. I can trust it."

The Christian name jarred on him from her lips. It seemed impertinent and unnecessary at that moment.

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"Yes, you may rely on my promise, Miss Pluff. It is the old story—the sins of the fathers upon the children!"

Then he closed the door softly after him and walked dizzily down the passage.

"I have made a bargain with a female fiend," he muttered. "I have sold myself to the Devil."

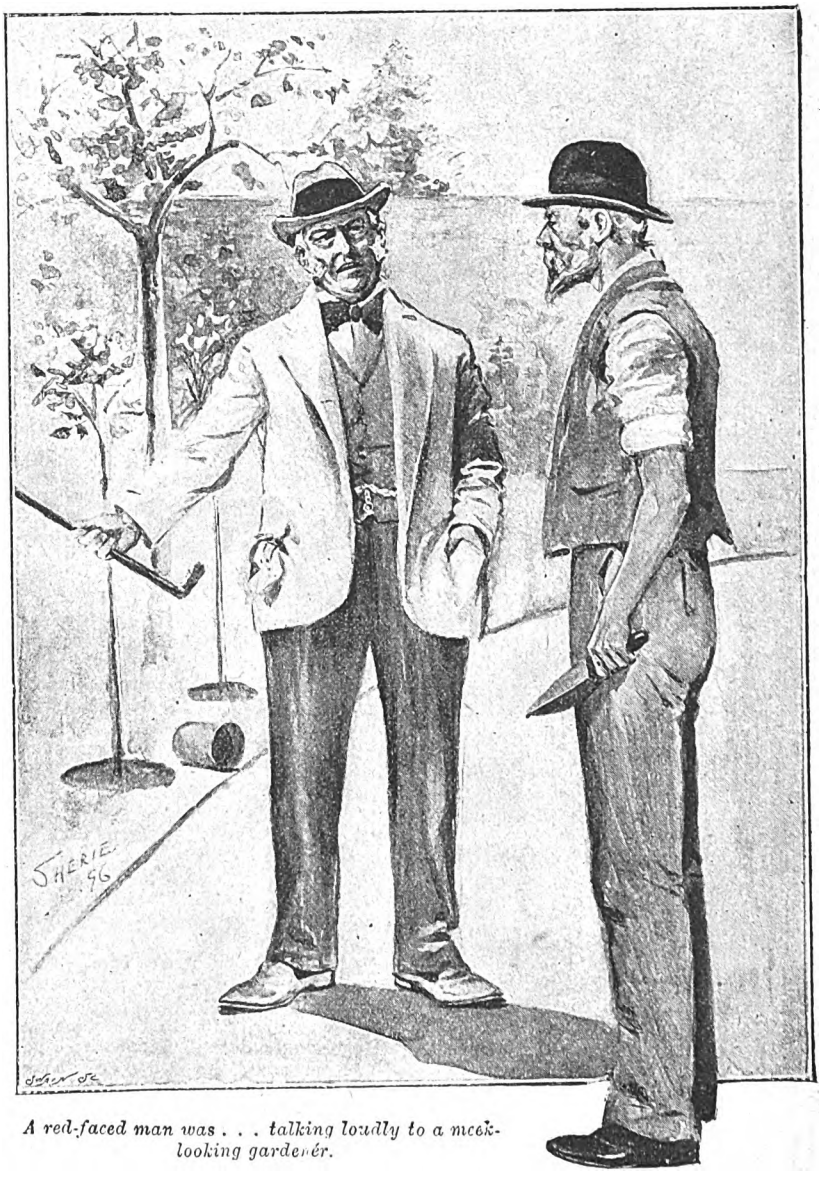
This tragic idea appealed to his morbid feelings as he remembered Lady Norah's words: "I have a presentiment about that woman—something evil."

It was Lady Norah who had driven him to destruction; he laid the wreck of his life at her door.

How could he guess at that very moment she, too, prayed for death in the midst of a merry house party at Worboise Manor? When her friends remarked on her depression she merely said: "The Ravenscrofts are in trouble. I knew them so well. I was thinking of that shocking suicide."

One or two whispered that she had broken the son's heart, and was troubled for once by remorse, but no one knew the truth. The world seldom gets to the bottom of anything, and what it sees on the surface is very far from the mark.

"Young Sefton Ravenscroft was one of Norah's latest victims," said a light-hearted girl to a hard-hearted youth; "she numbers him now among the slain. Norah has no *feeling*, and she left off her conscience with pinafores. Yet even then it was a trial to keep it clean."



A red-faced man was . . . talking loudly to a meek-looking gardener.

But what of Miss Pluff in her hour of victory, left as she was, mistress of the situation?

She stood listening to Sefton's retreating footsteps like a creature turned to stone, though a thousand thoughts darted through her brain. Was it possible that she had ever loved? Could this pitiless erring woman have cherished a tender affection, remembered a good day in the dark years that were gone? Once as a little child she recollected vaguely that someone had been kind, a dying man on a bed, she called him "father." He kissed her, and held her to his heart, whispering: "Be good, Georgie." Just three words that meant to her then "don't get into bad tempers, and scratch your nurse."

Then came a long and loveless blank till the passionate devotion for Sir Reginald had poisoned all that was pure in her nature, and cast her back upon the world raging against cruel crushing fate.

Now the current changed again into swift exciting waters. *She* was to be Lady Ravenscroft, one of a select circle, nearly related to some of the highest families, and pose as the sweet young wife who had taken pity on Sir Sefton in his poverty. Visions of the great people who would receive her, the grand houses at which she would visit stirred her blood.

These bracing fancies brought back the warm flow of life to her veins.

She looked only on the side that pleased her imagination.

Georgina Pluff had no fear, she would desecrate her womanhood without a sigh, violate sacred matrimony, and holy motherhood.

She neither flinched nor wavered as she turned over in her mind the recent scene with the man she had claimed for her husband.

"Would he grow in time to regard her tenderly?" she asked herself. "Could the kiss of emotion ever pass from his lips to hers?"

Candidly she confessed that it was not only unlikely, but, under the circumstances, practically impossible.

"Henceforth, good-bye, romance," cried Georgina, dashing a burning tear from her eye, and laughing harshly.

She sank into a low chair, rested her elbows on her knees, and pressed her sharp chin upon her knuckles.

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"Lady Ravenscroft, Georgina, that is your future name and title! He is yours! You have played your cards well."

"*Sefton Ravenscroft to Georgina Pluff.*" She fancied she read the announcement in the Times. It sent a wave of joy through her system, a smile to her narrow lips.

CHAPTER V.

The New Lady Ravenscroft.

A red-faced man was standing by a flower-bed, pointing with a thick stick, and talking loudly to a meek-looking gardener.

"What's the good," he thundered, "of keeping four of you chaps loafing round this garden, if you can't so much as *weed?* You don't think I'm going to pay you to play, do you? No doubt it's very nice sitting and smoking in the arbour, but I've got six acres of ground round my house, you'll be pleased to remember, and there are plenty of men out of employment in Clapham, who would be glad to step into your shoes."

Having delivered this tirade, he struck the offending weeds with his stick, and turned away towards the house.

John Pluff was a retired grocer; he gave up a thriving business in Sydenham, when his father, an old miner, died and left him an unexpected fortune.

A widower and childless, he settled down in a large house at Clapham, and was on the look-out for a second wife.

He had no relations except a half-starved nephew, whom he refused to help, for having committed the dire offence of marrying a penniless street singer at the age of seventeen, and Georgina, the child of his cousin, Gabriel Pluff, an orphan, earning her living as a governess.

Georgina had always hated John Pluff's vulgarity. The grocer's shop stuck in her throat—she could not gulp it down. Besides, she felt that he despised her for her poverty and had no pity for her orphanhood. They never corresponded, and it was with intense surprise that he had opened a letter announcing her engagement to Sir Sefton Ravenscroft.

The news swelled his heart with vaulting pride, his eyes rolled in their fat rims, he smacked his knee with his broad palm. Snobbish visions floated through John Pluff's uneducated brain. He heard himself saying to his friends in trade: "My cousin, Lady Ravenscroft," watching for the effect of the words exultantly. She should be his dear, adopted daughter, his favourite little Georgie! So he wrote a long effusion, giving her an open invitation to come to Queen's Gate House, his residence at Clapham, and asking her what gift would be most acceptable in her new position. Georgina promptly replied, "a cheque," and John Pluff instantly forwarded £1,000 for "my lady's trousseau."

He was thinking of Georgina as he stumped round his six acres and grumbled at the gardeners.

A hansom cab drove through the gates. He watched it with a sense of irritation.

"I know it's that pushing widow, Mrs. Pilpack, again," he muttered to himself. "She has an eye to my money-bags, the ugly old hag. If I marry, it will be youth and beauty my coin shall purchase, not dyed locks and painted lips."

A servant in livery came hurrying across the lawn.

"Well, well. Who's after me now?" asked Mr. Pluff irritably, having caught sight of a skirt passing through the doorway.

"Lady Ravenscroft, sir."

"*Lady Ravenscroft!*"

His eyes dilated, then rubbing his hands together and chuckling, he strutted across the lawn.

"I hope you showed her into my largest drawing-room," he said, as the servant followed him.

"Yes, sir."

"My dearest Georgina!" cried Mr. Pluff, kissing the new Lady Ravenscroft on both cheeks, "at last I hold you in my arms, my sweet, beautiful girl!"

She freed herself from his embrace, and smiled faintly.

"How is it you never asked your devoted old cousin to the wedding? Eh, Georgie?" chucking her under the chin.

"Simply because we were married at a registry office, discarding ceremony and pomp. My husband and his family have not yet fully recovered from the shock of poor Sir Reginald's death, though, of course, their grief cannot last for ever, and," with rather a strained laugh, "we are cheering up!"

"Well, I congratulate you. Who would have thought you'd have been booked by a baronet? A clever girl, as sharp as they make 'em. You must give me your 'usband's pedigree. I want to learn it off by heart. It's something to be related to the aristocracy, and not to be despised. It gives you a standing in Society. But you look pinched and pale, Georgina. Here, Edward, bring my lady a glass of wine."

"No, thanks, Cousin John, tea, if you don't mind, and then when there are no servants within earshot, I should be glad of a little quiet conversation with you on family matters."

"My dearest Georgina!"

Mr. Pluff drew his chair forward, and surveyed her approvingly.

"That's a very 'andsome gown!" he said. "Georgina, your figure's improved."

"I have to thank you for a decent trousseau, and a nice little sum of money in hand," she replied; "your cheque was a Godsend."

"Don't mention it, my dear. I thought a 'thou' might come in handy, and it's nothing to me," with an airy wave of his hand, and a widening of his chest. "Now here's a cup of the finest brew you could get in the country. Drink it down 'ot, and see if you don't feel twice as fit in a jiffy."

Georgina obeyed. His vulgarity was appalling, but she thought of his fortune, and murmured a compliment on the tea.

"Of course, as you know, *I* always have everything of the best."

He folded his hands, and ran through the wines in his cellar—their merit and price. "I bought up all Lord D——'s old port after his death. He left his widow a pauper, and she's in one of them Royal workhouses. That is the worst of some of these ancient families, they are as poor as Church mice, and as proud as peacocks."

"No wonder," put in Lady Ravenscroft, "they have their blue blood."

"Yes, and hard cash won't buy *that*," he replied solemnly. "But I never thought I should see a 'Pluff' with an 'andle to her name. But come, you were going to talk over your private affairs."

Georgina replaced her cup on the silver tray, and drew down her veil again.

"I suppose you know that the Ravenscrofts lost the greater bulk of their fortune at Sir Reginald's death."

"Yes, I gathered as much from the papers."

"I could not bear for Sefton to part with the old family

place, such a noble house, with miles of land, an estate that has been handed down from generation to generation from time immemorial. So sooner than put Ravenscroft Park on the market, we decided to retrench, and scrape along as best we could on his small income. Already I am beginning to see the folly of being over-housed and under-servanted, the misery of beholding the beautiful grounds ill-kept, the loneliness of rooms uninhabited. The grass is let out, except just what my husband requires for his animals. Poor boy! He is trying to make a little extra money by training young horses, breaking them in himself, and selling them at a profit. He is the most reckless rider imaginable. I always expect to hear he has broken his neck."

He placed his bulgy form beside her.

"Dear!, *dear!*" ejaculated Mr. Pluff.

"Oh! my life is not all a bed of roses. I have countless anxieties. Probably, if we could bring ourselves to live in a small house, in some quiet unostentatious suburb, we should be happier in the long run. But Ravenscroft in its beauty and dignity shall rot and decay before my eyes, its ancestral towers fall about my head, sooner than pass into alien hands, to parvenu purchasers."

She rose with a tragic gesture that impressed John Pluff deeply.

"I *can't* give it up," she continued. "I *must* cling to it, keep it, for Sefton's heir. Think, Cousin John, if a son should ever crown our married bliss, what it would mean to him—the future baronet—to find that his estates had been sold, his rightful inheritance given up to others."

The retired grocer warmed to the subject, catching Georgina's enthusiasm.

"Stick to the old place like gum, my girl. You've caught the true spirit of the aristocrat, and if you ever let Ravenscroft Park slip through your fingers, well, you won't be a Pluff. We have no blue blood in our veins, worse luck, still we've noble instincts to appreciate it, and we hang on to a good thing when we have it."

"Besides," continued Georgina warily, "fortunes change, and Sefton has so many rich relations who any day might leave him a legacy."

She looked shyly under her eyelashes at "Cousin John."

"Well, if you come to wealthy relations, guess you are as well off in that respect as Sir Sefton."

"Yes, indeed. I often boast of you to my husband."

"No, now, do you really?" with a bland smile. "And what about your ma-in-law? Do she cotton to you?"

"Oh! the Dowager Lady Ravenscroft is a very charming woman, but just a little jealous of me I fancy, resents her son's affection straying from herself. She lives in town on her own income with her daughter. She would dearly have loved to keep poor Sefton tied to the strings of her widow's cap. I must say he is a very devoted son, and visits her constantly. At present she does not come to Ravenscroft Park, as the associations are so painful. Her husband's suicide was a shock from which I fear she will never really recover."

"You don't say! Poor creature! I suppose she won't be looking out for a second, eh? A rich man who could set her on her feet again. Ah! no," catching sight of Georgina's horrified expression, "it would not do for two of the Pluffs to marry into the same family."

"Cousin John, you—you don't contemplate a second union?"

She asked the question anxiously.

"Well, and why not? I'm a hale, healthy man, with plenty of 'oof' to back me up. There's many a fine lass that would look upon me favourably."

"Ah! I see you are unselfish, you would share your wealth with another, some young extravagant beauty, who will squander it right and left, and marry you simply for what you can give her."

A pang of fear shot through John Pluff's soul. Her words had a ring of truth in them. He fidgeted in his blue satin chair.

"Perhaps you are right. I shan't decide in a hurry. I've only to say the word to get a dozen of 'em."

"Yes. I should be sorry to see you caught by a designing fortune-hunter."

Georgina rose.

"I must return," she said, "for Sefton is to meet me by the six o'clock train. He is spending an hour or so with his mother. Perhaps you would drive me to Waterloo. I should like to see your carriage and pair."

Mr. Pluff rang the bell. "Certainly, but I trust next time you will bring your luggage, and do me the honour to stay. I shall be proud and 'appy to entertain the pair of you. There's not a house in Europe where you will be better waited on. For comfort and good living my establishment can't be beaten, and you can tell your husband so. By-the-way, Georgie, my love, I'd like to have a look at the old ancestral mansion, though it is running to seed. I won't put you to any inconvenience, nor shall my visit cause you any expense. You are not above receiving a little present from Cousin John, I'm sure. He hasn't too many relations to spend his money on. Of course, when it comes to friends, well, they swarms like a lot of bees. But it don't do to be too generous to outsiders, for you never know when you are being taken in."

Georgina nodded.

"Very true," she declared. "Don't let people sit upon you. Now you are living in affluence, free from the atmosphere of shop and trade, drop those old acquaintances and leech-like hangers on, who would drain you of your very life blood. A man in your position cannot be too careful."

"Lor', what a wiseacre you've grown! But here are my two classy chestnuts. There's breeding in them, if you like; and that barouche is fit for a queen to ride in."

"But, Cousin John, *why* on earth have you given the men cockades?"

"Thought they looked well. Some folks say it's for the army and navy, but that's just because they are green with envy. Not having carringes themselves, and don't know nothing about it. Mr. Clay, the chemist at Sydenham, he calls me 'the Colonel.' There, step in, Georgina, and see if it is not the easiest seat you have ever fitted your back into."

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Lady Ravenscroft's heart sank. This was the man who had invited himself to Ravenscroft Park, the only relation she had to produce, a necessary incumbrance if she was to make him her banker.

He placed his bulgy form beside her, and the horses dashed away.

CHAPTER VI.

"I WANT YOU, SEFTON."

LADY RAVENSCROFT steadied herself against a gate, and placed her hand over her eyes.

"I can't bear to watch," she said. "Sefton is very cruel to cause me such terror and anxiety. He has absolutely no consideration for his wife or his life. That horse killed two grooms in Will Thompson's stables before he let Sefton have it."

The Hon. Douglas Shirling reassured Lady Ravenscroft, declaring that her husband had the mare thoroughly in hand, and that once he taught it manners, the beast would fetch a long price.

Nevertheless, he followed the rider's every movement with anything but a happy expression on his face.

Surely, he thought, Sefton must be mad to ride an untamed animal in the park—a bolt under the trees would mean certain death.

Douglas Shirling was one of the few friends Sir Sefton asked to the house since his marriage with Georgina Pluff. The men were the same age, and had been at College together.

Douglas was the only person outside his family to whom, in old days, he confided his secret engagement to Lady Norah. Douglas knew the Cannington's well, and had promised to be Sefton's best man.

Of course he guessed that Lady Norah proved fickle, and the governess, doubtless through sympathy, had caught the young baronet's heart in the rebound. Yet he instinctively disliked the new Lady Ravenscroft, and wondered that Sefton had allowed himself to be entrapped by her.

"His recklessness is positively suicidal," said Georgina, turning away. "But I'm tired of talking. Sefton never pays any heed to my wishes."

"Are you going in?"

"Yes. What is the good of standing here with my heart in my mouth? If Sefton is to be thrown, I would rather not see."

She walked slowly towards the house, vexed with Douglas Shirling for not following her.

He remained leaning on the gate, till Sefton rejoined him, pale with heat.

"What's the sense of risking your life?" said his friend, as they strolled through the grounds together. "It hardly seems worth it! I would ride anything within reason, but that mare will need a bit of breaking before you've done with her. I declare once or twice I thought she had got the better of you."

"Come into my study and have a smoke," said Sefton, passing through a long French window, and flinging himself into the chair in which his father sat the night before he died, contemplating the dread unknown. This room was so strongly associated with Reginald Ravenscroft, that Georgina never entered it without a shiver.

"Perhaps," said Sefton, his eyes wandering round the familiar walls, "the suicidal mania is in our family."

Douglas eyed him critically. He noticed the restless flash in his friend's eye, the drawn lines round his mouth, that should not have been there.

Sefton was wretched with his wife—anyone could see that!

"Don't let yourself get morbid," advised Mr. Shirling, forcing a laugh.

"Morbid! That's hardly the word, old chap. Morbid temperaments are often the happiest, *they* glory in their sorrows, and feast upon them with pleasurable relish. It is not my father's death I dwell upon. I do not revel in pointing out the spot on which he shot himself, nor plague my acquaintances with details of that horrible never-to-be-forgotten night. I want to put it all away from my mind. Believe me, the living sorrows, the daily, hourly regrets, are more haunting and terrible than all the ghosts of the past. When a man is ever face to face with his own madness and folly, the consequences of which go on—on—night and day. Bah! what am I saying?"

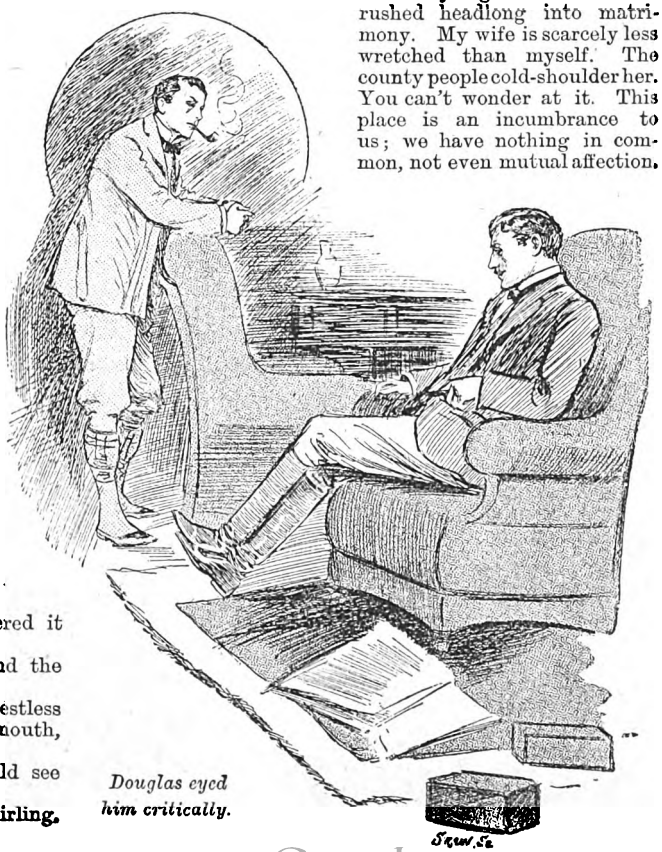
He broke off shortly, the pipe he had lit went out unnoticed between his pale lips, his hands hung limply on each side of the chair, as if dead, impassive and nerveless.

Douglas Shirling was one of those quiet listeners who instinctively inspire confidence. He had never known trouble himself, his life had been a straight rose-path, made easy by wealth, health, and a calm naturally happy nature, moulded in the lap of luxury. Yet he could give sympathy so genuine, so unassuming, that those who had once received it, sought it again and again.

"Oh, don't mind me, old fellow," said Douglas consolingly. "I can see you are in low water. I know you're not happy. I only wish I could do anything to——"

He stopped speaking, amazed at the look of bitter hatred that crossed his friend's face.

"You have guessed it then," said Sefton. "This miserable spun-out existence with a woman I cannot love, nor even respect. Ah, Douglas, I can trust you. I would not breath a word of this to another living soul—it is the secret of my life—a load of humiliation. I am chained down, body and soul. No wonder that danger is welcome—that I crave for death itself. I was not in my right senses when I rushed headlong into matrimony. My wife is scarcely less wretched than myself. The county people cold-shoulder her. You can't wonder at it. This place is an incumbrance to us; we have nothing in common, not even mutual affection.



Douglas eyed him critically.

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Ah, you look surprised. I know what you would ask. Why on earth did I do it? I'm not at liberty to explain. The iron entered into my soul when Norah Cannington went out of my life. I cared for nothing. I was hopeless —desperate! They say she will marry the Duke of Malvern; he is always at Rosemont. A brainless boy, insipid and weak-eyed, prematurely aged by outrageous dissipations, a creature unworthy to tie her shoe lace. It is too revolting to think of!"

She looked unutterably charming, lounging upon a window seat.

"Serve her right," muttered Douglas Shirling. "No fate is bad enough for a woman who wantonly breaks true hearts for a pastime. Lady Norah has absolutely no feeling, she is noted for her heartlessness. Whoever she marries she will wreck. Don't regret her, Sefton. She is not worth a sigh."

"Love clings fast, you cannot tear it out, trample it under foot for the bidding. Though your higher nature may rebel at cleaving to what is false, the lower nature will get the better of it, and kiss the very dust. By-the-way, you must go to the Cannington's, you promised them yesterday on the station."

"Oh! I can't stand the old man, and Lady Norah drives me wild. After the way she treated you, I can hardly bring myself to be civil to her."

"Well, go this afternoon and leave a card. There is a flower show at the Grange, and Lady Cannington is giving away the prizes. They will all be out."

Douglas Shirling caught at the idea.

He finished his smoke and changed the conversation to pleasanter subjects.

Then he whirled away on a machine to Rosemont, with knit brows and resentful thoughts for his friend's shattered career.

Lord and Lady Cannington, he was informed, were out, but Lady Norah was at home, and a moment later he found himself in her presence.

She looked unutterably charming, lounging upon a window seat, scribbling with a silver pencil shaped like an axe, on a sheet of notepaper. Her face was graver than usual, and the smile of welcome she gave Mr. Shirling had a wintry air about it. He fancied the pressure of her hand was more fervent than of yore, and that she paled at sight of him. He noticed a full-length portrait of the Duke of Malvern on Lady Norah's piano in a silver frame. His christian name was written across the corner of the photograph, the thin, straggling fist being characteristic of the man.

"You have shattered my poetic muse," she said, holding up the paper reproachfully. "I was just inspired."

"Penning odes to broken hearts?" he asked, a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"Yes," looking him straight in the eyes. "How did you know?"

He had not expected this answer, and hesitated before replying lamely:

"Oh! poetry is generally demoralising."

"Do you think so? I consider it is rather elevating to contemplate sorrow, especially if you can put it into verse."

"It is practically impossible," declared Douglas Shirling, "to write of a sensation that you have never experienced. You need a broken heart yourself before you can analyse the sufferings of others."

A strange expression flitted across Norah Cannington's face, quite enigmatical, a puzzle to the man. Her lips parted as if to speak, but she closed them again in silence, and crumpled the writing in her hand.

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She knew instinctively that he disliked her. It is easily discerned, unmistakably felt by sensitive impressionable natures. The knowledge, however, did not displease, though it certainly astonished Lady Norah.

People who are habitually worshipped by those around them, appreciate the novelty of a hostile attitude, it is at once diverting and interesting. Besides this, she knew the reason of Mr. Shirling's changed manner, and admired him for it.

"You are staying at Ravenscroft Park?" she said at last, breaking a rather embarrassing pause. "The place is very altered, don't you think?"

She leant forward as she spoke and raised her eyebrows inquiringly.

"Sefton is very altered, if you mean that," replied the man mercilessly.

"Ah! Sefton—yes," catching her breath, "poor fellow! He has had more than his share of sorrow. The kicks of the world are very hard, and they bruise deeply. I am so sorry for him."

Mr. Shirling stared at her amazed. How dare she *pity* Sefton, and before him too, when she herself had caused the sharpest pain—dealt the most lasting blow. His heart swelled with resentment, he looked up and saw the tears in her eyes. The sight of them softened him, till he remembered they could be but crocodile tears.

"You are right," he answered, "fate has been exceptionally cruel to our friend at Ravenscroft Park. More than one of the kicks you mention came when he was already down."

"I know what you think," said Lady Norah, her eyes suddenly flashing, "that *I* was to blame. It is very natural; perhaps, too, you are right. I like you for your staunch friendship to Sefton—your changed feelings to me. It shows that you have his happiness really at heart—that you are loyal and true. We are alone. I always speak plainly. You know that Sefton and I were all the world to one another. Then can you explain, why, if he loved me, he married that woman whose name was tainted already by scandal—a woman that people receive on sufferance, and to whom his mother can barely bring herself to speak?"

"Because he was mad!" muttered Douglas Shirling. "*You* drove him out of his senses for the time, and in some mysterious way that creature got hold of him. You left him a prey to an adventuress!"

Lady Norah shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

"If it could be undone," she said. "Marriage is so dreadfully final. It seems to end everything. I have such a horror, such a terror of it."

"Because you have never really loved."

"Is that the reason?" lowering her eyes lest he should read the anguish in their depths.

"Undoubtedly."

How little he guessed the bitterness of her soul. The thought of Georgina Pluff revolted her. She was madly jealous, miserably faithful to her old passion. Yet, like a ship driven of strong winds, she felt herself swept on into swift currents and deep channels, her father's strong will ever at the helm. Instinctively her eyes wandered to that portrait on the piano—her pictured destiny.

Douglas Shirling made an effort to steer their conversation away from personalities.

"Why are you alone?" he asked. "It is unusual to find you in solitude."

"I stayed in," she answered apathetically, "because I am expecting the Duke of Malvern."

Her visitor rose abruptly. She understood the stiff handshake.

"How long are you staying at Ravenscroft Park?"

"Only a day or two."

"Be good to Sefton."

Then she turned to the window and watched him down the drive.

"Oh, I want you, I want you, Sefton!" she moaned. But the sinister face of Georgina Pluff rose before her vision, and the Duke of Malvern was announced.

(To be continued.)

RESULT of PICTURE PUZZLE COMPETITION,

No. 8.

A LARGE proportion of the attempts in this competition were correct, and the prize has been awarded to Mr. George D. Taylor, 28, Ernest Street, Rhyl, North Wales, whose pictute was considered the neatest. Consolation Prizes have been sent to:

W. H. Dodson, 109, Leith Street, Edinburgh; T. N. Crowle, R.N., 43, Portland Road, Devonport; W. H. Barrett, 73, Tindal Street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham; F. Chapman, 47, Union Place, Stonehouse, Devon; A. N. Ward, The Firs, Essex Road, Enfield; D. Webb, Barnwell Junction, Cambridge; W. Binmore, The Cottage, Lyncombe, Torquay, Devonshire; A. Hodge, 1, Springfield Gardens, Upper Clapton, N.E.; H. W. Tinsley, 46, Rye Lane, Peckham, S.E.; Miss M. Clark, 12, Cloudesdale Road, Balham, S.W.; J. A. Rigg, 14, Newport Road, Manningham, Bradford; A. W. Rowe, New Road, Lower Edmonton; W. J. Spearing, Glenarm House, Shaw, near Oldham; Miss Beddre, 4, Globe Place, Clissold Park, Stoke Newington; R. T. Wall, 54, Burlington Street, Liverpool; J. Baker, 4, Argyle Street, Darwen, Lancashire; F. Grant, 12, Orchard Road, Plumstead, Kent; Mrs. M. Anderson, 4, Back Lane, Frances Street, Woolwich; H. Anderson, Naval Ordnance Office, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich; C. C. Hayter, 3, St. Mark's Terrace, Nichol's Town, Southampton; T. A. Auckland, 11, Mastyn Road, Brixton; S. H. Futt, 56, High Street, Old Brompton, Kent; B. Willman, 114, Eversley Street, Liverpool; Miss E. Olver, Lansdowne Villa, Newton Abbot, South Devon; Mrs. E. Davis, 13, Barbican Terrace, Barnstable, North Devon; G. S. Carlton, 1, Berridge Street, Leicester.

KEY.

35	23	6	37	41	18	69	14
54	2	51	83	8	28	21	40
38	3	16	39	63	68	43	9
71	55	15	32	5	45	18	25
10	48	58	12	1	66	30	67
4	46	57	53	73	34	33	27
70	11	82	24	99	86	20	65
42	52	76	78	62	69	75	17
69	08	22	85	60	72	84	44
59	47	64	19	62	77	88	19
7	97	13	88	18	82	50	74

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A FALSE ALARM.

Although a naturally good fellow, Saint-Perix went home in a very bad humour. He had been utterly cleaned out at the club. The worst luck! he had not won once in three hours. At last he threw down the cards and left, vowing that never again would he be found seated at the card table.

Ensconced in a cab, he said to himself, with sullen anger, that all this would never have happened if the Countess had not had a headache—her eternal headache—and they would have gone to the opera together and yawned in company throughout the performance, as they always did on Fridays. Mechanically he thought of the story they had told him of Montescourt one evening at the club. It was almost a farce, what with Montescourt's simplicity, his wife's perpetual indisposition whenever she was called on to accompany her husband to a ball or the theatre, and the handsome young man—like a hero of light opera—who made the third in the *dramatis personæ*.

Could it possibly be that the Countess was playing the same trick on him to be alone and free for an entire evening? Was not that headache a mere pretext. One by one a thousand forgotten details came back to his memory. He recalled that fashionable bazaar for the benefit of the inundated Madagascans, where, having neither rose-buds nor satchet bags to sell, Mme. de Saint-Perix had offered her bare arm to be kissed at twenty-five louis a kiss.

The receipts had been enormous. He remembered the interminable walks she had taken in the country with her cousin Max; a ball where she had danced four waltzes with the same partner; a letter that she had burned, with deep emotion, some days latter.

All these phantoms dazed and excited him.

"Fool that I am!" he burst out at last, "to think of such things. The Countess is an angel in her conduct, and she would never——"

He shrugged his shoulders and did not finish the sentence.

The cab stopped before his house. Saint-Perix entered. The gas was extinguished, the servants had gone to bed. The house was wrapped in silent peace.

"Evidently," said he, "I was not expected home so early." And, lighting a match, he proceeded to his wife's chamber, happy at the thought of surprising her in her sleep.

He crossed the ante-chamber, pushed aside the *portière* of the boudoir, and recoiled, startled, livid, as if he had seen a terrible vision.

He had seen a man in the Countess's apartment—a sort of Romeo, of aristocratic bearing, crisp curling hair, and irreproachably dressed.

"So," muttered the husband, "I was not mistaken."

He approached the man, his hands clenched, menacing, pale with anger.

"Will you inform me what you are doing here, sir, in my house?"

"I have no reply to make," stammered the other.

"Scoundrel! I find you at night in my wife's apartment."

"I can say nothing, sir. If you consider yourself aggrieved, I am at your orders."

He extended to Saint-Perix a card, which fell to the floor, and with the other hand he drew from his pocket an elegant little revolver, and, saluting ceremoniously, he said: "Whenever you choose. The Baron San-Leone, Hotel Bristol. It is too late to prolong this conversation—so farewell, till we meet again." And he hastened from the house without awaiting Saint-Perix's reply.

The latter, stupefied, leant with both hands upon a chair to keep from falling. All seemed red before his eyes. He felt that he would go mad—a terrible sense of desolation seemed to crush him down.

"I shall kill him!" he cried, at length; "as for her, I shall attend to her later."

He picked up his card and hastened to the club to choose his seconds.

"A duel to the death," he told them, "and the sooner the better."

* * * * *

The next afternoon, at four o'clock, the seconds came to give an account of their mission to the unhappy husband.

"We presented ourselves," said one of them, "at the hotel indicated on the card of your Baron San-Leone. He had left by the first train in the morning."

"The coward!" cried Saint-Perix; "I would give a hundred thousand francs to find him again!"

At this moment there was a discreet knock, and the Countess's maid half opened the door.

"Madame begs that monsieur will see her a moment," she said.

"Very well," he replied shortly; "you may go."

Scarcely had he pronounced these curt words when the Countess, her eyes red with weeping, her face pale and drawn, entered the salon.

"Henri, Henri, what is the matter with you to-day," she cried, "that you avoid me and close your door to me?"

"You shall learn presently, madame, since you seem not to know," replied Saint-Perix, in measured tones of bitter irony; "at present, as you see, I am engaged."

"But I must speak with you," she interrupted quickly; "I must speak with you now. Do you know what happened in my boudoir last night?"

"I know only too well, madame."

"What! You know that while I was asleep some one broke open the sandal-wood box in which I keep my diamonds——"

Saint-Perix had risen. He gasped, and seizing the Countess's hand in his own, he repeated anxiously: "Someone broke open your box?"

"Yes, and the robber has left nothing, not even my engagement ring, that I prized so much."

"Gentlemen, all is explained!" cried the Count to his two friends triumphantly; "it is a good lesson—do you think so?—and one which I merited. Our San-Leone was a common thief. Well, so much the better. Your jewels, fortunately, can be replaced."

And the Saint-Perix began a second honeymoon, which was quite as tender as the first.

Le Vier.

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The Knife with the Death's-head Handle.

"HULLO, AMIGO! I was looking for you. I want to borrow your knife. My own I have lost, and to-night I lay for the big buck at the spring. Without a knife, how shall I cut his throat, eh?"

Marston carelessly drew his knife from its sheath and handed it to the speaker. "*Si, con gusto*, Vincente," he said, and he resumed his pipe.

Vincente Mariano grasped the weapon almost eagerly. Had Marston not been absorbed in serious thought he would have observed beneath the friendly smile on the Mexican's face an expression of satisfaction hardly called for by so simple an act of generosity as the lending of a knife.

"*Gracias*, señor, the liver shall be yours for breakfast," and, turning from the light of the log fire, Mariano, with his rifle over his shoulder and Marston's knife in his belt, disappeared in the darkness.

Marston continued his ruminations by the fire. It was early yet, but the little Indian village had quieted down, and, save an occasional form stalking along the single, straggling street, he was alone. He had scarcely noticed the coming or the departure of the Mexican, and had passed the knife to him almost mechanically. Now, however, as his thoughts recurred to the incident, a frown settled upon his brow. Then he whistled quietly and finally laughed, but it was a laugh devoid of merriment. "Fudge," he ejaculated, "there's nothing in it; still——" And his mind ran back over the strange story that had been told him by his friends, the gunsmith, in the little shop down at Prescott the day he was first attracted by the long, keen blade of the weapon, its artistically fashioned buck-horn handle, and, above all, by the carved death's head that decorated it. "Grim fancy, that," he had remarked to the gunsmith.

"That is what I thought," was the reply, "when I saw the fiendish thing put on there. This knife was brought into my shop ten years ago by a handsome, dare-devil Spaniard, who had as a wife one of the most attractive women in town. He was a bright chap, and, placing the knife upon the counter, he carved with his penknife this death's head upon the handle. 'My wife shall see it,' he said, with a smile that I did not like, and, gaily waving his hand, he walked out. The next day his wife was found in her bed stabbed to death, and he had disappeared."

"And how did you become possessed of the knife again?"

"Ah, that's too long a story! The day after Francisco Vargas fled, his wife's lover—a Mexican, Mariano, I think was his name—also left town. Three months later, at a fandango hall down at Tucson, while a Spaniard was engaged in the dance, a Mexican, who had entered unperceived, stole behind him, snatched his knife from its sheath, and plunged it into his breast. As he fell, the victim of his own weapon, those near him heard him exclaim: 'Her curse!—she swore I, too—should die—by it. Ah, Mariano!'—and then his life went out. Vargas had a daughter seven or eight years of age—some people said Mariano was really her father—but what became of her nobody seems to know.

"That knife—well, there isn't a vacquero, hunter, miner, or gambler in all Arizona that would wear it at his waist for all the gold in the country. It has had a queer, a diabolical history; but whether the fatality that accompanies it is the result of a frenzied and dying woman's curse—some fearful potency that inheres in that leering symbol of death, projected there by the fiend that lived in the heart of Francisco Vargas, or merely a curious combination of circumstances, such as often makes the truth more wonderful than the wildest fiction, I shall not endeavour to say. After Vargas's death, a gambler got possession of the knife, and, in an affray one night, as he reached with it in his hand to strike an antagonist, he slipped and fell and thrust the blade into his own heart. It passed into the hands of a miner; he was found one morning in his cabin dead, with a huge gash in his breast. His partner, his gold, and his knife had disappeared. Months later the partner, while resisting arrest for another crime, over in Idaho, having emptied his revolver, and being cornered and desperately pressed, avoided the gallows by thrusting the knife's keen blade between his own ribs. Since then it has had half-a-dozen or more owners, and everyone has come to his death in some strange way through its instrumentality. The last one to handle it was the coroner here, into whose hands it came after holding an inquest upon the

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body of its last victim two years ago. He would not keep it, it couldn't be given away, and he finally forced it back on me. But I don't own it, you mind, any more than he did. It belongs to nobody. I am not superstitious, and I have no fears; still, I sometimes dread the infernal thing; it does seem as if within that grinning skull there lurked a relentless and implicable demon."

"Good!" said Marston; "your story is interesting Let's see the belt."

Taking it, he buckled it on, and placed the knife in the well-worn sheath. "I am about to start on one of my periodical hunting and prospecting trips. I shall go alone, as I always do. I came in here to purchase a knife and to say *adios*. This is just the thing," and before the little gunsmith could remonstrate—before, with pale face, and hand that trembled, he could reach across the counter in earnest protest, Marston had thrown down a gold piece and was gone.

Just why Marston had wandered off up into the Suppai country, he could not tell; but he did know that he had already been there a few weeks too long. After several weeks of leisurely roughing it he found himself one day on Cataract Creek, among the small tribe of Suppai Indians who occupy that almost inaccessible section. They took to him kindly, for Marston was one of those strong, strapping, broad-shouldered, broad-natured men, a thorough Englishman whose strength, cheerfulness, and kindliness appeal magnetically to all classes of men and to all classes of women.

Marston smoked and meditated. Day after day he had mentally sworn that he would get out of there, and at once. And day after day, and night after night, he had remained.

But the next morning he would "strike out"—bright and early, too. There were unfriendly signs in the air; at least he imagined he saw them. He seemed, somehow, to be an object of suspicion of late. A few of the young bucks kept away from him; their demeanour was sullen and threatening.

He arose, kicked the remaining brands together, and walked towards the small brush shanty that served him as a sleeping place, some distance behind the village. The night air was sweet with the odours of tree, and shrub, and herb, and throwing back his shoulders he filled his lungs with it and rejoiced. Life—life beneath the open sky, companioned by mountain, and forest, and stream—life, with the large liberty and continuous delights that one finds in perfection only in the wide and sunny West—how good, he thought, it all was; with his health, his strength, his freedom, his love for all things, he felt like a god, whose subjects were the rocks, and the trees, and the running waters, and all wild creatures of the wood and of the air. He paused before the shanty. "And yet," he reflected, "what would it all be worth, but for some sort of human companionship!" Putting aside the blanket that served to cover the doorway, he entered and dropped it behind him.

* * * * *

There was a commotion in the village the following morning, and as the sun rose steadily higher the hubbub correspondingly increased. Maria, the belle of the Suppai, whose perfect Spanish features distinguished her from the other girls of the reservation was missing —*La Coqueta*, Vincente Mariano had called her, casting a furtive glance at Marston to see the effect of his words. Marston had not changed countenance. "She is a beauty, Vincente; who was her mother, and how did she come here?"

Mariano shrugged his shoulders. "*Quien sabe!*" he said, and with his habitual imperturbable smile he walked away.

Marston did not appear that morning, either; and finally a group of bucks, some silent and stolid, and some with ugly and menacing looks and gestures, turned as if by a common impulse towards his shanty. At the door they called. There was no reply. Thrusting back the blanket they gazed within. Soon the shanty was filled with and surrounded by a mass of pushing, struggling bucks and squaws, and the cañon resounded with commingled cries of astonishment, rage, and sorrow. Side by side lay Marston and Maria; in the bosom of the girl, thrust to the hilt, was a black-handled knife such as Vincente Mariano always wore in his belt; from the bare and bloody breast of Marston stood up a buck-horn handle on which a death's-head grinned ominously at the young buck whose hand pulled the weapon from its sheath of flesh. But in all that surging, ravening crowd, nowhere was seen the smiling face of Vincente Mariano.

Fred Foster.

JUMBLE STORY COMPETITION.

No. 3.

Four Prizes, one of £2 and three of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the opposite page, in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, and the first line is in its correct position, but the title is jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, July 20th.

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JUMBLE STORY, No. 3.

THE RUSTTED FINDER.

"THE gloomy house at the end of the street is on the golden metal transformed it into a thousand sweet promises to her, saying that when he returned to tell his wife. It would kill her. He knew that she met a companion in misery who was an old friend. The man swore by everything sacred and unsacred that was set on the house, and several facts of interest brought home worn out and fatigued, but invariably with a swollen garden, six yards from the pear tree, beneath a dandelion surrounded by a high wall, and a mystery," the Doctor would never leave her again, and they would be rich and deserted, alone in the gloomy house—what was it that he was doing?

In the first place it was found that there was one young parted with her wedding ring, and then she awaited the worry: she must be very lonely, and yet the busy-bodies discussed, it was observed that behind the fresh beauty of the suburb was fond of saying, and the epigram had but one old dress with which to clothe herself. Lastly she would soon be in want of money. Oh, the bitter irony in finding the big gloomy house, surrounded by the high solemn oath that he would do his commands faithfully. Sentence by sentence, sometimes only one a day he told her; friendless and relationless, she knew of no one to end.

Now it happened that in the exercising yard this man bade her a more tender farewell than usual, he had made piece by piece, until there was none left; all the fine old furniture worth fifty times the amount she got half in gold, amounting to thousands of pounds; he did take a holiday abroad for a year or two. And then he drove his pick savagely into the soil. The dandelion plant, lay buried his hidden treasure, half in notes, and gazed at the gold. "He was to keep the notes for months, and still she was left alone.

There were few, however, who troubled themselves with the agony of the thought; his health broke down; friends' words came back to him, and he remembered of her face there was a tired expression of sadness and mystery, it was nevertheless very evident. So the busy-bodies discussed the matter, with the result that a watch return. But the days passed by and he did not come; to light.

And the husband of this poor woman, starving, and in the eyes, and then one of them was taken back to his City. That meant that he would go away, and return at heads as they went by and passed on. That there was a wall. It was apparently deserted. Not a soul was to about the matter; those that did merely shook their stars. The man ran his fingers through the coins, and banking account.

For the girl who took the lonely little walks by herself to a heavy iron box, and drawing it out, he prised it all times of the day; sometimes he would be absent for the doctors knew that he had but a few months to made the place notorious.

The moon came out from behind a cloud, and shining his secret when the warder's back was turned. In the door lay hundreds upon hundreds of pounds of his ill-cell, and a few hours later found himself free.

The jewels went, one by one, and after those her person in the house at least; and then it was noticed not know how many. The man was to dig it up, and the gloomy house, and yet how deep a mystery, and how pretty. And when she was scanned yet more closely, they would leave their gloomy house, and perhaps would live.

In truth there was a mystery behind the high walls of his shoulders. Then he hurriedly left the garden.

So he went away, and his wife waited anxiously for his drives. He went to the back of the building, scaled the notes back in the box, and the whole in the bag. He did not think of comforting her.

One day, after he had been home all the morning and afternoon, he had taken his hat when it grew dark, and found within everything that his poor friend had broke asunder. and yielded up its treasures. He came whom she might apply for aid. She sold the furniture, and her every detail, from her hat to her shoe, had been happy.

"Fourteen years penal servitude." He had not dared the days lengthened into weeks, and the weeks into days at a time, and even weeks. Then he would come tragic, no one even suspected.

By the last day of his friend's confinement the wretched walls, found the pear tree, and the dandelion plant, and the oath that he had sworn. Then a thought from the suburb his friend had mentioned. He had no difficulty gotten wealth.

He set out immediately in search of the out-of-the-way wife." He was to tell her that her husband was dead.

And he could not let her know. His hair turned white the world that knew his secret; and one, though living, was dead.

Then he looked nervously behind him, and put the clothes. The wind was blowing cold now, and she had listened to their music.

Then gradually she used up all the money he had left open. His heart gave a great bound of excitement as he threw the soil in its place again, and raised the sack to be seen. Only a few sparrows hopped on the overgrown husband had told him everything, and demanded his keep the notes himself, and give the gold to the "little himself, and give the gold to the little wife." His Devil entered his mind;—there were only two people in described. He put the notes hastily on one side, and that she was usually alone, and, what is worse, was very was a young wife, whose husband was something in the of it—the cursed, bitter irony. Within ten paces of her he would do so; the two men looked each other earnestly for it.

The mystery is soon explained—he was in prison.

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LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 13.—Needed Watchin' an' Herdin'.

"YES," said the old cattle-man, as he took off his sombrero and gazed meditatively at the rattlesnake band, "cow-punchers are a mighty queer people. They need watchin' an' herdin' as much as cattle.

"I knowed one by the name of Stevenson down on the Turkey Track ranche, in Texas, as merited a heap of lookin' after. This yere Stevenson wasn't exactly onery, but bein' naturally restless an' peevish, with a disposition to be emphatic whenever he was fillin' of himself up, keepin' your eye on him was a good safe play. He was public-sperited, too, if anyone ever was, an' sometimes took lots of pains to please people.

"I minds once when we was bringin' up a beef herd from the Panhandle country. We was up agin' the south bank of the Arkansaw tryin' to throw the herd across. There was a bridge there, but as we allowed it was weak, we was enjoyed in makin' the herd wade.

"Steve was posted at the entrance of the bridge to turn back any loose cattle that might take a notion to try and cross that way. Thar he was, a settin' on his bronco an' both mighty near asleep. Some women people—towerists I reckon—as was camped in town, came over on the bridge to see the fun. They was lined out close up to Steve, an' leanin' of their young Eastern chins on the top rail, a lookin' down.

"'I don't regard this much,' says one young woman, 'there ain't no thrill into it. Why ever don't they do somethin' excitin'?'

"Steve sees the young woman is displeased, an' as he couldn't figger nuthin' else out quick to entertain her he gives a whoop, bangs his six-shooter off into the scenery, digs his spurs into the hoss, an' hops over the side of the bridge into the shallow water below.

"The jump I reckon was some twenty feet an' busted the pony's legs like toothpicks, besides breakin' Steve's collar-bone, an' dispersin' of his features around mighty free an' frightful on account of his sorter lightin' rather heavy on his face.

"Well, we shot the pony, an' Steve rode in the grub waggon four or five days recooperatin' of himself.

"Steve got himself killed a year after, an' struck out on the big trail where the hoof prints all p'ints one way. He was over an upper Red River a-gamblin' around with the cowboys when he got creased.

"Steve never oughter gambled none. He was a good cowboy—splended round-up hand—an' could do his day's work with rope or iron in a brandin' pen with anybody; but comin' right to the case, he didn't know any more about playin' poker than about preachin'.

"Actually he'd bet two pair like there was no record of their bein' beat. This yere, of course, led to frequent poverty, but it didn't seem to teach Steve nuthin'. He was downright foolish on that p'int.

"On the occashun of his demise, one of the boys got hold of a tray-full, Steve bein' possessed of a club flush, queen at the head. That settled it. In two minutes he didn't have even his blankets left.

"After he went broke Steve histed in a drink or two of nose-paint, and scoured around a whole lot, an' just as the tray-full boy gets into his saddle, aimin' to go out to his camp, he comes along up an' hails him.

"'Do you know,' says Steve, mighty gloomy, 'I've been tryin' to school myself to bear it, but I can't, an' I'm therefore here to say as how you stole that pair of kings as you made out your full hand an' completed my ruin. This bein' troo, I'm just goin' to draw on you for that *bric-à-brac* I lost, an' I looks to see you honour the draft unmurmuringly.'

"'Oh, you do, do you?' says the tray-full boy, mighty scornful. 'Well, you're a heap too sanguine. You just send the draft through the clearin' house an' watch it get thrown out a whole lot. Do you suppose I gives up the froots of a tray-full—as hard a hand to hold as that is? Well I guess not; not this round-up.'

"'Don't get flippant about this yere robbery,' says Steve. 'It's enuf to be plundered without bein' pestered with ill-timed gaiety. Now, what I say is this: either I gets my stuff back, right here now, or our succeedin' conversation will occur in the smoke,' an' thereupon Steve pulls his pistol and takes hold of the tray-full boy's hoss by the bridle.

"'If anything makes me more weary than another,' says the tray-full boy, 'it's gun play, an' to avoid such exhibitions I freely returns your plunder, but mark me, you and I don't play cards no more.'

"So the boy gets down off his hoss, an' Steve, thinkin' the debate is closed, puts up his gun again. But he was a heap too hopeful, for the next second, bang goes the tray-full boy's six-shooter, and the bullet ketches Steve in the neck. It bothered his breathin' to such an extent that in two minutes he quit tryin' altogether, an' that afternoon we had a hasty but mighty successful funeral with his remainder.

"'I don't reckon,' says Gene Watkins, who was ranch boss, 'there's no need of havin' any trials or lawsuits about this yere killin'. I've knowed Steve for a long time an' liked him, but them views he kept entertainin' as to the value of poker hands leads straight to everlastin' life, an' this yere sorrowful episode don't surprise nor stampede me none whatever. His death should be a warnin' to us.'"

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By John K. Leys, *author of "The Tenth of June," etc., etc.*

CHAPTER XXIV.

Mr. Daunt is Still Puzzled.

Kenyon did not think it necessary to inform the authorities at Scotland Yard that Vere had been found. They were certain to become acquainted with the fact before long, since the proceedings at Deptford must reach their ears; and in the meantime it was of the utmost importance that the invalid should be allowed to remain quietly in the doctor's hands. Vere was indeed little better than a wreck. He was a different creature from the bright-eyed, high-spirited young man who had won Winnie Denvers' heart.

It was quite impossible for him to go to Devonshire, even if the Rector had been willing to admit him to his house. But Harold had written a long letter to Katherine Dale, explaining in detail the plot against Vere, and the state in which he had found him. After describing the way in which the artist had been drugged and carried off by Jane Unwin to her father's house, he went on:

"It may seem well nigh incredible to you that a man should have been kept prisoner for several weeks in an ordinary house in such a country as ours. But you must remember that, in all probability, for the greater part of the time, he did not care to escape. When he awoke from his stupor on Wednesday morning, his captor would probably give him another dose of the drug; and by Thursday morning she would allow him to realise that it was too late—that the morning which should have secured his life's happiness had come and had found him unable to take the prize he had won. I can imagine him sinking into a deeper and ever deeper apathy, finding his only recreation in the society of Jane Unwin (who, we must remember, had at one time been his sweetheart), and flying every night to opium to deaden his mental pain.

"I can understand all that easily enough; but what I find it hard to comprehend, is how Miss Unwin should have possessed the cunning, the courage, and resolution to carry out a plot of this kind. Assuming, as I think we may fairly assume, that she was madly jealous of Miss Denvers, and keenly desirous of marrying Launcelot Vere, she took a very good way, perhaps the only possible way, of accomplishing her purpose. But is it conceivable that alone and unaided she compelled or induced, not only her father and cousin, but the lawyer, Beaumont, to aid her in the carrying out of her plans? It seems to me that she must either have had a powerful friend to assist her, or she must have been used as a tool by one who desired that Vere should be suppressed, at all events for a time.

"I have one request to make of you before I close. It may appear to you singular, but, believe me, it is not unwarranted. It is that you should not breathe a syllable concerning Vere's release to anyone except Miss Denvers—not even to her father, or to Mr. Shenstone—and that you should impose the same condition on Miss Denvers herself. It will be quite sufficient reason to give her that if the fact of his being found were known to the police they would speedily discover his address, and that it would be a dreadful thing for him to answer the charge of murder (of which I am certain he is wholly innocent) in his present state of health. At any rate, please tell Miss Denvers that I rely absolutely on her discretion, and on your own, to preserve perfect silence on this subject, even from your own nearest relations."

Harold's real reason for insisting that the fact of Vere's having been found should be kept a close secret was that he did not wish Paul Shenstone to hear of it. He thought that his best chance of discovering why Shenstone had played him false, was to allow him to remain in ignorance of what had happened, and see whether he would not in some way betray himself.

Ralph Masters had been taken before the magistrates and remanded for a week. At the expiration of the seven days it would be necessary for Vere to appear at the Deptford Police Court; and then he must be ready, Kenyon knew, to surrender himself, and be taken into custody on the coroner's warrant.

But to Harold's surprise the Deptford police made no effort to arrest Vere, and seemed ignorant of the fact that the coroner's jury had found a verdict against him. The two friends gave evidence against Masters, who was committed for trial on a charge of conspiracy and false imprisonment; and they returned to London in company.

The only reason Harold now had for remaining in town was that he might stay with Vere, and help him to break off the fatal habit of taking opium. But he did not feel certain whether it would not be better for Vere to go to a police office and voluntarily surrender himself; and to set his mind at rest he took Vere one day to call on Mr. Daunt.

"Quite unnecessary," said the lawyer, when the question was submitted to him. "The police have your address?" he added, turning to Vere.

"I am staying with my friend Kenyon at present," he said; "they know that; and they also have my permanent address," was the reply.

Mr. Daunt fixed his steady blue eyes on the sensitive face before him. "A kindly, gentle soul, but weak as water," was his inward comment.

"I believe the police are convinced, as they must be by the facts proved in Masters' case, that you are entirely guiltless of causing poor Jane Unwin's death," said Mr. Daunt. "They probably suspect Masters, or some one else, of the crime; and although you must take your trial, it will be only a formal affair.

"There are one or two points, however, that should be explained. The revolver, now—can you offer any explanation of the fact that your revolver was found close to Jane Unwin's body?"

"As I have told Kenyon," answered Vere, "I lost that revolver, or mislaid it."

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"When did you see it last?"

"At Mr. Pascoe's house in Richmond. It was there I lost it. I had picked up the thing at a pawnbroker's on purpose to use it in a picture of an American girl defending her wounded lover, or something of that sort. Miss Unwin sat for the American girl, and I painted the picture at Mr. Pascoe's house. The case I left behind in my rooms, because it took up so much room in my portmanteau. Mrs. Unwin objected to seeing the revolver lying about the studio, though I told her I never had had a single cartridge for it, so I put it somewhere out of sight—into a cupboard, I think. But when I looked for it, just before leaving, I could not find it. I never saw it again, and I have scarcely even thought of it till Kenyon told me it had been found close to Jane Unwin's body."

Mr. Daunt turned to Kenyon, a grave look on his face.

"The doctor must have been mistaken in saying that the girl could not have committed suicide," he said. "It seems clear that Jane Unwin must have appropriated the revolver and afterwards used it to take her own life."

"It does," said Kenyon.

"Were you in any way related to Mr. Pascoe?" asked Mr. Daunt suddenly of Launcelot.

"Not at all."

"Are you sure?"

"As sure as a man can be of a thing of that sort," replied Vere; and he rose to take leave.

"Could you spare your friend for a minute or two?" said Mr. Daunt to him, as he shook hands. Vere answered that he would wait in the clerk's office, and left the room.

As soon as the door had closed behind him, the lawyer drew his chair closer to Harold's.

"Have you any idea how Jane Unwin came by her death?" he asked.

"Not the slightest."

"Doesn't it strike you as singular that a young woman alone and unaided, should have been able to conceive and carry out such a plot?"

"I don't believe she did it alone, or unaided. I believe she was made a tool by some one," answered Kenyon.

"By whom?"

"Ah! How can I tell?"

"If your friend had been a relation of old Mr Pascoe, I could have guessed at a motive readily enough."

"Yes. But there was no attempt to kill him."

"He would have killed himself soon enough with opium."

"Still, *they* couldn't have reckoned on that," objected Kenyon.

"True—but perhaps a temporary seclusion—long enough to enable some one else to put his hands on Mr. Pascoe's money—would have been sufficient. The trust funds once distributed——"

"The money is still in the hands of the trustees, then?"

"So I was told when I made inquiries a few days ago. It would have been divided among the claimants—children of a second cousin named Patey, I believe—before now; but the trustees received a letter protesting that more time should be given for some nearer relations to turn up. And who do you think wrote that letter?"

"Haven't an idea."

"The disinherited nephew, Joseph Abbot!"

"But what had he to do with it? I thought you told me that he was expressly excluded from sharing in the inheritance?"

"So I did."

"Under no circumstances could he take anything?"

"Not a penny."

"Then why should he trouble himself in the matter?"

"Why, indeed?"

"It is impossible," said Kenyon after a pause, "that any claimant of the Pascoe property could have been at the bottom of this plot against Vere, seeing that he was merely a friend, not a blood relation, of the testator."

"Just so. Yet, where to look for his enemy I do not know."

"The thing is a mystery," said Harold, rising from his chair.

"And will be a mystery to the end," answered the lawyer.

CHAPTER XXV.

In Wythecombe Church.

As Launcelot Vere recovered strength, mental and bodily, the desire of going to Wythecombe, and ascertaining for himself what Winnie's feelings towards him were, grew in intensity till he could bear the suspense no longer. Yet he shrank from meeting the Rector. For several days together he never ceased to implore Kenyon to go with him to Wythecombe and explain to the Rector how he had been trapped and caged and kept a prisoner. Harold would have been willing enough to go, but for two considerations. He feared the effect of so severe a strain on his friend's enfeebled intellect; and he was nervously anxious that Kate's wedding-day should have come and gone before he went to Wythecombe.

As the twelfth of the month—the day that had been fixed for Kate's wedding—drew near, Kenyon fell into a deep melancholy. More than ever, now that his self-imposed task was finished, life seemed a flat and barren moor, empty of everything like interest, not worthy of a man's labour, not worth keeping. The loss of Kate made existence a burden to him. In the future he saw a dull series of aimless years. There he forced his thoughts to stop. He did not know what abysses, what crimes, his passion might plunge him into, if he were to allow himself to think of what he was losing. Sometimes he was on the point of rushing off to Wythecombe, to make another appeal to Kate, ere she spoke the words that were to be an eternal barrier between them. Then he remembered his last interview with her, and recognised the fact that he might bruise and wound the girl's heart, but could never turn her from her purpose.

When the morning of the twelfth of October dawned, Harold's rooms were empty. Vere, who was now quite out of the doctor's hands, waited there all day for him in vain. He did not return till late at night, pale and haggard, drenched with rain, and hardly able to speak.

For the next three days Harold remained in a state of apathy. On the evening of the third day Launcelot Vere called on him as usual and began once more to urge him to go with him to Wythecombe.

"All right," said Harold quietly, "we can go to-morrow."

Vere was astonished.

"Will you see the Rector for me?" he asked eagerly. "Will you plead for me? Will you explain how it was that I was unable to free myself? Will you get him to consent to my seeing Winnie?"

"I will," answered Kenyon. "At least, I will do my best for you."

Vere's impatience was so great that nothing would content him but travelling all night, or leaving London by the first train in the morning. Kenyon preferred the latter alternative; so they agreed to meet at Paddington at 5.20.

Kenyon was punctual; but Vere was already at the station when he arrived, looking out for him anxiously.

"I'll take both tickets," said Harold, taking his place at the end of the *queue* at the booking-office window, while Vere went off to secure seats.

Kenyon had got pretty close to the window, when he heard a man asking for a second-class ticket to Wythecombe. The village was so remote, that Harold felt a certain surprise, and moved a little to see whether he should recognise the man who was going to that out-of-the-way corner of Devonshire. He saw a small, common-place looking person, with a pale, quiet, composed countenance, wearing no beard or moustache, but dressed like a

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commercial traveller or a small tradesman. He seemed to observe that Harold was staring at him, for he suddenly lifted his eyes, and Kenyon hastily looked away.

Once or twice during the journey Kenyon noticed the pale-faced stranger, and found himself dully wondering what the traveller's object might be in going from London to an insignificant village two hundred miles away.

When Vere and his companion arrived at their destination, they noticed that the village street was unusually quiet, even for Wythecombe. Not a soul was to be seen. They went on to the Rectory; the roads were deserted. Around the church-porch were a few women and children.

"Upon my word, I believe there is a wedding going on," said Vere, "some villager's, no doubt." A thrill shot through Harold's veins. Could it be that the scene he had so carefully avoided was to be enacted before his eyes—that his ears were to hear the words spoken that were to put him and his love asunder.

"I say," whispered Vere, "I want to see what is going forward; but I am anxious not to be recognised. Let us slip in by the little door in the tower, and get into the gallery." He dragged Kenyon away by the arm as he spoke, and Harold followed, unresisting.

They found the tower-door open; but the door at the foot of the gallery stair was shut and locked. There was nothing for it but to slip into one of the pews.

If Harold had happened to turn his head round for an instant, he would have seen in the pew immediately behind them the quiet looking stranger who had travelled down that morning from London. But he was gazing about him like one under a spell, or like one who had been a hundred years dead, and was trying to understand the new world he had awakened to.

Even now Kenyon hoped that this was some stranger's wedding—not Kate's, surely! How was he to bear it?

The vestry door opened. There was no more room for doubt. Preceding the Rector by a few steps came Katherine and her mother. The bride was clothed in white; but her face was as white as her dress, and her eyes were on the ground.

Harold could hardly help showing how he suffered. He grasped the back of the pew in front of him, and tried to rise and make his escape; but his limbs refused to obey him. He was shivering from head to foot.

As the bride and her mother passed on to the altar rails, the bridegroom, who had been hidden from the two friends by a pillar, stepped forward.

"Good Heavens, Harold!" said Vere in a loud whisper, "it is Joseph Abbot! What is he doing here?"

Harold, looking round at his friend, saw the quiet stranger in the pew behind start, rise up, and bend forward.

He touched Vere with his finger, and said in a low tone:

"I beg pardon, sir, but are you *certain* that the bridegroom is named Joseph Abbot?"

"Of course I am. I know him perfectly well."

Vere had hardly uttered these few words when the stranger left the pew and glided up the aisle.

The Rector, who had uttered the opening words of the service, paused and frowned at him.

"This marriage cannot go on!" The words were spoken in a low voice, but they were heard all over the church.

"What do you mean, sir? Who are you?" asked Mr. Denvers in an angry whisper.

"I am a detective officer from Scotland Yard, and I arrest you, Joseph Abbot, for the murder of Jane Unwin at Hampstead, on the——"

The sentence was never finished.

Shenstone turned on him, his face like the face of a tiger. Kate, seeing it, turned half round, and clutched her mother by the arm. And, with a snarl of rage, like a tiger's, the murderer felled his captor to the ground. Then, with quick, sudden strides, he reached the door of the vestry and disappeared.

A dozen voices uttered an inarticulate cry, a dozen people ran forward to help the fallen man.

"Take him! Follow him! Don't let him escape!" gasped the police officer as soon as he could speak.

But when the bystanders opened the vestry door, they found the room empty. It was evident that the criminal had run down the green lane that skirted the Rectory garden, and had escaped through some coppices and broken ground into a large wood which filled the bottom of the valley. Pursuit was soon begun; but it was not very vigorous. Nine-tenths of the people in the church were women; of the remainder some were unwilling to run down a neighbour on the mere word of a stranger. Others were secretly unwilling to face a desperate man. By the time the police were fetched from Darnport, it was seen that the fugitive might possibly escape arrest.

* * * * *

"How did you find out that this man Shenstone was the murderer?" asked Kenyon of the detective that evening.

"When the police searched the 'Black Swan,'" he replied, "they found in a drawer a letter to Jane Unwin appointing a meeting on Hampstead Heath. It was signed only with the initials J. A.

"The case was put into my hands; and I saw at once that Mr. Vere could not be the murderer, and that 'J. A.' very probably was. I took the letter to Mrs. Unwin; and she told me at once that she recognised the handwriting as that of a Mr. Abbot, her late master's nephew. There was a postmark on the envelope containing the letter—Wythecombe. I came down here; but could hear nothing of a Mr. Abbot. I went back to London and made inquiries in other directions, but meeting with no success, I decided to try Wythecombe again.

"I confess, sir," he continued with a smile, "that when I saw you in Mr. Vere's company at the railway-station, I thought it possible you might be the man I wanted. So I followed you into the church. Then, when I heard Mr. Vere's sudden exclamation, I thought it better to act at once, since it was of the utmost importance to delay the marriage until the truth could be ascertained."

Kenyon turned away, unable to speak.

Some hours before this Launcelot had managed to get a note conveyed to Winnie, telling her that he was waiting in the lane, not far from the garden gate. The instant she read the scrap of paper, Winnie flew to the spot where her lover was waiting, and he caught her to his breast in a whirlwind of joy; then, before a word was spoken, he knelt down and kissed her feet.

"Oh, Winnie!" he cried at last, "can you forgive me?" and he poured out the story of his being kidnapped, and of his subsequently yielding to the demon of opium.

"Forgive you? I have nothing to forgive!" cried the girl, clinging to his breast, and looking up into his face with shining eyes. She led him home; and at the sight of her radiant face her father's stern resolutions and gloomy fears melted away. He received Vere stiffly at first; but as he came to understand how helpless the poor fellow had been, Mr. Denvers felt able to forgive him for—having been so unfortunate.

Leaving the two lovers to themselves, the Rector went out to pay a call at the High Cottage. On his way back he met Harold Kenyon, and brought him back to the Rectory, in order that he might satisfy his curiosity concerning the events of the last few weeks.

They were sitting together in the library, when a servant came in to say that the person engaged by the Rector to pack up Jane Unwin's things and forward them to her mother had finished her task, and that she had brought a book which she had found on Miss Unwin's bookshelf, but which did not apparently belong to her.

Mr. Denvers took the volume in his hand.

"This belongs to the Sunday-school Library," he said,

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"Miss Dale gave it to us. Here is her name in it—Katherine Pascoe Dale."

Kenyon started.

"Did you say *Pascoe*, sir?"

"Yes. *Pascoe*. Wasn't that the name of the old man who was the uncle of that scoundrel Shenstone?"

"It is the same name," answered Harold. "I wonder if she can be a relation of Mr. Pascoe! The name is not a common one. Perhaps Vere can tell me."

Vere, on being applied to, said he thought Miss Dale might be descended from a sister of Mr. Pascoe, who had married and gone to Australia with her husband many years before. And this turned out to be the case. The solicitors to the trustees had advertised for the next of kin of Anna Pascoe, but only in Australian papers, not knowing that the widow and child of Anna Pascoe's only son had come home and settled in the quiet village of Wythecombe.

The motive which Joseph Abbot had had for all his machinations was now clear. He had found a useful ally, years before, in the housekeeper's daughter, who kept him informed of what went on in his uncle's house when he was absent; and when he was disgraced and banished from the house, she secretly sympathised with him, and did her best to serve his interests, corresponding with him privately from time to time.

Shortly after she went to Wythecombe she borrowed a few books from the Parish Library, and happening to observe in one of them the name "Pascoe," she mentioned the fact in one of her letters to Abbot.

Abbot was at that moment well-nigh desperate. The will disinheriting him had been read, and was evidently going to be acted upon. He had nothing in the world but a few pounds; he had no profession, nor any means of earning a livelihood. When he received Jane Unwin's communication he made some inquiries, and soon satisfied himself that Katherine Dale was sole heiress and next of kin to his late uncle. He then conceived the idea of going down to Wythecombe under a strange name, marrying the heiress, and then, in right of his wife, claiming the property which the will prevented his touching.

He paid his court to Katherine Dale so well that he secured her promise; but very soon after this success he was thunderstruck at being told that Launcelot Vere, who had frequently met him at Mr. Pascoe's house, and knew the whole story of his crime and his disgrace, was actually at Wythecombe, and engaged to marry the Rector's daughter.

It was by the merest accident that he did not meet Vere on the street on the day when Jane Unwin met him and spoke to him.

It was certain that the instant Vere found that Abbot, who had been guilty of a bare-faced attempt to win a fortune by forging a will, was passing under the name of Shenstone, and was about to marry his wife's bridesmaid, he would certainly enlighten his bride, and, through her, Kate herself, as to Mr. Shenstone's true name and character. Therefore it became a necessity for Abbot, unless he meant to abandon his hopes, to stop the impending marriage, and keep Vere out of Wythecombe, at all events until his own marriage had been celebrated.

But this seemed a task beyond his power; and after long and fruitless pondering he had given up all hope of gaining Kate and with her his uncle's property, when he happened one evening to come upon Jane Unwin in a lonely part of the road between his own house and the village. She was crying, and after a little trouble Abbot made her tell him the cause of her distress. The same event, Vere's approaching marriage, was to blast the hopes of both of them.

At that moment a plan for averting the danger that threatened him shone out clear and luminous in Abbot's mental vision. It was almost as if Satan himself had inspired his willing servant.

Here was an instrument, Abbot saw, ready to his hand. He easily persuaded Jane that if she followed his directions she would not only prevent Vere from marrying Miss Denvers, but would raise an insurmountable barrier between them, while at the same time she and Vere would be thrown together at a time when he would be grateful for any society, or any sympathy.

Jane, urged forward by her own unruly passion, soon consented to do all that was asked of her; and she suggested her father's house as the place most suitable in all respects for Vere's temporary prison. Beaumont's help was purchased by a promise of a share in the spoils, and the plot was successfully executed.

It turned out, however, that Vere was by no means the passive victim Jane Unwin had expected to find him.

She wrote to Abbot telling him that she was tired of the struggle, and intended to take Vere back to his own quarters on the following day.

Abbot saw that he must act at once. He had noticed Masters, and had conjectured, rightly enough, that his was one of those low natures which can be bought. He went up to town, therefore, resolved to bribe Masters into doing his will, and to silence Jane Unwin. He took with him the only weapon he had—one he had picked up some months before in his uncle's house. But he did not believe that it would be necessary to use the revolver. He hoped to be able to cajole or frighten the girl into doing what he wanted. But Jane Unwin was not to be either cajoled or frightened. She defied Abbot. He threatened to shoot her. She, maddened with the loss of all her hopes, and driven to frenzy by her accomplice's taunts, struck at him. There was a scuffle, and all that Abbot knew the next moment was that he was standing with a smoking pistol in his hand and a deadly fear at his heart, while a woman lay stiff and dead at his feet.

The murderer spent his last sovereign in bribing Masters to keep the half stupefied victim a prisoner for a few weeks longer, and he was obliged to forgo the name of one of the bank's customers at Darnport, in order to obtain the advance he had tried to get from Harold Kenyon without the formality of a guarantee. This was not found out until afterwards.

Two days before the day appointed for the wedding, the bride caught a bad cold; and on the twelfth she was confined to bed. This led to the marriage being postponed for a few days; and the delay, as it happened, saved Kate from a lifetime of misery.

Nothing was heard of the escaped criminal for some days. Then it was said that his body had been found on the beach at Darnport. This rumour turned out to be true. And as a short time afterwards a small boat was discovered floating about in the bay, bottom upwards, there seemed good ground for hoping that Abbot had not been guilty of suicide, but had been drowned while trying to make his way to some other part of the coast.

* * * * *

Shortly after Vere's return to Wythecombe, Mrs. Dale went abroad with her daughter.

They are coming home, however, in order to be present at Vere's marriage, which is to take place in April.

Harold has not yet asked Kate to be his wife. He is afraid of her, Winnie Denvers says, because she is an heiress. This may be true; but Winnie has told them both that if they are not engaged before she leaves her father's house as a bride, she will denounce them at the wedding-breakfast as a faithless pair. And there can hardly be a doubt that whether the Rector's daughter carries out her threat or not, she will not permit Harold Kenyon and her old friend Kate to live to the end of the year in single blessedness.

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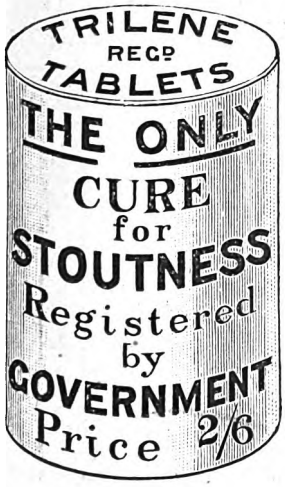

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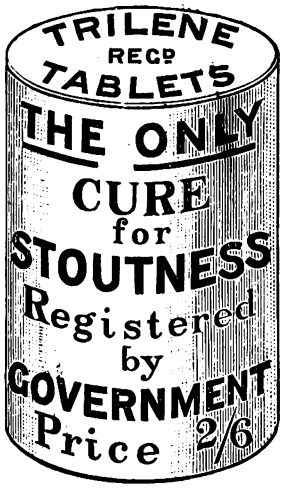

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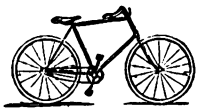

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 395. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 25TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

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7½ft. by 9ft. " " "	5/11	12ft. by 12ft. " " "	12/9
9ft. by 9ft. " " "	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft. " " "	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft. " " "	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " "	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. " " "	19.6
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No. 30

July 25, 1896.

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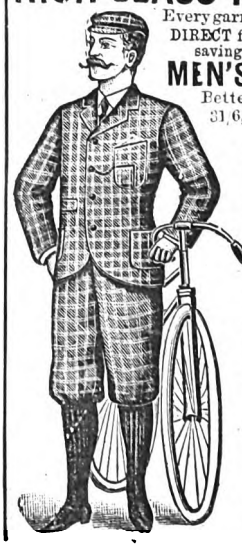

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 395.] For the Week ending July 25th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

HIGH PLAY.

A Comedy off the Stage.

By G. Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER I.

A GOOD MOTHER.

"OH, curse it all! my head! my head!"

Lord Braetoun jerked himself viciously from his right side to his left as he lay on a couch, and the effect was not soothing, for he uttered a groan, and then something else which made Lady Braetoun, a very fashionably-dressed, handsome, patrician dame, turn from the window in Hyde Park Gardens, where she was gazing thoughtfully out upon the various equipages passing, and look at her son with a half-mournful, half-contemptuous expression of countenance.

"Poor fellow!" she said softly, as she shrugged her shoulders, raised her eyebrows, and then took out a laced handkerchief, with which she carefully dabbed her forehead just where the none too abundant frizzed grey hair covered it with tiny curls.

This action necessitated a glance at one of the mirrors, which seemed gratifying, for she drew herself up and then took a few steps towards the couch.

"Does your head ache so much, Roderick?" she said.

"Ache!" he groaned. "It's as if boiling lead was running from side to side."

"Shall I ring for a cup of strong tea to be made, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, do, pray, if you want it to be a hundred times worse," he cried fiercely. "My nerves are bad enough without strong tea."

"It always does mine good, my dear," said the lady coldly, as she arranged the full lace ruffles about her delicate blue-veined wrists.

"Does yours good! Well, what of that? You are a woman, aren't you?—Oh, dear; oh, dear!"

"But you are so impatient, my love. Really, Roderick, as a man you ought to try and bear pain with the mind of the stoic."

"D——n the stoics! The headache is unbearable."

"If you are going to use such language as that, Roderick, perhaps I had better leave you."

"I wish to goodness you would, and not stand there firing off platitudes at me. Can't stand an honest English oath,

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can't you? Why, that's nothing to what I used to hear the old man say to you."

"Let your father rest in his grave, my son, and try and pay a little respect to your mother, if you can."

"There, don't bother me with all that talk. You don't know what I am suffering."

"I pretty well do, but I cannot pity you. If you acted sensibly you would have been fit to go with me this morning to church."

The young man laughed bitterly.

"Be a good boy and walk with mamma to our pew, and carry the books, to go and sit among all the rest of the miserable sinners in lace and silk, scenting the place like so much incense——Ah! there it goes again."

"Lie still, then. If you had not burst out into that foolish tirade of irreverence you would not have felt that pang," said the lady with dignity, and she turned to gaze in a glass again, turning her head first to one side and then to the other, to pat and arrange her hair, unconscious of the fact that her son was gazing at her with a face full of contempt.

"Looks lovely," he said with a snarl. "Is that the new *coiffure* from Truefitt's?"

The wrinkles in Lady Braetoun's handsome face showed in a marked way for the moment, and there was a peculiar twitching about the corners of her lips, as she said coldly:

"I thought you were ill, Roderick."

"Well, so I am," he cried, with a peculiar drawing in of his breath, as if he were suffering intense pain.

"I should not have thought it of one who is well enough to insult his mother."

"Insult? Bah! You make me speak, with all your mincing. Anyone would think you were a young widow on the look out for a fresh husband."

"And you some coarsely-minded young man of the lower classes. That is not wit—it is not *badinage*, my son, only brutality, such, however, as I suppose I must expect from one who associates with grooms and betting men."

"That's right; go on. I wish you suffered as I do for half-an-hour. It would make you more feeling."

"I am quite ready to be sympathetic, and to do all I can for you, Roderick, if you will act like a reasonable being."

"You don't know how bad I am," he groaned.

"Oh yes, I do; it goes without saying; but I don't wonder at it after your dissipated life."

"Dissipated devil!"

"You force me to speak to you, my dear. I do not want to know anything about the life you lead, nor to bring you to making confessions of your folly."

"That's right; get a man down sick and helpless, and then jump upon him."

"It is my duty, Roderick, to jump upon you, as you so slangily term it."

"Then you should have begun earlier," he said bitterly.

"Perhaps so; but I trusted to my son's common sense. I had the dignity of our position to keep up, the exigencies of society to attend to. Succeeding as you did to the title and your father's fortune, I was willing to believe that my son—a Braetoun—would worthily support his position."

"Go on!—go on."

"Yes, I have much to say, and though it pains me I must go on. I ought, I know, to have tried to check you sooner, before you had ruined your property, and brought yourself down to what you are."

"A regular wreck, I suppose," he sneered.

"No, but one suffering bitterly from his follies. I hear too much about you. No, I do not play the spy. I try hard to remain in ignorance, and if I were selfish I should shrug my shoulders and say: Why should I trouble myself about him? I have enough for my wants; he must do as he pleases. But I am not selfish, Roderick. I think deeply about you and your interest, and I tell you now that it is quite time you ceased to sow your wild oats and thought about redeeming the past. I am really shocked. What do you expect is to be the end of all this keeping of racehorses and pretty actresses?"

"Pistol, I suppose."

"Worse and worse! A Braetoun talking of taking such a cowardly step as that! Shame! You are ten times worse than your father. Reckless, imprudent, a gambler perhaps, but he was always a nobleman. He would not let me suffer. But really if it had not been for his forethought in settling upon me what I have, I don't know where I should have been."

"Have you done?"

"No, Roderick, I have not done. I have let you go on in your own way all this time without doing anything, hoping that a change would come, but hoping in vain."

"I wish to goodness you would not worry me now I am so ill."

"I must. Now is the time to try and bring you to your senses. It is the only chance I have, Rod. You see you are getting worse and worse—constitution ruined—hopelessly involved in debt——"

"Oh, I shall make a *grand coup* one of these days, and clear everything off," he groaned.

"Not you. That's what every foolish racing and betting man thinks."

"Will you leave off, mother! My head's all of a whirl. There, it's of no use to make a fuss about it. I must keep on till I win, and once I do I'll sell the horses and have no more to do with them."

"And will you give up that other dreadful shameless expense?"

"Never you mind about that."

"But I do mind about it, Roderick. As your mother, it is my duty. Now, my dear boy, do be ruled by me. Do take my advice. You never will win enough on the turf to clear yourself."

"How do you know?"

"By experience. There is only one way to recoup yourself."

"Speculate?"

"Yes, if you like to call it so."

"What in?"

"Matrimony."

"I? Not fit to marry. Rubbish!"

"Yes, that is what you are talking. You must marry, Rod, my dear! It is your duty. Begin quite a new life, my dear, and clear the estate. Then turn quiet country gentleman."

"Ha, ha, ha!—Hff! Ah, my head!"

"Self-inflicted pain, Roderick. But come now; you know I am talking sense."

"I don't want a wife."

"Yes, you do. It is time you married."

"Who'd have me? You don't want me to marry that widow?"

"You might do worse, dear: she has a very fine fortune, and is a sweet-tempered little woman."

"Sweet-tempered little fool. Bah! Idiot! I won't have her. I wouldn't if she were a ten times millionairess, so drop it."

"I don't want you to marry her, dear."

"Then you've got another woman up your sleeve?"

"'Drop it!'—'up your sleeve!'—My dear Roderick, should you make use of such slang to your mother?"

"Oh, my head!"

"Let me lay my eau-de-Cologne moistened handkerchief on your forehead."

"Lay the coal-scuttle on it if you like, only don't bother me."

"I won't, my darling. There now, isn't that cool and pleasant?"

"Oh, it's very well, but smells spirity. I want a soda-and-brandy."

"No, no, not now. You really must not drink as you do, Roderick dear. Now, listen to me. I have a girl up my sleeve for you, if you will talk slang, you naughty boy."

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"Who is it?"

"That charming Miss Emsworth."

"Who's she?"

"Roderick! Now, my dear boy, you were introduced to her at Lady Baringham's, and she dined here with her father."

"Oh, her! Simpering bread-and-butter school miss."

"She is not, my dear! only sweet and innocent. The very woman for you. This is her first season. There are a dozen men wanting her, but I said as soon as she had been here an hour: 'That is the very girl for my boy, Roderick.' She is the only child, and Mr. Emsworth must have at least a million."

"What is he—a Whiteley, or John Barker?"

"Absurd boy! No! he is one of the British South Africa princes, and she'll be enormously rich. I had long talks with him, and he's a thoroughly keen, shrewd man of business."

"Then he won't be such a d——"

"Roderick!"

"Well, blessed fool as to marry his little girl to a used-up rake of a fellow, right to the eyes in debt and difficulties."

"Don't you be so fond of depreciating yourself, silly boy. You've been foolish, and now you are ill and repentant. I have seen a little of the world, my darling, and I know what Mr. Emsworth means by settling in England this season, and taking his daughter everywhere. These men have made money, and they want position. Trust me for it, he wants to match her to some scion of good family—to give his child a title, and the son-in-law a large fortune. Now do you see?"

"I don't want the chit. Silly schoolgirl, who could only say 'yes' and 'no.'"

"You did not get to know her. She is very sweet, highly accomplished, has a lovely voice, plays brilliantly, speaks three or four languages, and is charmingly pretty. Only wants the style that a season would give her. Rod, my boy, you have only to ask, and there is a delightful wife for you with a noble fortune. Come now, do be a good boy, and take my advice."

"What, go and tell the old man that I'm a regular wreck and want to marry his filly?"

"Filly! For shame, Roderick! Go to him and propose in due form, prior to going abroad."

"Going abroad? What, to get rid of my duns?"

"Oh, you dear, foolish, absurd child! No—no—no! You are out of order and want change. Make sure of her first, and then go and see Allan Murray or his father, tell him the exact truth about everything, and ask him where you had better go for three months—Ems, Baden, Aix, Cannes, or Algeria."

"Three months! Besides, I can't afford——"

"You shall afford it, my dear, even if I sell my diamonds, for the estate must be rescued from these dreadful harpies to whom you have pledged it."

"Here, how the devil do you know?" cried the young man, sitting up.

"Never mind. I know everything about you, Roderick—*everything*," said the lady with intense emphasis.

"The dickens you do."

"Yes, everything, you foolish boy, and that it is time a certain dissipation came to an end. There, you know I am right, so do as I wish. *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute.* Before the three months are over you will be thoroughly well again, and I shall have managed Mr. Emsworth and his daughter. He will trust me to introduce his child to society and be her chaperon. I quite love the dear girl already. Then I shall persuade him to take her out for a month to wherever you are, and—there, do you see?"

"I don't want the chit."

"Messieurs, le jeu est fait. Yes, I see, mother. What a clever old girl you are!"

"Somebody need be clever, my dear."

"Is she all you say?"

"Ten times more, Roddy dear. A most loveable girl, and as innocent as she is high. Oh, you lucky fellow; it is a chance of chances."

"Is it? Don't count your chickens until——"

"Ah, but this little chicken is hatched, Rod, my dear. There, I'm very glad we've had this pleasant chat; you will be good now, won't you?"

"Oh yes, for I'm sick of living as I am."

"Of course he is, poor darling," said Lady Braetoun, bending down to re-saturate the handkerchief

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with scent and kiss her son's brow. "No wonder, poor boy."

"Gently with that scent; you are soaking me. What time is it?"

"Half-past twelve, dear, and the people are actually coming out of church."

"What!"

"Roderick, my darling, what is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," cried the young man, dragging at the bell. "Only an appointment that I must keep."

"No, no, my darling, pray lie still. Have lunch with me to-day."

* * * * * *

"Did you ring, my lady?"

"No, I did. I ordered the phaeton to be round at twelve; why the dickens isn't it at the door?"

"Been at the door half-an-hour, my lord," said the servant who had answered the bell.

"Then why the dickens didn't you come up and tell me?"

"Your lordship's orders were that you were not to be told, because you could always see for yourself."

"Go to the devil, idiot!"

"Yes, my lord," and the door closed.

"You shouldn't speak so pettishly to the servants, Roderick darling," said Lady Braetoun, "it will make them think you irritable. Are you going to have a drive, then?"

"If I wasn't going for a drive I shouldn't have ordered the horses round should I?"

"No, my dear; of course not. Good-bye, darling. You will be back to dinner?"

"No; I shall dine at the club."

"Very well, dear. But you will think seriously of what I said?"

Roderick, Viscount Braetoun, was scowling at his handsome features in the glass, noticing the dark rings under his eyes, and a peculiar twitching at the corners. Then, without giving further answer than a short nod, he strode out of the drawing-room, and his mother moved to the window to see, a few minutes after, a handsome pair of high-stepping horses driven up from where the groom was waiting, her son step in, and the stylish phaeton dash off at a rapid rate.

"Ha!" she said softly, "I did not think he would take it so well. Terribly plebeian; but she is very sweet, and it will be our salvation."

After which Lady Braetoun picked up the scent-laden handkerchief her son had tossed off his forehead, and seated herself on the nearest couch, looking handsome with her grey hair and stately bearing, quite the patrician mother, smiling, placid, and content, in the satisfaction of what she looked upon as a good Sunday morning's work.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

CHAPTER II.

Playing with Death.

Roderick, Lord Braetoun's appointment was in the Strand, for he drew up at a well-known restaurant, gave the reins to the groom, and upon entering walked through at once to the inner room, where, at a table in a corner, a particularly striking little figure was seated, and rose eagerly as he appeared.

"Oh, Rod, dear, I was getting in such a fidget."

"What about, Baby?"

"I thought you didn't mean to come, but it's all right now."

"Didn't mean to come! Didn't I say I'd come?" he cried pettishly.

"Yes, and I ought to have known, but I am so stupid. I've ordered the lunch, so as to be ready, for I do so want to go—omelette, sweetbread, cutlet, and a bottle of dry."

"Humph! That's right," said Braetoun, seating himself and gazing rather wistfully at the piquant little figure in pale blue and a gauzy diaphanous bonnet, with quite enough lace here and there to give the wearer a fairy-like—theatrically fairy-like—aspect. Her face was covered by a delicate veil, which needlessly heightened a perfect complexion, and half hid her fair, clustering golden hair, whose tint gave the lie to any suspicion of aureoline, or any other *coiffeur's* preparation. In short, she bore careful inspection, and the most particular in taste would have declared Lucy Lee, known as "Baby," late of the chorus of the Theatre Royal Thespis, to be absolutely the most charming little blonde upon whom eyes had ever rested.

"Oh, what a serious look," she said, as she began to take off her gloves and display a pair of the prettiest hands possible, and then to remove her veil, which was lightly tied on behind, this last process helping to explain the sobriquet by which she was known, for baby-like dimples played about in cheeks and chin, and again at the knuckles, or where the knuckles should have shown in her soft, white, little hands. "Not cross, are you, Roddy, dear?"

"Cross? No. Tired; and got a horrible head on."

"Oh, poor, dear, darling old man!" she cooed. "Only wait till we're down in the country, and that ogre of a groom isn't looking, and I'll kiss the poor, aching place. Mustn't kiss it here, dear, must I?"

"Don't be a little fool," he said sourly. "Oh, here's the cham.," as the waiter came up, carrying an ice pail. "Yes; open it."

The cork was dexterously sent flying, the pale pink, amber wine poured foaming out from glass to glass till each was filled, without a bead running over the side. Then, as the waiter hurried off for the first dish, the glasses were raised, there was a long, silent look, and a moustache dipped in one, a pair of classically-formed, ruddy lips touched the other, to take a few sips in the same time that the masculine vessel was drained.

"Poor old thirsty boy! I am so sorry that the head's bad."

"Hah! It'll be better now," said Braetoun; and his face lit up a little as he gazed approvingly at his companion's costume. "That's capital, Baby."

"Do you like it, dear?" and as he nodded she added with childish delight: "Oh, I am so glad."

"It all suits you perfectly. Ah, you're a horribly pretty little thing."

"Horribly!" she said, with a pout of her rosy lips. "What a shame!"

"Well, you can't help it, pet," he continued, half mockingly; "but you really are a puzzle to me."

"Puzzle? Why?"

"Because you ought to have been the daughter of some big pair of blue-blooded swells, instead of a farmer's daughter. How did you come?—hansom?"

"No, in the brougham, of course. I wasn't going to let that lazy fellow have nothing to do on a Sunday. He gets dreadfully idle and impudent. There, it's only about one o'clock now, and he'll have nothing else to do all day. He don't know what work is. He ought to have been on the stage. I say, how funny and quiet this place looks on a Sunday."

"Humph! yes; very. Go on; you're not eating."

"I'm not hungry, dear; I want to get out in the country. It seems a shame not to make haste. We can eat at any time."

"Yes, of course. Well, don't be impatient."

"All right; and you must eat, dear. Is your head getting better?"

"Yes. Sight of you has done me good."

"I wish that was quite true, Rod," she said, resting her elbows on the table, laying her little white chin in her hands and gazing at him earnestly with her dark grey eyes.

"Well, so it is," he retorted.

"No, only a compliment; but it is true with me."

"I say, 'bilboes,' little lady."

"Oh, I forgot," she said, colouring like a detected child, as she hastily removed her elbows from the table. "But it's of no use, Rod. I'm not a lady, and I never shall be one. But so long as you don't mind, it doesn't matter, does it?"

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At a table in a corner, a particularly striking little figure was seated.

"Not a bit," he said. "Come, have some more wine."

"No; I haven't drunk this, dear."

"Never mind; freshen it up. Make your eyes sparkle, Baby."

She smiled and held her glass, sipping from it after it had been refilled, but it did not have the effect he declared, for the pretty eyes grew slightly dim and suffused.

But they began to sparkle soon after, when their owner was seated beside Braetoun in the phaeton and the horses trotted west.

At Hyde Park Corner they were checked, and, as if already tutored, the groom stepped down from behind.

"Seven o'clock, my lord?" he said.

"Half-past."

The horses darted off again, and they were not checked till well beyond Esher, at the bottom of a very retired mossy lane, deep in woodlands. Rein was drawn at the gateway leading to a low thatched farmhouse, half hidden in ivy and other creepers.

At the sound of wheels a weaseley-looking, thin man, with the face and form of a boy, came trotting down, and pulled off his stableman's cap as he ducked down his head.

"Day, Sam."

"Day, m'lord; day, m'lady."

"How's the mare?"

"Splendid, m'lord; never see anything like her."

"Humph, where's your father?"

"Hout, m'lord."

"Eh? Out?" said Braetoun sharply. "Where's he gone?"

"Dunno, m'lord. Hout with the old woman. Chutch, p'r'aps."

"Church!" said Braetoun scornfully, as he drew up by the garden. "Here, take the horses out, and give them a good rub down and feed. As soon as that's done saddle the mare, and bring her into the field."

"Yes, m'lord," said the little groom obsequiously; and he hurried off muttering to himself, while his master strolled across an inclosure through a gate, and into what in days gone by had been the home field of the farm, an extensive tract of some thirty acres, shut in by trees, and, having just recovered from the late mowing, whose result was shown in a couple of goodly stacks, now stretched out in a beautiful green lawn, over which the rooks were sailing, their hoarse cries made musical by mellowing distance.

"Oh, look at the flowers, the dear old buttercups and daisies!" cried the girl; and in a few minutes her delicate white gloves were stained with green, as she kept on picking till she had quite a bunch.

"What a little goose it is!" said Braetoun with a smile full of contempt. "Wish you'd be content with them always, instead of orchids and stephanotis."

"Well, so I should be, if I could pick them for myself. Oh, I say, Rod, it's just like being at home again. It is so beautiful. How nice it all smells!"

"This will smell nicer," said the young man, taking out and lighting a cigar. "Wonder how long that idiot will be! I wanted to talk to his confounded father about the mare."

"Why didn't we go to the stables and see the dear?"

"Because you haven't got on your stable suit, you extravagant puss. Look at your gloves."

"Oh dear, what a mess! Never mind; you'll buy me another pair, dear. I should like to lie down in the grass and roll."

"If you do, I won't drive you home. Look here, Baby, you were never meant for a lady, but for a South Sea island savage, where the young ladies wear nothing but flowers. You'd be quite at home there."

"For shame, Rod! Well, let's go there. I should like it; I'm so tired of London. Who'd go gravel-grinding in

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the Park when they could come here? Hi—loo—loo—loo—loo! There goes a rabbit!"

"Be quiet, you little savage!" cried Braetoun, laughing. "Come, walk about properly. Suppose anyone saw you."

"But there is no one to see us here, Rod; that's why I like it. Seems like being Adam and Eve in the Garden."

"Oh, does it? Well, perhaps so, for that scoundrel Vinnis plays the devil here."

"Don't be cross, Rod, but do let's enjoy ourselves now we've come."

"All right, go on then; but you don't expect me to begin picking buttercups and daises, do you?"

The girl made no reply, but darted at the globular head of a dandelion flower in seed, picked it, and then, pouting out her lips, began to puff at it to see in how many breaths she could send the winged seeds flying.

"Look at that," she cried; "it's just like it used to be when I was a good little girl."

"What!" cried Braetoun, with a boisterous laugh; "why, you were never a good little girl in your life."

"That I was, till father and mother died, and I came up to nasty old London, and Aunt Duncan. She's a dear good old thing, but I don't think—I don't think——"

"What don't you think, Baby?"

"Look, here comes Bella," cried the girl excitedly, as the groom rode through the gate, mounted upon a satin-coated mare which touched the sward so lightly that she seemed to be gliding along on air. "Oh, you darling, how I do love you!"

"Nice she-devil to love, 'pon my soul!"

"For shame, sir! She's only wicked to you men, and you deserve it. See how gentle she is with me."

Proof positive was given the next moment, for, as the groom rode up, Lord Braetoun raised his hand to pat the animal's glossy neck, when she stopped short, uttered a low, squealing cry, and made a dog-like snap at his hand.

"Ah, you beast!" he cried fiercely.

"Don't, don't," said the girl. "It's only her play; look here."

"Keep back; she'll savage you," cried Braetoun.

"Not she. You wouldn't hurt me, would you, Bella, you beauty?" said the girl, going close up to the mare, which sniffed at the flowers and then suffered herself to be patted and caressed, the girl ending by raising the animal's muzzle and then kissing her between the eyes.

Suffered herself to be patted and caressed.

"That will do," said Braetoun impatiently. "She isn't a lap-dog, Baby. Now, Sam, give her a canter."

The sinister-looking lad pulled his cap down tightly, gathered up the reins, and pressed the mare's sides with his legs, when she shook her head violently, sidled, arched her back, and uttered a low, whinnying noise.

"Quiet!" cried the lad harshly, and, after making two or three bounds, she went off at an elastic canter towards the trees, and then down by the side of the hedge towards the lower part of the great field.

"Splendid, splendid!" muttered Braetoun. "She'd be perfect if it were not for her temper."

"She is perfect," said the girl. "Look at her. Oh, how I should like to ride her! What would she be without a bit of temper?"

"Bearable. She's a devil with," said Braetoun, laughing. "Well, she must be safe for a few races to come; and she need be. But hang the beast! I hate her."

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"Glad of it. She's beautiful enough to make you love her."

"Well, suppose I did, Baby," he said contemptuously, "what then?"

"I should hate her. Don't want you to love anything but me."

She darted a look full of passion at him, but he did not notice it, his eyes being fixed on the mare as she galloped along with her head down and neck curved, the lad riding her perfectly and the hoofs hardly seeming to touch the soft turf.

"Capital—capital!" muttered Braetoun.

"Yes, she is a darling," cried the girl as she too watched now, with her lips parted and her white teeth glistening. "Faster, Sam, faster. Give her her head."

"No, no, no, no," growled the young man—needlessly, though, for the horse and her jockey were far beyond hearing. "He's going quite right. I don't want her made hot. So you don't want me to love anyone but you, eh, Baby?" he said, smiling.

"Of course not."

"Humph! Fellow had better love a mare than a woman."

"No, he hadn't. She'd cost more and you couldn't trust her."

"Nor a woman, neither."

"You're a wicked story, Rod, that you are, and if you were quite well I'd punish you. I say, do get quite well again, there's a dear. Oh, do look, though! Here she comes. Oh, you pet, you pet! What did you say Bella Donna meant?"

"Poison," said Braetoun shortly.

"That you didn't, Rod. It was beautiful girl—no, beautiful lady; and so she is."

The lad drew rein close by them, and the girl went to the mare's head to caress her, while Braetoun gave her rider a few instructions in a low voice, ending by laying his hand heavily on his companion's arm.

"Stand back, Lucy," he said sharply; and the act seemed to startle the mare, which shied violently, and went off at a tremendous gallop for a hundred yards or so before the lad got her head again.

"Temper," muttered Braetoun.

"'Tisn't," said the girl decisively. "She thought you were going to hit her with a fork handle. I know she's been ill-used."

"Clever! And how do you know?"

"Because that's how one of our mares used to do; and father caught the horsekeeper one day hitting her with the fork handle, and father knocked him down, and was summoned for it."

"Summoned or not summoned, I'd knock anyone down who ill-used one of my horses, Baby. But it isn't that Bella Donna's a regular savage, and that lad's the only person living who can ride her."

"Nonsense! I could. Let me, now."

"You? Absurd!"

"It isn't, Rod. She'd be as gentle as a lamb with me. Send Sam in when they come back. I must have a canter."

"Without a riding habit?"

"I don't want a riding habit. I never used to have one."

"But there is no side saddle."

"I don't want a side saddle. I could ride her barebacked. I used to ride everything at the farm. Why, Rod, I've ridden the colts, the donkeys, the old cart-horses, and I once had a trot all round the field on an old Alderney cow. Oh, it was fun—all jolty and jog, and she was such a bony thing. Ah, those were happy old days!"

"Happy old days?"

"Yes, but I was never so happy as I am now. You do pet and spoil me so."

"I believe you want to get back to the stage. Think of the applause, bouquets, and diamonds—notes too."

"Don't be a brute to me, Rod. You know I always hated the silly idiots, with their flattery and stupid presents. Then you came, and everything seemed so different. I say, Rod dear, oughtn't you to marry me?"

"No. Spoil you," he said roughly. "Perfect as you are."

"Couldn't be happier, could we? Only I feel sometimes as if it would be right. But I couldn't love you more, and the country and flowers, and horses."

"And champagne, and a brougham, and money."

"Pooh! I don't care for them a bit. I am tired of them directly, but I am never tired of being down here with you."

"Bosh! You're getting tired of me now, and want to get rid of me, so as to go back to the theatre."

"Rod!"

Only that word, full of reproach in its tones, as the tears started to the girl's eyes, and she clasped the speaker's arm. But she burst into a half-hysterical laugh directly.

"You shouldn't talk to me like that, Rod," she said softly. "It's only teasing, and I don't mind, because you know better; but it hurt me, dear. There. It's all gone now. Oh, do look at the mare; isn't she lovely? Look how her skin shines. What a shame to put that thin, ugly boy on her! Rod, I must have one canter."

"Absurd!"

"Well, I like to do absurd things sometimes. I will ride. Here, you, Sam Vinnis," she cried as the lad rode up, "jump down."

The lad glanced at his master and obeyed, while the girl took the reins and began caressing the mare.

"You can go back to the stables. I'll bring the mare in."

The lad grinned, and hearing no counter order from Braetoun, he walked awkwardly back, with his legs very wide apart.

The girl waited till he had passed through the gate, and was out of sight, while Braetoun looked at her curiously, and

"I should kill her."

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as if something were passing through his mind. Then he started, and turned paler when she spoke.

"Now, Rod, give me a leg up."

"Nonsense!" he said angrily, "she'll turn her head and bite you directly."

"She won't. You wouldn't bite your little mistress, would you, beauty? You sweet—not you. He tells wicked stories about you, you darling."

"Mind, Baby. I tell you she'll savage you."

"She will you, if you say such wicked things about her. Come and help me on."

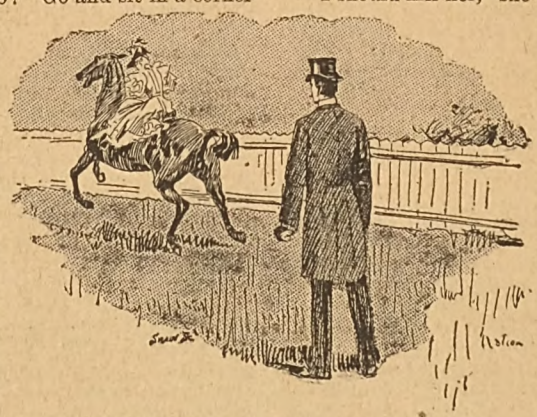
"I won't. Why, you'd be off in a moment, and break your neck."

"Oh dear, should I?" she cried mockingly; "and if I did what would darling old Roddy do? Go and sit in a corner and cry; or be very glad to have got rid of a tiresome, expensive, extravagant thing, and then marry some very good, nice lady in his own set. I believe you'd like to get rid of me and do that, so now's your chance."

He gazed at her wildly as his scene with his mother flashed before his mental gaze, then turned ghastly pale.

Lucy burst into a mocking peal of laughter.

"There, sir, how do you like to be teased? That made you feel. Poor old darling! It will be a lesson to you not to tease me. I know: he couldn't live without me, could he, beauty? We know, don't we? Come, that's right; rest your pretty head on my shoulder. We love one another, and we're not a bit jealous. Now then, you shall take me round the field twice, as fast as you can go. We don't want side saddles, or riding habits, or any of that nonsense. We understand one another, and we'll show him how we can go. Now, stand quite still, beauty, while I mount. Come, Rod, make a stirrup of your hands."



"Mad little fool; it would serve her right."

"I will not," he said angrily, and speaking with a peculiar look in his eyes.

"Thank you," she said, with a gentle look. "I like that. I'm so glad. If you hadn't said that, and turned to be so cross, I should have felt that you didn't care whether I did or no. But you would care, because you do really love me—very, very dearly. Rod," she whispered, as she nestled to him, with the rein over her arm, "I am glad I'm so pretty."

He caught her in his arms, for they were quite alone, and the mare started slightly.

"You little mass of vanity," he said, as he held her tightly. "Proud of your pink and white face, and bright eyes?"

"Not a bit," she said, "I'm only glad because I know you like me to look nice. Now help me on."

"No—no," he said, starting again, and with the peculiar look coming into his eyes.

"Yes, please—please; I want to. I must ride. Help me, Rod."

"I can't," he said; "it isn't safe for you."

She burst into a little, silvery, rippling laugh.

"What nonsense! I could ride anything. Come, help me."

She gave him a long, earnest look, and as he stooped down and made a stirrup of his hands, she placed one tiny little foot in them, laid a hand upon the saddle, and the next moment was seated, the mare not flinching in the least. Then she laughingly settled her right leg over the pommel, and shook out her dress, patting down the stiff folds and looking at him archly.

"Now, sir," she said, "how do I look—pretty?"

"Pretty?" he said, as he settled her tiny foot in the stirrup after shortening the leather. "Lovely."

"What nonsense! But will you always think so?"

"Always."

"When the little crows' feet come in the corners, and won't be stopped up with powder? Oh, Rod," she whispered, as she bent down and kissed him; "I know. But you must always love me, Rod, because if you were to throw me over I should—I should——"

"Yes—what?" he said huskily.

"Turn like the mare, and show how much devil I had in me. I should kill her."

"What!" he said, starting violently.

"I should kill her," she said, as she leant down with her face very close to his. "Yes, I know. It would be because there was someone else for whom you were throwing me over. I've seen it done—often. But I'm not like they were. I couldn't bear it. I should kill her, and then I should kill myself. Yes," she went on, with a peculiar smile, "it sounds ugly, doesn't it? But I should, somehow, for I couldn't bear for anyone ever to look in your eyes as I do, and put her arms about your neck. You are mine, Rod, and I'm yours, and——what am I talking about? There, let go of the rein. Why did you catch it?"

"Because you must not go," he said huskily, as he forced himself to speak, and get rid of the strange paralysing sensation that troubled him.

"Yes, I must. I will. Let go!"

"No," he said, with a boisterous, unnatural laugh. "Look at that devil, now, she's laying down her ears."

"Nonsense! What has come to you?"

"Nice question," he said roughly, "after your talking like you have been. Here, come down."

"I won't."

"I tell you I don't want to come and pick you up all soft, with a lot of bones broken."

"I should think not. I won't let you have a cripple to pet. Let go."

"I shall not. There, I'll walk her up to the stable."

"Rubbish!"

"I will not let you ride her. Look at her; she's as skittish as—as——"

"Oh, say it!—as I am. Now, don't be absurd. Let go."

"I tell you I will not. I can't let you. I—I feel as if something would happen."

"Nonsense! You dear, loving, careful old boy; but I won't break your heart by coming to grief. Let go, Rod, I must have my ride. It sends a thrill all through me as I feel her breathe. It's like sitting on air—like being part of her. Now let go."

"I will not," he panted. "You have no grip of the saddle, and that she-devil will——"

Snatch.

Quick as thought, she twitched the rein from his hand; the mare made a deer-like leap, and they went off like the wind which swept by as a cloud covered the sun, while in imagination Braetoun saw her slip from her seat, to be dragged by the stirrup at the heels of the mare, and something seemed to whisper to him.

"And then you would be free."

"Mad little fool; it would serve her right!"

(To be continued.)

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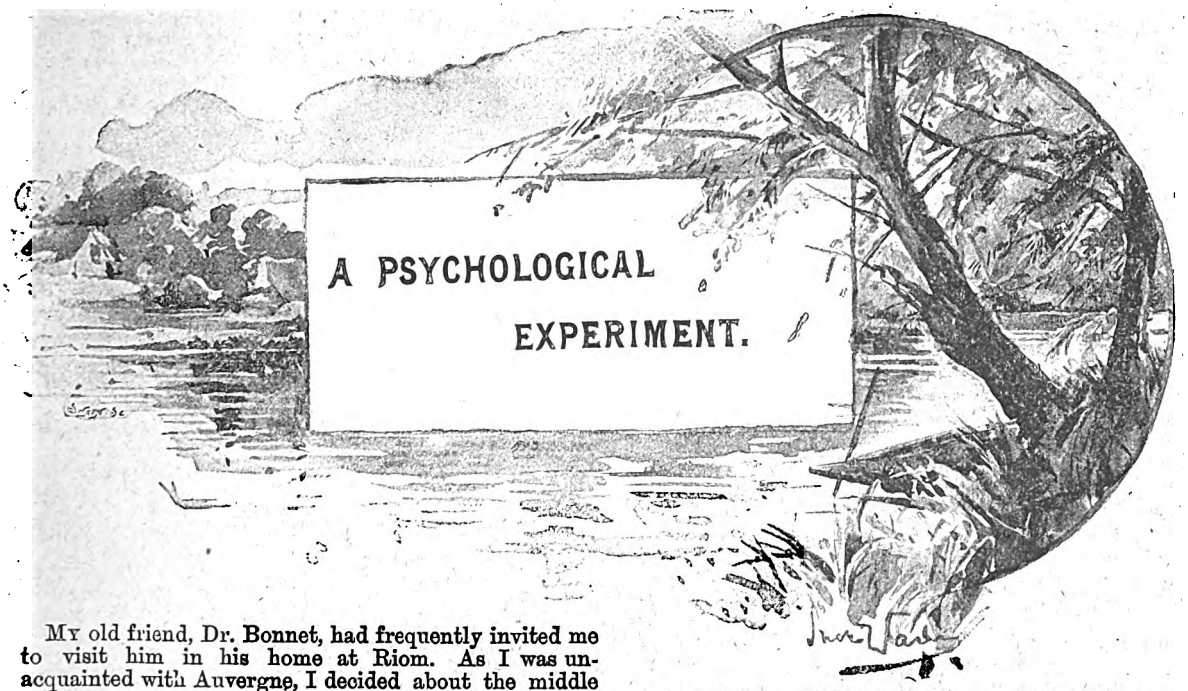

MY old friend, Dr. Bonnet, had frequently invited me to visit him in his home at Riom. As I was unacquainted with Auvergne, I decided about the middle of the summer of 1876 to accept the invitation.

I arrived by the morning train, and the first face I saw on the platform was that of the Doctor. He was clad in grey, wore a round, black, soft felt hat with wide brim and a very tall crown, narrowing as it rose to the shape of a chimney-pot, a genuine Auvergnat hat, which suggested a charcoal-burner. Togged out thus, in his light suit, broad hat and bushy white hair, the doctor had the air of a young old beau.

He embraced me with the frank delight that country dwellers always exhibit on seeing arrive long-desired friends, and waving his arms around him, proudly exclaimed: "Behold Auvergne!" As for me, I gazed, but saw only a chain of mountains whose truncated cones might have stood for extinct volcanoes.

After a while, when I had swallowed a cup of *café au lait* and rested a little in the doctor's house, he dragged me out again to see the old city, obliging me to admire the apothecary's shop and the other celebrated old buildings, black and gloomy, but pretty as trinkets, with their richly sculptured fronts. At last, before one of them, Doctor Bonnet asked me to wait a bit while he entered for a professional call.

"I'll not be gone a minute," said he, "and afterwards we'll go to the Chatel-Guyon Hill and view from there the city and the whole Puy-de-Dome range. Wait here on the pavement. I'll just run upstairs and straight down again."

The house before which he left me standing was one of those sombre old country houses, closed, mute and mournful. It seemed to me, besides, to have a specially sinister countenance, the cause of which I soon discovered—all the broad windows of the second storey were closed halfway up with stout, wooden shutters. Only the upper part was open, as if they had intended to hinder the people shut up in this vast stone coffer from looking into the street.

When the Doctor reappeared I told him what I had noticed.

"Yes," responded he, "you are right. The poor creature shut in there is never allowed to see what passes outside. She is crazy—an idiot, or rather a simpleton—that which you Normans term a '*niente*.' Ah, it is a sorrowful story, at the same time a wonderfully strange and interesting case in pathology. Shall I gave you details?"

"Yes," said I, and he resumed:

"It is twenty years now since the owners of that house, my clients, had a child, a girl, like all other girls apparently. But I soon perceived that while the body of the little one developed admirably, her intelligence remained inert. She walked at a very early age, but absolutely refused to talk. At first I believed her deaf; then I found that she heard perfectly, but that she did not understand. Loud noises made her tremble, startled and frightened her, though she could not comprehend their causes.

"She grew; she was superb, but mute—mute through lack of sense. I sought every means in my power to rouse a glimmer of intelligence in that torpid brain; nothing succeeded. I thought that I had noticed something like recognition of her nurse; but once weaned she knew her mother no more. She never knew how to speak that word, the first that infants lisp and the last that soldiers cry on the battle-field—'mother.' Occasionally vague stammerings or meaningless squalls fell from her lips; nothing more.

"When the weather was fine she laughed continually, uttering soft cries that one might compare to the cooing of birds; when it rained she wept and moaned dismally, frightfully, like the plaint of dogs howling at death. She liked to roll on the grass in the fashion of young animals, to run like a mad thing; and she clapped her hands joyously every time she saw the sun entering her room. When her window was opened she clapped her hands again and threw herself about in her bed in order to be dressed the sooner.

"She appeared, however, to make no distinctions

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between persons, between her mother and her nurse; between her father and me; between the coachman and the cook. I liked her unfortunate parents, and went to see them nearly every day. I also dined with them frequently, which allowed me to see that Bertha—for so they named her—that Bertha, I say, seemed to recognise the dishes and to prefer some to others.

"She was then twelve years of age, but developed like a girl of eighteen, and taller than I. The idea came to me then to foster her gluttony and by this means to bring into her mind an appreciation of differences, to force her, through the faculty of taste, the animal love of certain savours, if not to reasoning, at least to instinctive distinctions, which would clearly constitute a sort of material working of thought. We could, later on, perhaps, by making an appeal to her passions, to her appetite, and by carefully choosing those that would be able to serve us, obtain a sort of return shock from the body to the dormant intellect that would, little by little, increase the insensible working of her brain.

"In pursuance of this plan I, one day, placed before her two plates, one of soup, the other of very sweet vanilla cream, obliging her to taste alternately one and the other. Then I left her free to select for herself. She ate the plate of cream. In a short time I had made her gluttonous—so gluttonous, in fact, that she seemed to have in her soul but one thought, or rather the one desire, to eat. She recognised perfectly the various dishes, reached for those she liked and greedily seized them. She wept, too, when they were taken from her.

"I then thought of teaching her to come to the dining-room at the sound of the bell. It was a long task; I accomplished it, nevertheless. There was assuredly established in her clouded understanding a connection between the sound and her taste, a sympathy between two senses, a call from one to the other, consequently a sort of linking of ideas, if one could term an idea that faint, that instinctive bond of union between two organic functions.

"I pushed my experiment still further and taught her—with what difficulty!—to recognise the meal hours on the dial of the clock. For a long while it was impossible for me to hold her attention upon the hands, but I succeeded at last in making her notice the striking. The method was simple. I stopped the dinner bell ringing, and everyone rose to go to the table when the little hammer struck the hour of noon, etc., etc. But here success ended. To count the strokes I could not teach her. She simply darted to the door each time the clock struck, then, little by little, was able to grasp the fact that the striking had not all the same value from the point of view of repasts, and her eye, guided by her ear, rested frequently on the dial.

"Having noticed this I was careful every day at twelve and at six o'clock to put my finger on the given number exactly as the sound she awaited rang out, and I soon perceived that she followed attentively the march of the little brass hands that I had often moved in her presence. She had understood—I should say rather that she had seized the meaning. I had forced upon her the knowledge, or to make it still clearer, forced upon her the sensation of the hour as one does with carp—which have not, however, the assistance of clocks—by feeding them every day at exactly the same moment.

"Once this result reached, all the timekeepers in the house occupied her exclusive attention. She passed the days watching them, listening for them and awaiting the hours, from which happened something that was very funny. The works of a pretty little Louis XVI. clock that hung at the head of her bed got out of order and failed to strike. She noticed it. She had waited twenty minutes with her eye on the hands, for ten o'clock to sound. But when the needle passed the figure she was stupified at hearing nothing, so stupified that one saw plainly that she was agitated by one of those violent emotions which move us in the face of a great catastrophe.

"And stranger still, she had the patience to remain before the little dial till eleven o'clock came to see what would happen. She heard nothing still, naturally; then, suddenly, seized with a mad rage at being deceived, or with fright at being face to face with an inexplicable mystery, or with the furious impatience of a passionate nature before an obstacle, she caught up the tongs from the chimney corner and in a second had smashed the clock to atoms.

"Her brain, then, was working, calculating in an obscure fashion, it is true, and in a narrow limit, for I was still unable to make her distinguish people as she distinguished hours. To obtain from her a further stir of intelligence we would have to appeal to her passions in the material sense of the word. Of this we soon had another and terrible proof.

* * * * *

"She had become magnificent, a type of her race, a sort of admirable but stupid Venus. She was now sixteen, and I had rarely seen such beauty of form, suppleness of shape and regularity of features. I have said a Venus; yes, a Venus, blonde, plump, vigorous, with her great limpid eyes, vacant, blue as a flax-flower, and wide mouth with full fleshy lips, the mouth of a glutton, a sensualist, a mouth for kisses.

"Well, one morning her father entered my surgery with a strangely disturbed air, and seated himself without even responding to my good-morning.

"'I—I am here to speak to you upon a very serious matter,' said he at last; 'is it—is it possible for Bertha to marry?'

"I jumped with amazement and involuntarily cried out:

"'Marry! Bertha! It is incredible!'

"'Yes, I know—but—reflect, Doctor; we have hoped—we have thought, you see, that possibly—if she—had children it would be a help to her, a great happiness, besides, in short, that her mind would awaken through the joys of maternity.'

"I was greatly perp'exed. It was reasonable. It might be that this thing, so new—this wonderful instinct of motherhood that throbbed in the breasts of brutes as in the heart of woman, that makes the hen throw herself into the jaws of the dog to defend her little ones—would bring about a revolution, a complete transformation in that dormant brain, and start to working the motionless mechanism of thought. I immediately recalled, too, an example that had come under my observation. I had possessed some years before a little hunting dog, a female, so stupid that I could do nothing with her. She had pups, and became at once—I cannot say intelligent—but certainly as well developed mentally as many another dog.

"Scarcely had I foreseen this possibility than I, too, was eager to marry off Bertha, not so much through friendship for her and her poor parents, though assuredly that helped, as through scientific curiosity. What would come of it? There was a strange problem here.

"'Perhaps you are right,' I answered the father, 'we

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can only try, but—but you will never find a man that will consent to this.'

"'Yes,' said he in a low voice, 'I have found him.'

"I was dumbstruck, but managed to stammer out:

"'A suitable match—someone—someone in your own station?'

"'Yes,' said he briefly; 'it was of that I came to tell you and to consult you. It is Gaston du Bois, of Lucelles.'

"I had nearly cried out: 'The scoundrel!' but caught myself in time, and said, instead:

"'So be it, if Du Bois suits you.'

"The poor man warmly shook my hand.

"'In a month from now, then,' said he, 'the marriage shall be.'

* * * * *

"Briefly, Gaston du Bois, of Lucelles, though a man of good family, was a gentleman of leisure who had run through all his paternal inheritance, mired himself in debt by a thousand questionable means, and now simply sought a new way of procuring money. He had found it here. Handsome, strong and hearty, though wild and of that odious race of fast livers, he appeared to me a sufficiently suitable husband, inasmuch as later on he could be got rid of with a simple pension.

"He came, then, to the house to pay court to the beautiful 'innocent,' who, moreover, seemed to please him. He brought her flowers, kissed her hand, sat at her feet and regarded her with tender eyes; but she gave no heed to his attentions, and never seemed to distinguish him from the others living about her.

"The marriage took place.

"Soon afterwards I went to see Bertha, to read on her face, if possible, if change had come to her. But I found her as I had found her every day before, preoccupied solely with the clocks and with dinner. He, on the contrary, seemed really to have affection for her, and laughed and played with her as with a petted kitten. He had nothing better to do.

"Then I began to make almost daily visits to the married pair, and before long I saw that the young wife recognised her husband, and threw upon him the greedy glances that hitherto she had kept for sugared dishes. She followed his movements, distinguished his step on the stairs or in the adjoining room, and clapped her hands when he came, with a countenance transfigured by a glow of profound happiness. She loved him with all her force and soul, her poor, infirm soul, and with all her heart, the poor heart of a grateful beast.

"It was a picture of admirable and innocent passion, nevertheless pure and modest, such as Nature had put in souls before man complicated and disfigured it with all shades and changes of sentiment. But alas! the husband soon wearied of this beautiful, ardent and mute creature. His days began to be spent away from her. She began to suffer. She waited for him from morning till night, her eyes on the clock, and thinking no more of the meals, for now he ate always from home, at Clermont, Chatel-Guyon, Royal, no matter where, in order not to return.

"She grew thin. All other thought, desire, expectation or confused hope fled from her mind, and the hours when she did not see him became for her a time of cruelest torture. Soon he slept from home and returned only at daybreak. She would never go to bed till he had come, but sat motionless on a chair, her eyes on the little brass clock hands, turning and turning always in their slow regular march around the dial with its tell-tale numbers. She heard the trot of his horse away down in the valley, sprang up with a bound, and then, when he came, turned with a gesture of a ghost to the clock, as if to say: 'See how late it is!' And he, beginning to be afraid of this loving jealous idiot, grew fretted, as brutes do; and one night he struck her.

"They ran for me. She was struggling and howling in a horrible attack of sorrow, anger, passion, I know not which, for who can divine what is passing in these rudimentary brains? I calmed her with morphine and forbade her seeing this man again, for I comprehended that marriage was infallibly leading her to death. Then she became mad. Yes, my friend, that idiot became truly mad. She thought of him always and awaited him always, day or night, sleeping or waking.

"As I saw her emaciating and pining, and as her obstinate regard never quitted the clocks, I had taken from the house every apparatus for the measurement of time. I took from her thus the possibility of counting; of counting the hours and of ceaselessly seeking in obscure recollections what moment he had formerly returned. I hoped at last to kill memory in her, and to extinguish that flame of thought that I had lighted with so much trouble.

"I have not succeeded. The other day I tried an experiment. I gave her my watch. She took it, considered it some time, then began to wait in a lamentable fashion, as if the sight of that little instrument had suddenly reawakened the memory that had begun to be dulled. She is thinner to-day than ever, with great hollow, brilliant eyes and a restlessness of nerves and body that keeps her pacing, pacing, back and forth like a caged tigress.

"I have had the windows barred, high shutters put to the glasses, and all the chairs screwed to the floor to keep her from looking into the street to see if he is returning. Ah! the poor parents; what a life they have passed."

* * * * *

We had arrived now on the hill.

"See," said the Doctor, facing about. "Look at Riom from here."

The gloomy old town had the air of an ancient, dead city. Behind us, as far as the eye could reach, stretched a green, wooded plain, dotted with villages and towns, wrapped in a blue vapourish mist that reached to the sky line; while to the right, clear to the horizon, ran a chain of round-topped knobs and mountains.

The Doctor still talked of the country and the summits and the history of this or that one. But I did not listen; I was thinking, thinking only of that poor mad girl, seeing only her; she seemed to hover, like a sorrowful spirit, over all that vast country.

I demanded brusquely:

"And the husband—what has become of him?"

"He lives at Royal on the income they allow him. He is happy and free."

Saddened a little and silent, both of us, we turned to go back. Just then an English T-cart, which had come up behind us, passed rapidly, drawn by a thorough bred. The Doctor clutched my arm.

"There," said he, "there he goes now—Du Bois."

And I saw a wide-brimmed grey felt, tipped over the ear, and beneath it two broad shoulders disappearing in a cloud of dust.

LE VIER.

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Key to Jumble Story Competition.—No. 1.]

BESSIE.

"YOU'LL come again to-morrow?"

"I can't, besides——"

"Besides what?" curiously.

"You know, Dick, well enough," and the woman turned away.

The man kicked a stone viciously.

"Just once more," he pleaded; "I shall be going away soon now."

"Yes," replied the woman sadly, "and I shall be glad when you have gone. I can't help it, but I know that to meet you like this is very, very wrong."

"Rot!" the man ejaculated.

"No it is not rot, Dick, but I will try and come just *once* more."

She stood facing him now, a little thing with soft, fair hair clustering round her almost childish face.

He was so tall that he had to bend to look into those wistful, upturned eyes.

He took her little face between his hands and kissed it.

A man with hair streaked with grey, and a slight stoop, passed them; he half paused, then hurried on swiftly.

They did not see him; they were looking at each other.

"Let me go, I shall be so late."

"Then promise to come to-morrow?"

"If I can."

"I shall expect you. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, Dick."

* * * * *

A man and his wife were sitting in the drawing-room, while the late autumn sun flooded the room with colour as it slowly set.

He was reading the paper and smoking his beloved pipe.

She was working, and her thoughts kept time to her stitches.

"How dreadfully old he is looking to-night"—stitch, stitch.

"What ages we have been married"—stitch, stitch—"more like thirteen years than three"—stitch, stitch—and she sighed.

The man (he was not so very old either) laid down his paper, and looked at her, opened his mouth to speak, but stopped, and took up his paper again.

"Why didn't we meet three years ago?" A pause. "I wonder why I married *him?*" Stitch, stitch, stitch—angrily now.

"How he stoops! Always poring over those musty old books, I suppose"—stitch, stitch. "I don't think he stooped like that three years ago. I wonder——" She laid down her work and closed her eyes.

The man smoked furiously.

"I am going out shooting to-morrow," he said.

"Shooting!" She sat up and looked at him. "I didn't know you cared about it."

"One must have a change," shortly.

"A change; perhaps he was weary too!"

"You look tired; you had better go to bed. I must see to my gun and things; I shall be very late to-night."

He went into the library and locked the door; then he took a large parchment document out of his desk, and read it over.

After that he began to write. Sheet after sheet of notepaper he covered, pausing at length to look at his wife's portrait which smiled down at him over his table.

"No, no," he muttered, "better not," and he threw the paper on the fire and watched it burn and smoulder away. Then he took a fresh sheet and wrote five words on it, and placed it with the parchment in a drawer.

A clock chimed three a.m. The man did not heed it but sat smoking. At last, as daylight dawned, he took up his gun and examined it.

A hurried pretence of breakfast in the grey morning light, then he stole up to his wife's room. She was sleeping peacefully.

"Bessie," he said softly.

She opened her blue eyes bewildered.

"You are up very early," she said.

"It will be late when I come home; I want you to kiss me, dear."

She looked at him astonished.

He did not often ask for kisses *now*.

The man took her little arms and placed them round his neck, and held her close to him.

"Bessie, dear," he said, "I have not made you very happy, but I am going to try and make you happier."

Then he kissed her and went downstairs.

* * * * *

It was a long sunny day, the late roses were heavy with perfume, and the birds sang unceasingly.

At the gate, by the cornfield, the man and woman met. She was very white; they were to say good-bye. She meant never to see him again.

The sun had set when she went slowly home. The house was dark and still; she was, oh! so glad she could not talk just yet, and the light would hurt her eyes.

Going into the library she sat down.

Oh! how she longed for a change. If only she could go away for a little time, it would be easier to bear then.

Yes, she would write to those friends up North, that would be far away.

The woman lit a lamp and searched for some notepaper.

She could not find any, she knew there had been some yesterday.

She opened a drawer. A folded parchment document, and on the top a sheet of paper. There was a sudden commotion in the hall; he was coming home; she must get the letter written quickly; she seized the sheet of paper.

A knock at the door.

"You are wanted at once," said a strange voice. A sudden fear struck her. Still holding the paper in her fingers, she followed the man out into the hall.

On a stretcher lay her husband, dead. He had accidentally shot himself.

Bessie glanced mechanically at the paper which she still held. On it was written:

"God bless you, my darling."

MARY WEST.

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WE sat together in the verandah at Shepheard's Hotel. Cairo lay beneath and around us—Cairo, filthy, multi-coloured, malodorous, but always picturesque. Suddenly an Arab came round the corner, and, with a salaam of the deepest, handed some letters to Grimshaw. Then he squatted down on the verandah boards, with his great black eyes fixed on my companion's face, waiting for further orders.

"Your boy, Captain?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Grimshaw; "but a good deal more than that: I should be buried in the Soudan now if it were not for Ibrahim yonder."

"Tell me about it, please," I said rather eagerly, for this small Arab in the clean, white tunic and brilliant turban interested me mightily.

Grimshaw settled himself back in his bungalow chair and began:

"You know, of course," he said, "that I was in Khartoum with Gordon. I did not regularly belong to the General's forces, but I had volunteered as one of his aides-de-camp. Well, we were shut up in that death-trap city Khartoum, surrounded upon every side by the forces of the Mahdi—myriads of fanatical Soudanese Arabs following that high priest of bloodshed.

"We English were but a mere handful of men; the auxiliary forces were wretchedly small. Our only hope was aid from Egypt, and, as the whole world knows, that never came. Poor Gordon was allowed to fall a victim to the Mahdi's sword, and most of the garrison were slain. With the exception of Slatin Bey, who became a Mussulman, I think, I was the only European who got out of the doomed city with my life. That I did so is due to Ibrahim."

Here the Arab boy—on hearing his name mentioned—looked up and smiled, showing a row of teeth exceptionally even and white.

"A few days after we entered Khartoum," continued Grimshaw, "I was patrolling the town under General Gordon's orders, when we came across a great rabble of boys, hallooing and shouting at a deafening rate. I sent an Egyptian soldier to discover the cause, and he reported that the young 'fuzzy-wuzzies' (it is so that Private Atkins of her Majesty's troops denominates the Soudanese) were 'having fun' with one of their number. I was then, as now, intensely interested in native manners and customs. Halting my men I entered the boisterous cordon of boys to determine the reason of the tumult.

"The little rascals were teasing one of their number. 'Teasing,' indeed, in this case, is too mild a word. They were beating and stoning the lad, who lay bruised and half blinded in the gutter. His turban was off, and his already scant clothing had been torn to shreds. I sprang into the middle of the mob, and demanded the cause of such brutal treatment. At first they affected not to understand my Arabic, and went on beating their victim; but when I had soundly cuffed one or two and summoned my interpreter to my aid, I succeeded in making them answer.

"'He is the renegade's son,' said a ringleader—'Hassan the renegade's son. Stone him, in the name of the prophet.'

"Then I understood. The poor boy's father had taken service with Gordon, leaving his offspring to suffer all the cruelties which the Khartoum children, egged on by their elders, were sure to inflict upon him. I lost no time in calling up a few men, and sending that pack of youthful fanatics to the right about. They went away, vowing dire vengeance on the 'renegade's brat,' and I raised my *protégé* from the dust. He had fainted from pain and loss of blood; but one of our surgeons soon brought him to. When he opened his eyes and saw me, he smiled like a coffee-coloured angel, and wanted there and then to give me his best salaam. Of course I made him lie down again; but he blurted out his gratitude for

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preservation so vigorously that he became near fainting again.

"Next day his father, Hassan, one of Gordon's servants, came to see him. The two had a long talk, and finally Hassan announced that, for his son's sake, he had decided to leave the General and go back to the cobbler's stall in the bazaar. Ibrahim—for the lad whom I had helped to rescue was the same one now sitting before you—soon recovered, thanks to his native tough constitution. He left my hut, absolutely refusing to touch any of the money which I offered him.

"'Protector of the poor,' he said in his quaint, grandiloquent eastern way, 'you have saved your servant's life. Did not the mouse once repay the lion that had been his benefactor? Lo! I am the mouse, effendi, and you are the lion. Perhaps, some day, I may repay you. Salaam, friend!' Then he backed out of my hut; and I did not see him again for many days.

* * * * *

"One evening, while hurrying through the bazaar on my way to General Gordon's quarters, a boy sprang out of a cobbler's stall and handed me a tiny bundle—I had no time to more than recognise him as Ibrahim, son of Hassan. I carried the bundle to the General, and together we undid the fastenings. Have you ever deciphered an Oriental object letter? I mean a letter which is not written upon paper, but of which the sense is conveyed by objects—flowers and the like. The bundle handed to me by Ibrahim was just such a communication. It contained a queer collection of articles. They were: a piece of broken knife blade; a scrap of green cloth; two flowers (marigolds, I think) with only the head remaining; a brick from the walls; and, lastly, an iron affair, which I at once recognised as the point of one of those sticks with which camels are urged onwards.

"General Gordon lost no time in unravelling the mystery of this missive.

"'The Green Cloth,' he said, 'means the Mahdi; because his sacred flag is green. The knife blade stands for a sword; and the decapitated flowers mean that our heads are going to be cut off. The brick, I take it, hints of treachery inside the walls. The camel-spike advises you to fly from Khartoum immediately. Where did you get this?'

"When I told him the source of my information he was inclined to pooh-pooh Ibrahim's letter. 'It is a boy's fear and fancy,' he said. 'We shall be relieved in a few weeks.'

"But the Mahdi's men formed an impenetrable circle round the town—a circle that grew ever narrower and narrower. Day after day we scanned the desert horizon for some sign of the expected relief, but without avail. Day after day the impression grew stronger upon each and all of us that we were doomed.

"During an early morning walk, Ibrahim accosted me as suddenly as he had done before. This time he carried no object-letter.

"'Fly, effendi,' he whispered. 'The city is betrayed. My father and other Mussulmans have decided to let the Mahdi within the gates. Disguise yourself and fly before it is too late.'

"I shook my head, for duty kept me in Khartoum; and Ibrahim retreated with tears in those big, honest eyes of his.

* * * * *

"The very next night his warning was fulfilled. It would be idle, my friend, to tell you over again all the horrors of the capture, or rather betrayal, of Khartoum. The Mahdi soldiers were like fiends incarnate. Spent with fatigue and slender fare, we could not stand before them. Gordon, poor fellow, was slain; and a remnant of us were driven fighting for life from hut to hut, across the city. Finally, with empty revolver and broken sword, I found myself in the stairway of a rude minaret, waiting for the death which I felt to be inevitable. It is all very well to meet death boldly on the field of battle, with comrades and friends around one, but to sit down in a dark stairway and count the minutes until its coming, might make the bravest man in the world feel uncomfortable. All around I heard the hideous sounds of slaughter, and watched through a tiny loop-hole the wall of red flames shooting across the sky (for it was midnight, and a starless midnight to boot). A sick feeling stole over me. To remain cooped up thus seemed intolerable. I had just resolved to rush into the thick of the Soudanese and sell my life as dearly as possible, when a footfall on the stairs below arrested me.

"It was the sound of a naked foot; and as I peered, every sense on the alert, into the half-light of the minaret doorway, I vaguely distinguished a dark form and two shining eyes. Was it one of the Mahdi's warriors in search of human prey? I gripped my broken sword tighter, and prepared for action.

"'Effendi!' whispered a voice, 'is it you, protector of the poor?'

"The voice was that of Ibrahim, son of Hassan. My heart gave a leap for gladness, and I answered him that it was indeed myself.

"'It is good,' he exclaimed. 'My lord, I have come to save you. Hasten down, and don these garments which I have brought you. They belong to the old blind priest who lodged with my father. He died last night, but nobody knows of it yet. You can pass as the old priest and escape; make haste, Sahib, make haste!'

"I saw the chance, and seized it. Before you could have repeated the proverbial 'Jack Robinson' many times, I had pulled those baggy Mohammedan clothes over my soiled and bloodstained uniform. A turban took the place of my Khadi helmet, and around my face I draped the white hood which the Soudanese Arabs wear. Then, before I could protest, Ibrahim coolly seized a handful of mud and liberally daubed my face.

"'The Sahib is too white,' he explained. 'The old blind priest was always dirty and black—so kick off your boots, Sahib, and let me daub your feet.' Off went my boots, and in a minute or two my legs, from the knee down, were as brown (and as dirty) as they well might be.

"'You are all right now, effendi,' said Ibrahim; 'let me make for the Cairo gate.'

"With all my heart I thanked the boy; but he would listen to no thanks. 'You saved my life; I'll save yours,' he said. 'Remember, effendi, the mouse and the lion. Let us hasten to the gate.'

"'But you are not coming,' I began, when my protest was interrupted by a troop of black Mahdists surging into the little bye-street where we stood. Never shall I forget the sight they presented, in the false light of the burning city, with their huge piles of hair, their ferocious faces, and their spears and scimitars dripping with blood. I had given myself over for lost, when Ibrahim gripped my hand, led me onward, calling in sing-song tones: 'Make room for the blind priest. Room for Amed, son of Ali, the soothsayer. The light of Allah is upon the blind priest.'

"Taking the hint, I plucked up courage enough to shout the war-cry of the Mahdi. The fuzzy-wuzzies,

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entirely deceived, joined in my cry. 'Bide your time, holy father,' said one of them; 'we'll give you plenty of Christian heads later on.'

"Then they left us, whooping like demons down the street. But Ibrahim plucked at my sleeves, and mechanically I followed him. Many times we met such parties of the Mahdists, but in the darkness our ruse succeeded beautifully, and we reached the Cairo gate in safety.

"Around the gate, despite the confusion, a strong guard had been posted. In the open space without, many scores of camels were sprawling.

"'A camel for the Mahdi's messenger!' cried Ibrahim in his shrill voice. 'Ho, brothers! A camel for the blind soothsayer, Amed, son of Ali, who bears the Mahdi's defiance across the desert.'

"A dozen dusky warriors surrounded us; and as many awkward camels were prodded to their feet. One of these ungainly beasts was made to kneel, while Ibrahim made a great show of helping the supposed blind priest to a seat upon its back.

"Just then a tall fuzzy-wuzzy—clearly an officer—rushed forward. 'Who is this?' he demanded. 'Where does this man go? The orders are that none shall leave the gates before daybreak.'

"My heart sank, but, fortunately for us, the natural

"A camel for the Mahdi's messenger!"

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superstition of the Arabs came to our aid. 'Have a care!' cried one of the soldiers. 'It is a blind priest—a soothsayer. He may curse you.' The officer stepped back involuntarily, eyeing me with fear. 'Give us your blessing, holy father,' chorused a dozen onlookers.

"Here was a new predicament. I could not remember

Speeding fast from the gory city.

enough Arabic at the moment to give the desired blessing; but a whisper from Ibrahim recalled to my mind a simple form of words, which, eked out by discreet mumbling on my part, and the loud responses of the boy, suited the Arabs well enough. They prostrated themselves—the officer with the rest, amid a great cry of 'Allah Ackbar.' Then Ibrahim smote our camel soundly, and away we went, through the outposts, speeding fast from the gory city of Khartoum.

* * * * *

"The perils and adventures of that journey were too numerous to be told at one sitting; but it was nearly a month after that awful night that our camel limped into Cairo, carrying on its back two emaciated fugitives who had once been an officer of the line and an Arab boy.

"Ibrahim has been all round the world with me since, and will probably continue to be my comrade until one of us twain departs this life for ever—eh, Ibrahim, old friend?"

The Arab lad smiled, and spread out his hands. "My fate is thine, effendi," he said. "You saved my life."

"On that score, Ibrahim," answered Captain Grimshaw. "I think we are quits. Remember Khartoum."

Gerald Brenan.

Jumble Story Competition.

(No. 4.)

SEE OPPOSITE PAGE ☞

Six Prizes, one of £5 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the opposite page, in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, and the first line is in its correct position, but the title and signature are jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumble Story."

All competitions to be in by Monday, July 27th.

JUMBLE STORY.

Result of No. 1.

The Key appears on page 108.

That this new form of competition is likely to prove more popular than any yet started in *Short Stories* during its existence is proved by the enormous number of attempts received at this office in the first competition. Several readers succeeded in putting the story together within a few lines of its correct form, and the ingenuity displayed by the vast majority of those who competed was surprising. The £2 has been awarded to Miss B. Clifton, 46, North Side, Clapham Common, S.W.; £1 to Miss Nellie Ottewell, 29, Branston Road, Burton-on-Trent; £1 to C. Wilkins, 2, Claremont Villas, Tudor Road, Kingston Hill; and £1 to F. B. Roberts, 30, Durley Road, Stamford Hill, N. Consolation prizes in the form of pencil-cases have been sent to:

Mrs. Young, 319, Crystal Palace Road, East Dulwich.
F. Dix, Bradwell, via Sheffield.
W. W. Smee, 73, Benthal Road, Stoke Newington.
E. M. Atkins, Ben Nevis Cottage, near Fort William, N.B.
Miss E. M. Hilder, 77, Stormont Road, Clapham Common.
Miss M. Hunt, 41, Palace Street, Canterbury.
Miss E. Marshall, Kingston-by-Sea, Brighton.
E. Lloyd, 14, St. Mary's Square, Paddington.
Mrs. W. G. Ayers, Winchester Villa, 86, Birkbeck Road, Leytonstone.
G. D. Taylor, 23, Ernest Street, Rhyl.
Mrs. A. Cunnington, 86, West End Lane, West Hampstead.
H. Bedford, 99, Halton Road, Islington.
G. Shipley, 90, Manningham Lane, Bradford, Yorks.
Mrs. Wilson, 13, Rydal Avenue, Central Drive, Blackpool.
Miss G. Trotter, c.o. Mrs. Pendred, Crohill, Pendennis Road, Streatham.
Miss A. E. Gardiner, 2, Montpelier, Bath, Somerset.
Miss A. Mawdsley, Bystock House, St. David's, Exeter.
C. A. Young, 319, Crystal Palace Road, East Dulwich.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 1.

Of the several hundreds of experiences sent in for this competition, the following, forwarded by Mr. John Beveridge, of 3, Fishmonger Alley, Fenchurch Street, E.C., has been selected as the best. A penknife has been awarded to Mr. David Beveridge, of the same address, who attested to the truth of the statement.

I am not likely to forget what occurred when I received my first salary, as it is often made the subject of a joke against me in our family. I was barely thirteen years old, and the sum of 4s. a week (which I started with) seemed quite a lot of money. On the Saturday afternoon that I first received it, I had made arrangements to meet a girl that lived a few doors from me, and felt quite manly as we got a steamer up to Richmond, where, after a walk, I paid for tea and various other little expenses until she said it was time she was getting home. Then the thought struck me about money for the return journey, which I had forgotten all about, and when I counted up my remaining cash found it amounted to 2½d. My pride had a great fall as I explained the matter to the girl, who immediately turned as cross as possible and said she had no money with her, so we got on a 'bus as far as they would take us for the twopence, then started to walk home, a distance of about eight miles, and when we arrived her mother told me I ought to be ashamed keeping her daughter out so late. And ever after that I dreaded the sight of that girl as much as people do the tax-collector.

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JUMBLED STORY. No. 4.]

HER TRELLVE TOES.

"I WILL not give you back your letters," said he.

But I must have my letters back, and that night as I walked straight to the wardrobe and drew the curtain up and saw me and opened the door herself.

There was a wardrobe cupboard with curtains before the key in the lock.

Then a key rattled in the lock, and I did the only little package of "legal cap," and pens, and inkstand, on the mantelpiece?

Sally was a girl you could trust. She was a plain brute!—"you'll find a better girl in no time."

Ben—I mean Mr. Howard; he was Ben to me no Mr. Javerell, because he is engaged to my Aunt Ophelia, and now I intended to tell her the facts of the case and keep it to lend the lodgers when they lose their key-money. Secondly, I—I—only meant to tiff a little—not need and meet me at the station."

I knew that Ben—I mean Mr. Howard—was out by his room.

Then Henry walked away, and Ben—yes, Ben, my pipes.

"Ben," said the strange person, "you are not looking what belongs to me. And you will, won't you?"

"Oh, my dear," he answered, "you cannot have all the rings. Now, I shall lock you in and sit on the stairs to-day my dearest friend, and the only one who knows the stairs.

"We were engaged to each other," said Ben, "and I will be getting things ready for dinner, and Sarah kissed them, and took down my photograph and kissed you exactly at four."

I drew a chair to the desk, sat down, and turned a cigar box.

"There is but one woman in the world for me," said Howard."

And cold shivers ran up my back when Sally unlocks all the drawers and desks in the house. We heard the street door open and bang shut and feet ascend and look for my letters.

"And I want you to help me to get them, Sally," I said I.

"Ah, whatever you please, Miss Travis. I suppose I'll hide it from the world, and you will never speak of fool, Henry.

"It is a splendid idea," said Sally. "You'll have to buy those things for my wife, and you pack up what you wouldn't tell another fellow, but I believe my heart is all. She's a mercenary little wretch, but I—I am a window, and Sally, who was making a cherry pie, looked horrible Mr. Henry. "Now, you'll come up and spend eight o'clock, and at nine I tapped on the basement to break off, only to frighten you. Thirdly, I—I—oh, poor Ben—took a bundle of letters from his bosom and back.

And then and there I sat down and told her all about the fact that my grandfather did not leave me his own letters."

"You'll not have any trouble in six months," said the Ben. "There now, I've done. You know my trouble. that you are not engaged to me any longer, Mr. moment.

"But you have no right to keep them," said I, "now I've found out that you really truly love me, Ben—and unlocked the door and we were really in the room—by another man.

"I'm feeling wretchedly," said Mr. Howard. "I keep watch, though nothing can happen. I'll come for they are. Good-bye, Miss Travis."

"Gentlemen don't talk of law; they think of honour," and a blotting-pad.

They shut the door and sat down. They lit their correspondence. I always kept the rough draft of mine, but just as good as gold. I had told her everything, possible thing to avoid discovery—at least for a little thing, with something the matter with her spine, and he never wanted me. I came to get my letters, but loved her better than my life, and I thought she was longer—lived with Sally Grey's mother.

"I suppose he keeps the letters in his desk," said she. And I was about to try my key on the drawers when I said. "To let me get into Mr. Howard's room and take lunch, darling."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said this Mr. Henry—heartless and there's no law in the land to make me give up my property has a good deal to do with things being as well."

"I love her still. I shall keep her photograph all my life—and her letters to read and kiss—I would not give that, and then, having pulled a bag from the corner, he sat up in bed I thought of the way to do it.

There was nothing inside but some notepaper, and a broken—there, don't laugh. You see that photograph rubbing the forks and glasses. I'll get the pass key—of advantage! You have jilted me, and you can say what very fond of me. But you know how grandfather cut it. I ran towards it and stood bolt upright in the I—well there I was—it was not a situation to impart it to anyone, I know."

"Oh, dear," I thought, "where can I look now?" corner as Ben—I mean Mr. Howard—entered, followed them up."

"It is only me in the flesh, Ben," I said. "I wish I was wait until lunch is over, and Miss Peck and Mrs. Jones call upon her, and she picked a quarrel with me—that's me out of his will, and then a rich old fellow began to go out. Then mother will lie down for a nap, and Biddy you may keep them. I—I've misunderstood you, and love you very much—and I couldn't be going to marry old how Ben and I came to make up our quarrel.

I shut the desk and looked in the drawer. There was a ghost so that I could vanish. And now you can boast though we part for ever, forgive me, Ben."

"Is it her ghost?" I heard him say to himself, and all your life, if you like—and I will say something. Firstly, I did not care about your grandfather's horrid dignity.

And Sally was my bridesmaid when I married, and is your holiday with me, won't you? I'll just step out and though it is broken off—I—I want to know—I used to get her to let me go into Ben's room while he was away "I know he doesn't put them in his trunk, but this key you please, and I can prove the truth by our course we have one for every room. Now, do stay for it and about the letters.

The next moment he was staring at me and I at him.

SUSAN JEMREM.

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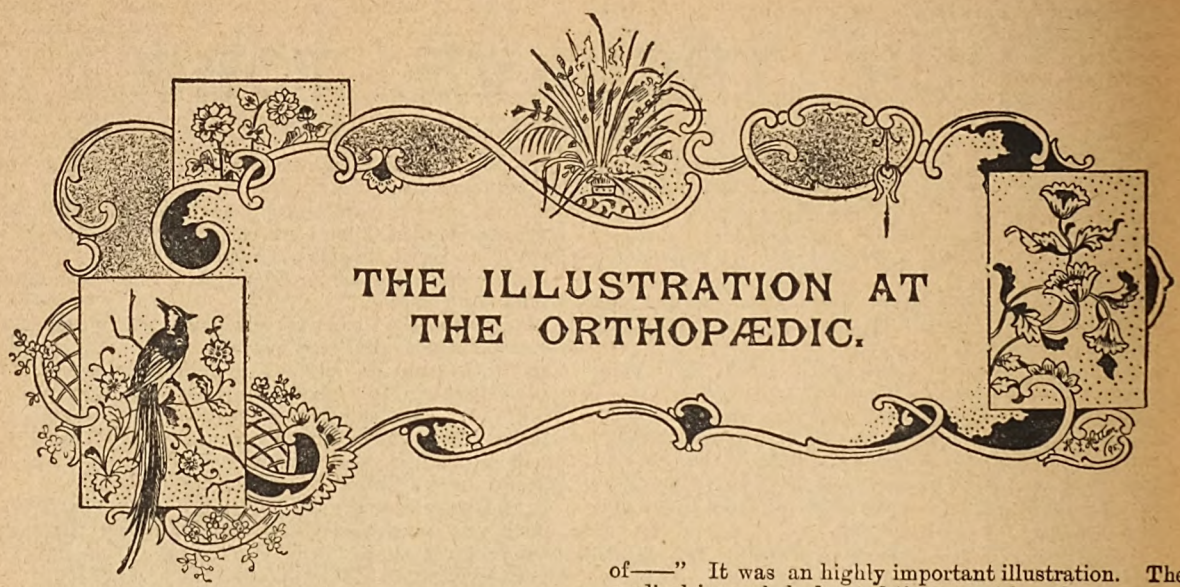

THE ILLUSTRATION AT THE ORTHOPÆDIC.

The young person in question was, I should think, about four years old, and she held, on the occasion of which I speak, the undivided attention of some twenty young gentlemen and even of a couple of older gentlemen of scientific aims. She was not so very important a young person, either, being a charity patient at a famous hospital where little ones of deformed limbs are treated. Yet, perhaps, she was not so very poor a little girl, because there were two red ribbons tying up her brown hair, and quite a wide frill of lace about the neck of her plaid dress.

Her mother carried her into the lecture-room and placed her upon a high table, and then left her to dangle her little bare legs until the lecturer should be ready to use her as an illustration.

The young person gazed thoughtfully about the room, at the odd instruments behind her and the students in front. Neither proved of sufficient interest to retain her gaze, and she presently devoted her attention to her mother, the nurses, and a few other pitiful ones in an adjoining room, who were playing unconcernedly amid surroundings which might have saddened them had they been older.

The lecture was vividly interesting, and the students looked at the little maid as they had, perhaps, looked at numerous other little maids with red bows and big brown eyes, as merely a convenient deformity that made the lecturer's words easier to understand. They were not a particularly pleasant looking lot of young men. Their clothes fitted badly, and it was obvious that their paths had been rural and their bringing up uncareful. Our little girl, although she certainly could not have told why, was not approving of them. She looked them over, as an older person looks at a monotonous landscape, with an eye open for possible beauty.

"You see, gentlemen," the lecturer went on, "the exactly opposite set of conditions occur in these two cases. In the boy's there is *talipes varus*, that is, the foot curves inwards; in the girl"—the child looked gravely down upon him as he took her little leg gently into his hand and moved it upward—"here is *talipes valgus*, the foot curves outwards." The class bent forward. "In this, however, an abnormal development of——" It was an highly important illustration. The medical journals had noted the case at length.

Only one man in the room was looking elsewhere than at the piteously twisted limb in the doctor's hand. There was a look about the child's little mouth which reminded him of someone whom he should see within a couple of hours. They would dine together. This was her birthday. He would give her the sweets he had chosen with such care and which he had now in his pocket. He could see her delight over the unexpected revelations in the box. It certainly would be the first time she had been presented with her own initials on each sweet. Then the tongs with tiny golf-drivers for claws, and the filagree paper perfumed with wood-violet, and the criss-crossing of violet baby-ribbon over the mauve and white confections. The *bonbonnière* was of silver with a pretty lid. It was a love of a box and he felt justly proud of it. The lecture was good, of course, but he should be glad when it was over.

A bored sigh from the little maid echoed his wish. She was looking dully about the room again, and presently her big brown eyes lit upon the young man who leant back while the others leant forward, and who looked upon her with friendly eyes while the others examined her feet. She returned his glance with grave scrutiny. He pleased her. He was good to look upon. He had a flower in his coat. Clearly this was something she did not expect among this crowd of ugly men. The little maid was unconsciously realising the difference between a good-looking chap, with a good tailor and an eye for ties, and the student who is too absorbed to care what he has on.

They looked steadily at each other, the young fellow with a smile on his lips, and the child with pleased appreciation dawning in her eyes. Suddenly she smiled also. Then she laughed aloud.

"Pretty man," she chuckled, pointing with her chubby forefinger at the well-groomed youth.

There was a roar from the class and the young fellow blushed a fiery red at the honours thrust upon him. The man next him grinned.

The lecturer, with a smile, proceeded to the boy's case. The girl felt her foot free and extended her arm to the class.

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"I want to go to him," she cried, her lips quivering with excitement.

"Hush, dear," said the nurse reprovingly. But the child persisted.

"Take me down," she begged, with her eyes fixed on Leggatt.

He shook his head smilingly at her, and turned his face resolutely towards the lecturer. In a second or so, in spite of himself, he stole a glimpse at the child. She was still seated at the table, dangling her poor little legs, with her arms pleadingly extended and with great tears gathering in her eyes.

Young Leggatt moved uneasily, tried to look away, uttered a forcible exclamation under his breath, and then, finally, with an impulse he could not control, dashed out of his seat to the front of the room and took the now sobbing child in his arms.

The lecturer frowned—it was his duty to frown—then turned his back so that he was not supposed to know what was going on. The young fellow retired with the little girl to the end of the hall and sat down, taking her upon his knee. The nurse hovered near. The little girl's eyes danced. She smiled up at the handsome youth while he was wiping her tears away. Then she proceeded to have one of the best times in her poor little life. She found out why his hair was parted in the middle, and why he wore a pin. She played with his watch and traced his initials on its back. She learnt how to make rabbits out of handkerchiefs, and elicited his admiration of her own new one with the blue flower in the border. His pockets revealed unknown treasures. She made hieroglyphics on his ivory tablets with a silver pencil. So far there was mutual enjoyment.

It was when she was going through his last pocket that she unluckily chanced on the *bonbonnière*. The outside box was tied with pretty pink string. She wanted the string. The young man gave it to her. Naturally, then, she opened the box to see what was inside. This had not been the programme. Inside was another box. How funny! The second box was glittering. Funnier still! Perhaps it would open also. Just at this juncture young Leggatt had his attention distracted for one perilous moment, and when he came back to his play with the little maid he received an unpleasant shock.

She had opened the silver lid and was gazing in an ecstasy of delight at the sweets and ribbons within. With a feminine intuition she recognised the contents, although she could never have seen anything similar. She looked up at him gaily, as if it had been a game and she had found the handkerchief.

"Sweets," she cried joyfully.

"Yes," said the miserable but truthful young man. Then she generously offered him one. He seized the opportunity and took the box from her.

"See," he said, wishing he had never been born, "pretty box shuts. Now, wrap it up. Put it away," and he slipped it into his pocket. Her face looked grieved wonderment at him, and he weakly added: "Hunt for it again."

She looked doubtfully at him for a minute while he basely tried to divert her attention. He pointed out the big clock beside him and the interesting fact that the pendulum swung all night and day. But the little maid, not being of the sex which is concerned with the insides of machines, gave the most cursory glance at the clock and began an instant search for the fascinating sweets.

The young fellow groaned within himself. If it were an ordinary box the poor little thing would be welcome to it. But this especially ordered one, with her initials on each sweet, the precious tongs and box with her monogram on its lid! There was no time to get anything else for her. In less than an hour he would be at her birthday dinner. Why had he been such an idiot as not to have sent it by post? To let himself into this scrape just because he was beguiled into wanting to give it into her hands himself, and see her radiant face. And if he let her birthday go by without a reminder, she might indeed be hurt. Perhaps she would say "No," when so careless a lover asked her to marry him. Then that fellow, Rowley—no doubt his present was already received. He had been so cock sure of being able to knock Rowley out with the daintiness and appropriateness of his own gift. Rowley would never have thought of anything so novel. Hang it all, the youngster should not have these sweets. He would buy her a couple of boxes to-morrow and send them to her.

A sudden shuffling of feet warned him that the lecture had ceased. He looked down at the child. She had found the box and was preparing to open it again.

"I must go, little one," he said. "I will bring you two boxes of sweets to-morrow. Let me have this one."

But she clung to it.

"No, baby keep it," she said forlornly.

It was the note in her voice that told how accustomed she was to having things taken from her, that went to young Leggatt's heart. He tried, miserably, to detach her little fingers. But she held tight and the tears began to come into her eyes. With a quick ejaculation he desisted from his half-hearted task. They looked at each other for a second in silence, the baby girl, the tears running down her cheeks, a pitiful quiver on her lips, the man with a struggle in his face. She held the box close in both small hands. Suddenly he beckoned to the nurse.

"Will you take this little girl?" he asked gently, kissing the child good-bye. "There are a few sweeties here," touching the box, "I hope you will allow her to keep them."

And he hurried out of the door.

He outstayed the others after the dinner party. The girl continued a conversation. "It was not kind of Mr. Rowley," she said, "to embarrass me by giving me such an expensive gift. A few flowers one likes. But a gold-lined box with my monogram on it, even if the value of it were disguised by filling it up with sweets! Why, even the sweets had my initials on them. It was execrably bad taste."

The young fellow pondered within himself. Had he any right to sail under false colours? Why not? But as the girl fixed her clear eyes upon him, he involuntarily told the truth. It was a bold narrative, and meant simply to honestly emphasise the fact that he had been guilty of the same bad form as had Rowley, and therefore deserving of no better treatment.

But somehow when he finished—though why should what was execrable taste in Rowley be thought a touching kindness in Leggatt—there were tears in the girl's eyes, and she extended her hand.

"You will go and see the little thing again," she said softly, "and I—I—should like to go with you."

"Always?" ventured the young fellow, his heart beating painfully.

He kissed her hand. Then he looked down into her eyes, and then—he kissed her lips.

MADGE ROBERTSON.

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He was a poor clerk, without high aspirations, commonplace, ungainly, living valiantly, and inexperienced in deep emotion.

She was plain, dependent, badly informed, unattractive, and she lived because living seemed the custom. Neither had ever been in love—they had never gone beyond vague dreams of what love, marriage and a home, such as they saw all around them, might mean in their own lives.

And when they one day fell in love with each other both were surprised beyond measure—he that any woman could find him lovable; she that any man could deem her attractive. There came another surprise in the sweetness of the experience—the having of a sacred little world of their own, apart from the great swirling world around them, and the cosy sympathy, the timid confidences, the bashful caresses, the tenderness that came into their hearts, and the wider and brighter aspect of the world, that before had seemed so far removed.

After the first of the love-making had passed, and they had adjusted themselves somewhat to their new condition, and had found life broad and wholesome, the differences between them began to come into evidence.

Each magnified, beyond all reason, the goodness and charms of the other—to him she was an angel, a faithful devoted heart; to her he was a deity, an unspeakable blessing which God in His infinite goodness had sent into her dreary life. He loved her, she worshipped him; and that is the old, old story.

If she paid more careful attention to her appearance, it was to be pretty for *his* sake; if he was more careful in his dress and manner, it was because of that higher respect for himself which her love had inculcated in him. She lived for him only; he for himself—and her. To her it was all a beautiful dream, to him, an awakening. It inspired him with ambition, her only with devotion. With her, dull earth had dropped away and radiant heaven had opened; with him earth remained, but had lost its dullness and had become shining and pleasant. She would have died for him; he would have preferred to live to make her happy and to enjoy himself the good which had come to him. And all this is merely the old, old story.

Surely he could not have been after all, so inferior as he had deemed himself before her love came into his life. He reflected that he had been under-estimating himself, and that if so good and sensible and loyal and tender a soul as she could find admirable qualities in him, such qualities must exist and be patent to the world. Thus grew his pride, and then his vanity. It was as grateful to his self-love as it was to her devotion, to humble herself before him, to look up to him, to hang upon his words, to repose her heart, her life, wholly in his keeping, to be eager to serve him, to renounce everything for his sake. In every way she encouraged him to take her life into his hands and make of it whatsoever he would.

The discovery of a self-surrender so complete, of a devotion so unrestrained, warmed the marrow in his bones. His spirit expanded, and the strength of a giant entered his soul. So much deeper and stronger than she did he come to feel—did she make him feel—that he began to regard her as a tender creature placed under his guidance—a frail, helpless, homeless dove, whom he must cherish, watch tenderly, and direct in the ways of his choice.

Thus it came about that he began to criticise her now and then, suggest changes here and improvements there; and she accepted these petty tyrannies as special blessing, and gloated over them, and trained her manner to accord with them, and deemed herself the most fortunate of all the girls to whom the great God in heaven had sent the priceless blessing of a good man's love. And all this, too, is only the old, old, story.

They were married at last. The world was very sweet and tender and beautiful in those rosy young days; and even poverty could not throw a mist over the morning of their lives. For was he not advancing in material ways at a pace which surprised the commonplace associates who, before *she* came into his life, had known him as a commonplace man like themselves. He even looked forward to the time when he might be rich

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and influential, when he would be spoken of as a *self*-made man, who, through sheer force of innate superiority had broken down the barriers which confine ordinary men, and had escaped into prosperity! How she pinched and patched and saved and contrived and planned! How able and shrewd she was in her suggestions, and how sensible he found them in practice. Surely, one of these days he would be called a remarkable instance of a self-made man?

In all possible ways she humbled and obscured herself. It did her good to see that in this way his pride and self-importance (which she knew to be admirable qualities) were developed and sustained, perhaps magnified. There was infinite sweetness even in the humiliation which she suffered when he tyrannised over her and treated her as an inferior being, and browbeat her over little things; in accepting his denomination, his prying into all the innocent little secrets and privacies of her woman-life, his interferences in and direction of her dress, her domestic affairs, and the minutest details of her small recreations.

What if he did make her read books which she did not like, entertain people with whom she could have nothing in common, and deny her the little cherished things that she wanted, and that he thought were trivial and injurious? What if, sometimes, he flew into a passion and heaped abuse and reproaches upon her, when she had tried so faithfully to please him, and had been so humiliated over her own shortcomings? What even, if a blow did come at last, that sent her reeling to the wall, her face blanched, and an inconceivable pain wringing her heart? Was not he the master, the king? Had she not sworn to love honour and obey him? And O, God in Heaven! did she not love him, and would she not have died for him?

The days grew longer then, and heaven—perhaps because she had become more accustomed to it—seemed not so bright as formerly. But still the fire of devotion (and who may know to what extent, if at all, it was fed by duty) burnt brightly within her heart. And what if chilling blasts should come in force seeking to overwhelm it and scatter it to the winds? Steadfast and devoted she had been to the end of the lengthening days. And this, too, is but part of the old, old story.

Towards the very end she did something—in an old, old story like this it never matters what—that sent his passion beyond the bounds within which a blow may bring satisfaction. In their own home, under the very chandelier which her hands had adorned with some fragile ornament, he thrust a pistol against her breast, while his eyes blazed, his face purpled, and his vituperations issued in thick and husky words. He stormed at her for not accepting gratefully the blessing of a comfortable home, of a husband who gave up all pleasures for her sake, and who slaved for her like a beast in the yoke.

And then, his passion rising under her complete abjectness and despair, lashed by the dumbness of white lips from which the power of speech had flown, maddened by the unspeakable reproaches, which, still tempered with the old tenderness, shone from her wide-staring eyes—he pressed the finger of murder upon the trigger.

A crash, a smothered gasp, and she sank to the floor, while he stood there looking down upon her; upon the white, pinched face upturned to his; upon wide eyes which, looking into his, spoke things which heaven has never given to lips the power to express; upon the painful heaving of her chest; upon the form, so lately alive with energy to do his bidding, lying so unshapely and disorganised on the floor; upon the thin stream of blood which so soon issued from her speechless lips; and as he thus looked down upon the pitiful wreck, there unfolded within him a mighty scroll, unwound by a flaming hand; and upon the whole length of it, suspended, as it were, from highest heaven and stretching thence down into nether-most hell, he read the dreadful tragedy of her sacrifice.

He was faint. He dropped the pistol; in falling, it touched her hand, and her fingers closed upon it. A distressing fulness, forcing itself upward, pressed upon his throat and sought to burst his temples. He staggered away from her, and fell weakly into a chair at the further end of the room; and her glance, tenderer now than it had been since the days had grown long and the light had faded from heaven, followed him thither and rested calmly upon him, as though caring for one thing only, and that, a last impression to take away with her on the wings of eternity and cherish fondly for ever.

Rising above her to confront him, the man saw a shadowy black frame, with a cross-beam from which hung a rope; and it was not in him to go and kneel beside her, and take her hand, and bestow a caress upon her, and beg the infinitely sweet boon of her forgiveness; it was only the scroll that he saw, and the calm, fond eyes, and the shadowy black frame above them.

Someone, attracted by the shot and the fall, came into the room. Was this the avenger of the law, the witness who would hear the accusation of the dying, the builder of the shadowy black frame? Painfully, slowly, the wife said to the intruder: "I have shot—myself; my husband—is not to blame!"

The black frame faded away with her words and her life, for was not the pistol in her hand? And the man, no longer burdened with her living, sat shrunken, cowering and wizened, in the chair.

W. C. Morrow.

WHAT CAN YOU MAKE OF THE STORY ON PAGE 113?

POST-CARD COMPETITION.—NO. 4.

On this page a letter is printed upside down. A Guinea is offered to the first person who mentions its position on the back of a post-card before Monday, July 27th next. In order to give provincial readers an equal opportunity, another Guinea is offered for the first correct solution received from readers living over 100 miles from London.

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PAUPER BLUE BLOOD

SUMMARY.

Georgina Pluff is a governess in the employ of the Ravenscrofts. Her charge is Eva, daughter of Sir Reginald and Lady Ravenscroft. Sefton, the only son, is engaged to Lady Norah Cannington, whose father, hearing on good authority of Sir Reginald's impending ruin, compels his daughter to write a letter to Sefton, saying that the engagement must be broken off. Before the financial crash arrives, Sir Reginald commits suicide in his own grounds, and Sefton's cup of bitterness is filled by the arrival of Lady Norah's letter. Georgina Pluff is aware of the late Sir Reginald's past, and threatens to expose his misdeeds unless she is married to Sefton. After the wedding Georgina visits her wealthy cousin, John Pluff, a retired grocer, and impresses him with her social position. Lady Norah receives a visit from a friend of Sefton, Douglas Shirling, who gives expression to his opinion concerning her treatment of Sefton.

CHAPTER VII.

The Market of Souls.

"Who spoke that word? Who called me 'Old Leather-lips'?" thundered John Pluff after a group of boys who were running across a field. He was too hot and stout to give chase, though he shook his fist at the retreating figures.

"Georgina, my dear," turning to Lady Ravenscroft, "this is your land, I believe?"

"Yes, but Sefton is going to let it to Farmer Hicks."

"Never mind, it belongs to you now, and those boys were trespassing. I informed them of the fact, and they addressed me in most insulting language."

"There is nothing on the face of this earth," retorted Georgina, "that can make itself more abominable than the small boy."

Lady Ravenscroft was looking out of sorts and annoyed. Her cousin had forced his society on her, and made her ridiculous in the eyes of everybody. Mr. Shirling, who had arranged to leave the day before John Pluff's arrival, stayed on at Sefton's urgent request. Georgina warned her husband that this relative was hardly one she would have chosen to present, but Sefton never considered her feelings, and failed to take the hint. Of course Douglas Shirling was laughing at her and John Pluff behind their backs, though he appeared unusually grave, never seeming to notice the *gaucheries* of Lady Ravenscroft's grocer cousin. That was natural enough in Mr. Shirling she told herself—a sign of his good breeding—well-bred people were all hypocrites, according to Georgina.

"I've been all round the place, and it's first class," announced Mr. Pluff. "You only want money to keep it up, and you might entertain dukes and duchesses by the score. Give them the best dinners they've ever sat down to, pour out your coin *ad lib.*, and you might be a shining light in society on the very top rail. Bah! it's a wasted chance, Georgina."

She raised her eyes pathetically.

"It is indeed, cousin John. I think, too, that I should know how to make the most of wealth, if it came my way. I feel that the true spirit of the hostess is in my veins. I should fling myself into the part body and soul. I would show Sefton I know the ropes, and he would never feel that he had married an outsider."

"Ah! Georgina, you're up to snuff, and no wonder, since you come of my stock. Our family was always for bettering themselves, and pushing to the front. But look here, my girl, it strikes me that you and the master ain't very chummy; 'ad a bit of a row, eh?"

"Oh! no," shaking her head sadly, "Sefton is always like that now, just dull and indifferent."

"It's a bit soon to begin. Rather a change to before marriage, I reckon. Ha! ha!" breaking into a gruff guffaw, "I should 'ave liked to see you two love birds spooning about here in old Sir Reginald's time. He'd have been down on the governess hammer and tongs, eh!"

John Pluff laughed again; he did not notice the grey hue that crept over the woman's face.

"You quite misunderstand," she said; "Sir Reginald had a great regard for me. If anything, he treated me as his superior. I was never looked down upon, and I dined every night with the family."

She tilted her chin in the air as she spoke, and rounded her words.

"No offence, dear," murmured Mr. Pluff humbly, looking at her with renewed reverence. "But what's altered the young spark? Why does Sir Sefton look so down in the mouth? You would not think he'd married for love, though of course, situated as you was, there *could* be no other reason."

"Shall I give you the key of the whole matter?" cried Georgina, twisting her fingers together, and rocking from one foot to the other with a half nervous, half impatient movement.

John Pluff nodded.

"Money," snapping her fingers, "or rather the need of it, which my husband has never before known. Is not that enough to age and sour a man?"

They had wandered out into the country roads, and as Georgina spoke a Victoria came in sight. A girl, exquisitely gowned, leant back in the carriage with rather a strained expression, and a bright hectic flush rising under her white veil. Beside her sat a peevish-looking youth, whose lips were set. They were not speaking.

Georgina bowed, and the girl returned it unsmilingly, the man raised his hat, a cloud of dust, and they were gone.

"Who are those swells?" asked John Pluff curiously.

"Lady Norah Cannington and the Duke of Malvern."

A low whistle, and a widening of the eyes, as Georgina's cousin regarded her admiringly.

"*My!*" he said, and collapsed into silence.

"Lady Norah is a very old friend of the Ravenscroft's. I dare say she was coming to call on me with the Duke."

Georgina knew full well that this was not the case, but her mission was to impress John Pluff with her poverty and grandeur. She spared no pains.

The sight of Lady Ravenscroft had come at an unfortunate moment for Norah Cannington.

The jealousy, the pique, which she could not control, leapt into her heart as she passed Sefton's wife. She did not pause to consider that her resentment was unreasonable. Her brain seemed on fire, everything was slipping away.

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She turned to the young Duke, and saw that his eyes were weak with rising tears. He had just declared his passion only to be refused. Norah knew well that Lord Cannington expected her to accept the offer—he intimated as much that very morning. She dreaded to think of the scene her decision would cause, anger from one parent—disappointment and reproaches from the other. Was it worth while? Her life could not be more bitter. She had no love to give, but this impressionable youth was not exacting, he would be happy and contented with a pretty face, and the shadow of a heart.

"Norah!" he broke in suddenly, his voice shaken by emotion, "you don't mean it—you *can't?* If you realised what you are to me, you would at least give it a day, an hour's consideration. Heaven knows I will try and make you happy."

Happy! Oh! the irony of that word.

"Is there no hope for me, now or in the future?"

She turned her head away. They were passing the gates of Ravenscroft Park. She felt the Duke of Malvern's fingers tighten over her gloved hand. A dull paralysed sensation deadened her sensibilities. She thought of Georgina's gushing bow, the triumph in her eyes. Why was Sefton so shortsighted? How could he believe she had really changed? *His* Norah faithless! It was impossible!

"Your eyes are softening," whispered a voice at her side. "I see light at last."

Lady Norah faced her youthful lover, with pallid lips, and a wan sweet smile.

"Yes," she said, "you shall make me—happy!"

Then she broke into a strange mirthless laugh, that tore her heart, and left it sore and bleeding.

A Victoria came in sight.

But the Duke of Malvern was happy, for what he called light was in reality merciful darkness, masking the hideous truth of Norah Cannington's wrecked life.

"I shall speak to your father to-night," said the Duke as they drove up to Rosemont.

On entering the house, Lady Norah slipped away, and softly opened the door of her father's study.

A vivid flash of memory brought back the night when Lord Cannington had broken the news of Sefton's altered fortune, and she had been weak enough to resign him under the pressure of a parent's influence.

"Father," she said, advancing to the desk and laying her hand on his shoulder.

He was writing letters in the same chair that she had written her last letter to Sefton Ravenscroft.

"Yes, my child."

He took the little hand tenderly, unaware of the silent misery he had caused. In his eyes, that passed episode was a girlish fancy she had long since forgotten. Why, the fellow was married now, she could not think of him still!

So Lord Cannington calmed the slight prick of conscience he felt, when the Ravenscrofts were plunged in mourning, and his daughter walked about looking like a ghost.

"I have come to tell you," said Lady Norah, "that I am engaged to Victor."

For the first time she spoke of the Duke of Malvern by his christian name.

A certain amount of pity for the worthless goods he was taking to his heart softened her towards him. Any other man must have known and seen how distant she was, how far away, even when he clasped her in his arms. But the Duke was not her equal intellectually, and she knew it, making allowances for him.

Lord Cannington was highly pleased at the news, and did not fail to express his feelings. She listened in silence, then drew away from the parental embrace.

"If you are glad," she declared coldly, "it's all right, only don't congratulate me in private. I shall have to suffer enough 'good wishes' publicly. I don't care what becomes of me in the least, all men are the same, but one, and you stopped me having him. Now I might as well go right as wrong, and I suppose the Duke of Malvern is the most eligible suitor in the market of souls."

Lord Cannington gazed at his daughter in dumb astonishment.

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Never before was there such a hard, bitter ring in Norah's silvery voice. It was a revelation to him.

"What nonsense you are talking, child," he said, not unkindly. "I don't want to sell you, though I won't have you marry a pauper. Besides, if you are harping back to your old affection for Sefton Ravenscroft, that 'love,' as you called it, was merely child's play. How long did he remain faithful to the memory of his passion?"

The words stung Norah to the quick. Lord Cannington little guessed how deep a wound he was probing. He merely noticed that she stood very still, without moving a muscle.

"I only thought I would tell you," she said at last. "It is better to be straight, and speak the truth. I cared for no one before I loved Sefton, and I shall never care again. Therefore, from a worldly point of view it is as well to widen my interests, and try to live down my sorrow as Victor's wife. There is some satisfaction in social success, and it helps to kill the heart. Yes, father, I will kiss you now, I couldn't before, but I think you mean to be kind. I was a fool once, and you meant it for the best. I ought to have stood firm, and never to have given in, but it's easy to talk afterwards."

Her head fell on his shoulder, she stifled a sob which rose involuntarily.

"Don't let mother know. I would rather she thought I was happy. It will please her so much, this engagement with Victor."

"Norah, if you are posing to me as a martyr, if you don't want the fellow, say so, and have done with it. But on one point I will have an understanding. If you don't intend to stick to your word, tell him so at once. Do not wait till all England knows of it, and then back out the last moment. Make your choice now, and let it be final."

Lady Norah drew herself up.

"I do not go back from my word," she said. "*You* made me break it before."

"Is Norah here?" cried a voice outside.

It was Lady Cannington.

"Yes, mother. Come in and hear my news. I have been breaking it to father. I am going to marry the little duke."

She laughed lightly, the old merry twinkle returned to her eyes, but green eyes are false, and as Norah's gazed at her mother their sparkle lied, and her sudden vitality was the outcome of smothered pain.

Her head fell on his shoulder.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Duty Visit.

John Pluff was a thorn in the flesh to both Sefton and his wife, the former more especially rebelled against the grocer's invasion.

"Don't take the cad's money," said Sir Sefton gruffly, when Georgina pleaded her cousin's cheques were *so* useful, that she could not afford to shunt him, though of course she knew "he was different to other people," and a trifle too coarse for polite society.

"He's simply the essence of vulgarity," retorted her husband. "I don't know what you mean about 'different to other people,' the fellow is not mad, only low bred, disgustingly common, and what is far worse, puffed up with pride."

He took the little hand tenderly.

"I sometimes think you forget, Sefton, when speaking of John Pluff, that it is a delicate subject."

"Nothing very delicate about him that I can see."

"Your sensibilities become more blunted every day. Don't you remember the wretch is a relation of mine?"

"Well, I have not a chance of overlooking the fact, when you 'Cousin' him about everywhere."

"And now," continued Georgina, "he is death on our returning with him to Clapham. Should you mind a little visit there? We need not stay long."

Sefton turned to his wife with an incredulous, hard, superior smile.

"Go to Clapham!" he murmured, as if the bare idea was too absurd for discussion.

"Yes," answered Georgina firmly. "I don't often ask a favour of you."

"No, I fancy you asked enough before our marriage to last a lifetime. I hope you are satisfied. I trust that being Lady Ravenscroft has come up to your expectations."

Georgina tossed her head at his sneer, and replied deliberately. "You'll go to Clapham as a matter of business."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" muttered Sefton.

His tone forebade argument.

"Then at least you will have no objection to my accepting *Cousin* John's invitation."

She spoke spitefully.

"Certainly not. Go by all means. It makes absolutely no difference to me."

"Then I will make your excuses as best I can."

"Oh! don't trouble. I can tell Mr. Pluff."

"Yes, and say something to offend him. *I* know!"

"It is hardly likely I should be rude to any friend of yours in my own house, and if I were, John Pluff would not perceive it. He is too self-satisfied to take a snub." Georgina went slowly downstairs, and

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explained to her cousin, poor Sefton was feeling unwell, and not up to visiting, that was the reason he seemed silent and queer. She feared something wrong with his brain, and dreaded a doctor's bill.

Anyhow it would brace her up to get change of air, even at Clapham, and accordingly arranged to depart with Mr. Pluff the following morning.

"Pack all your best gowns," said her cousin, rubbing his hands together gleefully, "and I'll show you life on a large scale. If you don't mind a scarcity of dooks and lords, you shall be my hostess at some big dinner parties, where the guests will be *smart*, if nothing else. Not tradespeople—don't you fear, a bit more spicy than that—folks that live on the best champagne, and know how to dress. You see Mr. Jackson, a friend of mine, is manager at the D—— Theatre, and I am running the piece, providing the capital. Well, one good turn deserves another, I am mighty useful to him, and he has a very large acquaintance. He introduces me, and I entertain. To have Lady Ravenscroft at the head of my table will give me a lift, and it will do you good to have a fling. It ain't very amusing sitting in state waiting for the county toffs to call."

Georgina heartily agreed, for it was chiefly "waiting." The thought of "cutting a dash," as her cousin termed it, amongst people who would look up to her, instead of holding aloof, was alluring in the extreme.

She had ordered herself some beautiful tea-gowns, the bill for which John had promised to settle; they would arrive just in time. So thirsting for dissipation she gladly fell in with her cousin's plans, and commenced designing dinner table decorations of the most costly description. She said nothing of this, however, to her husband, declaring that she was simply going to Clapham for his sake.

"Forgive me for bowing down to the mammon of unrighteousness," she cried flippantly. "You will exist without me."

The last sentence verged on sarcasm. He received it in silence, while Georgina thought with pleasurable excitement of the many titled names among her husband's friends she could slip into her conversation for the benefit of Mr. Pluff's guests.

By so doing she would win his everlasting gratitude.

"But I won't be a snob for nothing," Georgina told herself. "I'll make him pay."

Sir Sefton watched them go with a sense of unutterable relief.

John Pluff did not deeply regret his absence, and boasted to Georgina, as they drove away, of the special railway compartment he had engaged for the journey, and the large tips he bestowed upon her servants.

Douglas Shirling was still at Ravenscroft Park. Numerous and attractive were the house-parties at which he had failed to put in an appearance, owing to his friend's intense need of companionship. Sefton grew daily more depressed and irritable, only cheering up in Shirling's society.

The latter noticed that after Georgina's departure her husband became quite his old self again. It was as if he had determined to throw off the burden while he could, and forget it even existed. He readily agreed to accompany Douglas back to his home—Lord Gatton's seat in Wiltshire. Change was what he wanted, change of scene, and freedom from Georgina.

His mother and Eva were staying at Ermyn Way, which made the prospect all the pleasanter, and the two men left Ravenscroft Park that same day.

"I wish I could afford to travel, I'd go round the world to-morrow," said Sefton in the train. He was thinking how delightful a long absence from Ravenscroft Park would be.

Douglas Shirling read his friend's thoughts, and compared his own happy-go-lucky existence, crowned by every happiness the world could give, with Sefton's unenviable lot.

The marriage was still as great a puzzle to him as the first day he set eyes on the now Lady Ravenscroft.

Douglas took up a paper and read it mechanically, till something made him gather his wits together. It was a paragraph announcing Lady Norah's engagement to the Duke of Malvern.

He went over it twice, then he looked up with a long drawn sigh.

"So she's going to do it!" he said, handing the paper across. "I wonder which of the two will regret it the most?"

A stony look came into Sefton's eyes, as he scanned the news. He was conscious of a burning ache within, a sudden quickening of the breath.

"She can't love that bilious looking puppy," he muttered savagely.

"Oh, no. Those sort of women don't go in for affection, it is out of their sphere, they can't comprehend it. They have the faces and forms of angels, the hearts and souls of devils."

Having delivered himself of this distressing statement,

"I wish I could afford to travel."

Douglas Shirling lit a cigar, buried himself behind a paper and ignored the presence of his friend. He knew just then it was the kindest thing to do, and Sefton felt grateful. He stared through the open window, picturing Norah and her lover in the dear old familiar haunts at Rosemont.

Would she sit on that same seat under the copper beech, talking of twin souls, and ridiculing affinities, with a charming laugh, till her bewildered adorer was reduced to a state of despair? Then, as she had done once before, sink on her knees in an attitude of mock humility, and plead forgiveness. Would she fish with him along the banks of the river, and murmur a pitiful apology to the gasping trout she killed against her boot? Sefton fancied he heard the smack of its head on her heel; while she feelingly declared "She could not bear that they should suffer, the little dears!"

And then the walk on moonlight evenings, when she trailed her dinner dress across the dewy lawn, shrinking from countless imaginary spectres in the bushes, only that he (whoever the lucky "he" might be) would place a protecting arm round her slim waist.

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Unending were the memories that crowded back into Sefton's mind as the train whirled onwards.

But memory is only a wave washing the shore of the mind.

It drags back a handful of shingle, and swallows it up in the ocean of circumstance.

When Douglas Shirling spoke again, Sefton woke as from

"For the post," she said.

a dream. The waves were still once more, and the paper, with that loathsome announcement, fell unheeded at his feet.

The fresh air dispersed his gloomy reflections, as he drove with Douglas through the quaint old town of Salisbury to Ermyn Way, in the high tandem that had come to meet them.

As they approached the house a group of familiar faces round a tea-table under the trees greeted Sefton.

There was his mother, in her black dress, flushing with pleasure at the sight of her son, and Eva scampering across the grass, just as in the old days, when they had all stayed together in Lord and Lady Gatton's home.

In the meanwhile Georgina was revelling in more ostentatious and less refined luxury at Queen's Gate House. She liked ordering John Pluff's large staff of servants hither and thither, being waited on hand and foot, and not having to think of the weekly books.

"I've got an exquisite idea for your dinner-table to-morrow night," said Lady Ravenscroft. "It is to be all blue and orange, the Ravenscroft colours you know. You can explain to your guests that you had it purposely arranged so out of compliment to me."

"Happy thought! Guess it will look grand," chuckled John Pluff. "I want to do it well for the Pynes to see. They are very rich people, and entertain in South Kensington. I've got an eye to Miss Pyne, between ourselves, Georgina. Her mother was one of the wealthy family of Moses, a decided Jewess, but that don't trouble me. Mr. and Mrs. P. are both going to honour us, likewise Miss Nesta P. and her two brothers."

"A perfect plague of Pynes," sighed Georgina impatiently, her heart beating faster with apprehension, as she thought of the daughter.

Would John Pluff make such a fool of himself as to marry a young girl at his age? She feared it was very likely. The bare idea turned her cold with fear.

"Now, two opinions are better than one," continued her cousin, "and I want you to tell me exactly what you think of Miss P. I am not one to be hurried, and I want the best in the market, so now you know."

"Very well. Then hold back, and rely on my taste. I should like to see you marry someone I should be proud of introducing to the country people at home. She must be good style, or, of course, I could hardly ask her to Ravenscroft Park."

John Pluff rubbed his chin.

"Well they are not so easy to find, Georgina. Now, Nesta (I like to call her Nesta), she is a well set-up fine girl, and dresses awfully smartly. I might do worse."

The conversation was becoming positively painful to Georgina. She longed to take John Pluff by the shoulders and shake him.

"I won't offer an opinion till after to-morrow."

She left him, feeling too aggrieved to continue the conversation, and locked herself into her room to regain her temper. It was maddening to think of a second marriage, when John Pluff's purse was all she had to rely on for suitable gowns to grace her position, and then there was always his death in view. If she wheedled herself sufficiently into his good graces, and steered him clear of designing females, it was even possible.

Georgina paused, and gasped at the thought which crept into her mind, and set her brain on fire.

Money! What would it not mean to her?

Sefton sneered at the wife who had forced herself upon him, but how would he treat her with John Pluff's fortune at her back?

Georgina clasped her hands over her heart to still its beating. These wild day dreams made her dizzy. She was sick of scraping and pinching, the luxury of Queen's Gate House filled her covetous soul with hungry longing.

It was an effort to bring her mind back to the practical reality of her uneasy existence. Surely she could devise some plan to add to her income.

A sudden inspiration seized her. She crossed to the writing table and wrote several letters, tearing them up in turn, but finally satisfying herself, addressed an envelope, and rang her bell.

"For the post," she said, as the maid answered the summons. "I wonder," she thought, "what Sefton would say to it. I don't care, I mean to have my way henceforth —in everything!"

With this resolve Georgina went down and rejoined John Pluff.

CHAPTER IX.

Youth and Age.

The garden of Queen's Gate House was flooded in moonlight, it was a stiflingly oppressive evening.

John Pluff's long dinner had almost exhausted the patience of the guests.

But interminable as the courses seemed, the grateful reaction of dessert arrived, then the welcome signal from Lady Ravenscroft, and a haven of repose reached in the blue satin chairs of a large drawing-room.

All the windows were flung open, crimson lanterns illuminated the verandah without, inviting a stroll in the fresh air.

Georgina had, from the moment of their arrival, subjected the Pyne family to severe criticism. They were her mortal foes, she thought, as she conversed with the overheated Jewess, whose face appeared in a state of melting moisture unpleasant to witness.

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Her conversation consisted solely of admiring anecdotes connected with her daughter Nesta, and the "dear boys." She always alluded to her sons as the "dear boys." They were twin youths, tall, dark, and of Jewish countenance. Each wore a black rimmed eyeglass, very high collar, and extravagantly large buttonhole, which stamped them as unfashionable in Georgina's eyes.

"Buttonholes are not worn this season," she informed Mrs. Pyne, who was holding forth on the unique shade of the "dear boys'" carnations.

"Not worn! Why, Lady Ravenscroft, are you one of those unhappy women who follow the flock of sheep trooping to the slaughter-house of Fashion? It makes slaves of us all, not only in dress, but even in mannerisms and tricks of voice. I was told of a Lady-in-waiting who spent all her time endeavouring to sneeze like the Princess of Wales. It was during an influenza wave, and the fashionable sneeze became as well-known as the bonnet of the month."

Miss Nesta Pyne, a raven-haired beauty, gowned in scarlet, was seated at the far end of the room, gazing at a full length painting of John Pluff. Her dashing costume, and white arms and neck sorely disturbed Georgina's peace of mind.

"Just the style to attract him," thought Lady Ravenscroft, as the sound of her cousin's obtrusive laugh could be heard from the dining-room. It was a laugh that always made Georgina hot to her very ears. It generally burst forth after a story that were better left unrepeated. He would listen in silence, then came a sudden indentation of his features, a widening of the mouth, and finally like a cannon's roar—a rushing forth of impetuous sound, all-engulfing, deafening, hideous!

"It does me good to listen to dear Mr. Pluff's merriment," murmured Mrs. Pyne. "It is so robustly honest."

Lady Ravenscroft pursed up her mouth, shrugged her shoulders, and sought consolation by regarding her gorgeously flowing gown in a mirror opposite. She knew which chair to choose for this purpose. She still clung to her old fancy for dull yellow. In the days of Sir Reginald it was mustard coloured crépon, now she affected saffron tinted satin with pepper hued chiffon.

Georgina's swagger convinced these second-class people that she was far their superior, yet sweetly condescending, when promising to appear at various entertainments at their invitations.

"I shall be delighted to dine with you on the twelfth if Sir Sefton can spare me a week longer," or, "Really I *ought* to return to Ravenscroft Park, *but*," etc., etc.

She received no letter from Sefton, but found his name in a list of Lord Gatton's house party at Ermyn Way.

This fact was a boon to her throughout the evening.

Nesta Pyne sat silent and pensive till the gentlemen rejoined them. She had an expectant look on her face, as if she were waiting for something. Her expression irritated Georgina, who found herself perpetually tracing in the girl's features likenesses to people she knew.

John Pluff's eyes wandered round the room till they settled upon Nesta, then he took a seat beside her, and became mawkishly sentimental, and boastfully bouncing in turns.

"Sitting under my picture, eh?" he said, in answer to a murmured speech, breathed into his ear by Nesta's carmine lips. "It cost me a clear 'thou,' that bit of a daub, and they have not given me much of a mug either!"

Nesta gazed into his eyes and smiled bewitchingly.

"Sitting under my picture, eh?"

"Does that mean face?" she asked innocently.

John Pluff indulged one of his explosive fits at the innocent question.

"Bless me, you're as bad as my little Georgy there!" indicating Lady Ravenscroft. "She is always quizzing my 'lingo,' as she calls it. I wish we could get out for a wander on the terrace, but I don't know what to do with all these people. They will be following us as sure as a gun."

"Ask my brother Algy to sing, and David will accompany him. Then we can slip away unobserved."

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John Pluff gushed up to the "dear boys," with a benign and irresistible smile.

"Give us a ditty," he said, at the same time catching hold of Algy's coat sleeve, and dragged him to the piano.

David whispered he could not accompany his brother, being afflicted with violent indigestion.

His host however declared that was no excuse, indigestion could not attack the fingers, and announced to the company that the brothers Pyne would favour with a little music.

"I say," whined Algy, "David's no good. Nesta accompanies me far more feelingly, it's just twice the effect."

But such an awful paralysing look came into John Pluff's usually good-tempered face, that Algy was utterly quelled, and David, with a martyred expression, struck a chord weakly to command silence.

The hubbub of voices ceased; all eyes turned on the "dear boys."

John Pluff edged towards the open window, Nesta being already on the verandah.

"You are *wonderful!*" she murmured coyly, as they strolled away. "This reminds me of that beautiful evening at the Richmond Rowing Club ball."

"What a night we had! It makes my heart thump to think of it."

"I—I hope you did not dance too violently. It is very dangerous with a weak heart."

"Come, come my dear—you know my meaning full well, and it's no good beating about the bush. I am a plain spoken man—and I'll put it to you straight. Look here, Miss Pyne—Nesta, my love—I'm yours for the asking!" He announced this marvellous piece of news with an expectant smile, his breast swelling with anticipation.

Why was the girl silent? Overcome by glad surprise? Stunned by the pleasurable shock?

She bent her pretty head, and her face was scarlet as the gown she wore.

"Well!" he cried at last, a trifle nettled at her apparent lack of appreciation.

"I—am—not—accustomed—to—proposing," she gasped, still turning away that he might not see the expression in her eyes.

"Well now that's good—that's rich!" rubbing his hands together. "As if a man ever made a clearer declaration than myself at this moment! Come to my arms, there's nothing to fear. It's all straight and square, and I'll fix it up with Mr. and Mrs. P. to-morrow, as ever is. I'm not one to stick at settlements."

Nesta turned sharply in the bright moonlight, and moved a step or two back, facing him with a look that puzzled and bewildered John Pluff.

It was an expression of intense overwhelming amusement. A merriment that had been suppressed till the controlling of it almost amounted to pain. Nesta was a girl who acted and carried on a joke for her entertainment. She needed no one to share it, her own appreciative powers were enough.

As she surveyed the stout elderly man who offered her his hand in marriage, a laugh she could no longer keep back, rippled forth on the still air.

It was a thoroughly genuine peal, a laugh that refused to be confined, and leapt across her cheeks, dimpled her chin, dived under to her neck, scrambled along her ears, and finally capering across the temples passed away into a realm of smiles.

Mr. Pluff gave an uncertain "ha! ha!" and asked what the joke was.

"Why, *you* of course, you dear old goose! I do believe you actually thought I should jump down your throat!"

Her host assured her he expected no such acrobatic feat from a lady, especially one so dignified, so *self-possessed* as Miss Pyne.

This with a mock bow, and effort at sarcasm.

"Well, it's really too funny. As if all the fellows were not after me, and as if I had not my own especial 'best man' coming back from Gibraltar next week to 'fix it all up with Mr. and Mrs. P.' But there, you're a nice old thing, and I ought not to be making sport of you."

"Sport, sport of *me* indeed," muttered Mr. Pluff, walking back towards the house, with elevated head, and extended nostrils. "Oh! don't imagine *I* care."

"Do stop a minute, if you go in looking like that everyone will guess."

He paused, aware of the beads of perspiration on his forehead, his swift, heavy breathing, inspired by rage, not love.

It was no easy matter to pacify his wounded pride, and as Nesta Pyne endeavoured to soothe the feelings she had wantonly ruffled, Georgina Pluff suddenly became aware of their absence.

It turned her cold and sick. She saw it all. John had purposely asked for the singing that he might slip away and flirt with that minx in the moonlight. Perhaps he was offering his heart and fortune to the designing creature.

There was not a moment to be lost. They must be disturbed at once. She rose, and moved towards the window.

"There are chairs here in the verandah, won't you all come out. The night is *so* delicious!"

Her suggestion was immediately taken up.

The first sight that greeted Georgina's vigilant eyes was a red dress walking by a stout figure.

Mr. Pluff looked grave. Had the mischief been done? Was her move—too late?

"Cousin John," she cried, shaking her fist playfully, "you missed two of the most charming songs. Mr. Pyne is quite a genius. Come here, I want to scold you for deserting us, and what is far worse, robbing your guests of Miss Pyne's delightful society."

"That's right," laughed a short, square man at her side, with diamond studs and jewelled rings. "Keep the old man in order, Lady Ravenscroft. He needs a restraining hand, and always marches off with the prettiest girls."

How little the speaker guessed the mental torture his words were giving Georgina.

"He is too old to care about girls," she replied curtly.

"Don't you think it, my lady, the older they get, the worse they become. It's a disease that increases with age, and the young 'uns like it; even when they are as good looking as Miss Nesta. It is a case of the hay-stack, I reckon, and which side the bread is buttered. They like the butter laid on thick, and won't be put off with margarine."

By this time Miss Pyne was safely back among her friends, laughing and talking as gaily as any, coquetting with married and single men, ridiculing their remarks, and making herself generally conspicuous.

When the guests had left, Georgina addressed John Pluff in a tone of utter disgust. "If *that* is your choice," she said, "I pity you, and, as to introducing her into country society, well, it would be absolutely impossible! Of all the vulgar, pushing, ill-mannered girls, give me Nesta Pyne. She's out-and-out bad style, Cousin John, take my word for it. You won't help *yourself* on in society by taking up with *her*."

"I quite agree with you," he replied, to Lady Ravenscroft's surprise. "Her bad taste has never been so blatant as to-night; the scales have fallen from my eyes. I shall *not* marry her."

A gasp of relief escaped Georgina. "It is very nice of you to take my advice in this matter, Cousin John; I feel highly gratified and flattered," she murmured, calming down.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "They are not the sort of family I should care to marry into. Mr. and Mrs. P. are all right in their way, but I would not trust the daughter."

Georgina kissed her cousin affectionately. For once she felt loving towards him, and retired to her room well pleased.

"I've squashed that young woman," she said to herself. "There is one danger removed. I shall have to keep John well under my eye, he is so easily led away, but becomes instantly docile under my influence. How they pandered to me to-night—those parvenus!"

(To be continued.)

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By the Night Train.

"You must travel alone, then, Ned. my boy. It is a tiresome thing, but it can't be helped. At latest, I shall be at C—— in good time on the wedding morning. Tell Carry so, with my love," said my father, laughing off his vexation at being thus peremptorily detained in London.

These were the circumstances of the case. My engagement—a two years' engagement, insisted upon by my own parent no less than by Admiral Lethbridge, that the "young people might know their own minds," most unreasonable and unnecessary as the delay had appeared to those principally concerned—was drawing to a happy close. I was to marry dear, pretty Carry Lethbridge, with the full consent and approval of both families. The wedding-day was drawing near, and my sister Clara, who was to be one of the bridesmaids, was staying at C—— with Caroline and her mother and sisters, in anticipation of the ceremony. Rear-Admiral Lethbridge resided at C——, and there, of course, the marriage was to take place. And my father and I had intended going down to C—— some three days before the wedding, and taking up our quarters at the hotel there. By the merest hazard, or apparent hazard, the execution of this plan was prevented, so far as my father's share in it was concerned.

My father had been summoned as a witness before a Parliamentary Committee of the House of Lords, and it had been notified to him that although, in consequence of frequent adjournments, his evidence might not be called for for a day or two, it was necessary that he should be in actual attendance, lest "My Lords" should find the private bill in hand pass more rapidly through its preliminary stages than was expected. The Parliamentary lawyer by whom my father was subpœnaed was civil enough to add that the committee could by no means dispense with Mr. Henley's very valuable testimony and advice.

"Very complimentary; but uncommonly tiresome," said I, really annoyed, in spite of the usual unselfishness of a young man and a lover; for my father and I were on terms of much confidence and affection, and I was aware that he had looked forward to this trip as one of his rare holidays. "The Lethbridges will be sorry, and so will Clara also. Cannot you come, after all?"

My father laughed.

"No, no, Edgar," said he; "I should expect to see Black Rod draw my curtains at the dead of night, come to take me into custody for treason. Committees must be obeyed. But never mind! I shall be with you on Saturday, before the wedding breakfast is laid out. And now I must be off to Westminster. You go by the night train, of course?"

My father and I shook hands, and I turned into Bond Street, where a double stream of carriages flowed slowly and strugglingly past, and where the crowd of lounging foot-passengers was at its height.

My first call was at the shop of the well-known Court jewellers, Miles and Henderson, and its object was to fetch away a certain set of pearl and ruby ornaments which my father had ordered, and which were his present to his future daughter-in-law. Mr. Henley had looked forward with pleasure to placing these costly toys in the bride's hands; but since he had been compelled to postpone his arrival at C——, he had good-naturedly but firmly insisted that I should take the jewels down with me, and give them to Carry in his name. I had not seen the design of the ornaments, but I was aware that the device was a new and well-chosen one; and from my father's liberality, of which I had since childhood received so many proofs, I had little doubt that the gift would prove to be a splendid one.

As I was in the act of opening the jewellers' door, a man passed me so closely as to brush my elbow, and, turning his head, looked me for a moment in the face. His own face was a remarkable one, or rather would have appeared remarkable elsewhere than in London, where the natives of all countries are every day to be met, jostling each other unnoticed in the midst of the great seething stream of restless human life that fills our streets.

This person, evidently a foreigner, was about forty years of age, wore spectacles, a bushy, red-brown beard, and a threadbare suit of black, shabby, but well brushed and neat. So far his appearance corresponded, more or less accurately, with that of a legion of professors, doctors, and philosophers, dubious hangers-on of the learned professions, whom Red Republican tenets and police hostility have landed in the limbo of Leicester Square.

But I could not help feeling a thrill of repugnance and dislike at the aspect of that broad, flat, white face, with its Tartar coarseness of feature, the sharp white teeth just visible between the thin lips, and the long, narrow eyes blinking catlike through the glasses of the spectacles. Can you fancy a white-faced tiger, badly pitted by the smallpox, walking erect in human guise, and stealthily pursuing his way through a jungle, not of the trees but of houses? Such was the impression which the first glimpse of that foreigner's face made upon me. In the next instant, I laughed at myself for my folly.

"The poor man cannot help his ugliness," said I to myself, as I followed the shopman to his employer's office on the first floor, near the glittering showrooms. He is a Russian, of course, too advanced in political ideas no doubt to please the Tsar and the police Prefect. Not a

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very pleasant person, though, to trust with a guillotine if his party should ever be uppermost."

And then Mr. Miles, bald and florid, came civilly forward to welcome me, and I forgot the Russian and all connected with him.

"Certainly, my dear sir, certainly," said the jeweller, unlocking the strongest of safes with the tiniest of Bramah keys, and tossing over a quantity of *écrins* labelled with the names of half the duchesses and countesses in the Red Book.

"Here is the set that your esteemed father, Mr. Henley, was so good as to order. Very old and respected customer of ours is Mr. Henley. I sold him—dear me! thirty years ago it must have been—a set of emeralds for Mrs. Henley's wearing. Not a very costly set, but in good taste, in capital taste. Mr. Henley had but lately come back then from Calcutta. His was a new name then on the Stock Exchange and in the Bank parlour. No name higher now; but his taste was always excellent, always. Here are the stones. I sent a set nearly similar last week for the wedding of Lady Florence Fetherton, but not so fine, I give you my word, as a tradesman of fifty years' standing, not so fine."

I think these words were either uttered in a louder tone than the rest of the jeweller's discourse, or a lull in the roll and rumble of the carriages made them unusually distinct, but at any rate three or four of the passers-by turned their heads inquisitively towards old Mr. Miles and myself, as we stood in the open doorway. And among those three or four was the ugly foreigner with the red-brown beard. He was repassing the shop coming from the opposite direction to that in which he had previously been walking. A coincidence, no doubt! Merely a coincidence.

I beckoned to the driver of a hansom, sauntering past on the look-out for a fare, and rattled down to my club, and after a quiet dinner drove to the station, first assuring myself that the precious jewels were safe in my pocket.

"Your luggage is labelled, Mr. Edgar, and ready to be put into the van," said old Jones, my father's confidential servant, touching his hat respectfully. "I have put the rugs and sticks and fishing-rods into an empty first-class carriage third from the bookstall to the left."

"Very well, Jones. Just see the luggage put in. I must get my ticket," answered I, and hurried to the ticket office where several impatient passengers were hustling and elbowing one another, while a stout lady, one of those voluble but unprotected female travellers who are the scourges and torments of all officials, was blocking up the window and holding a long and discursive argument with the booking-clerk on the subject of her fare, her change, her preference for slow trains, and the best way in which she could reach some cross country line some eighty miles off. At last, however, even this lady voyager's demands, or the clerk's patience, being exhausted, I managed to crush my way to the window, and to take my ticket for C——.

"First class to C——, monsieur!" said a peculiarly harsh and strident voice at my elbow, with a slight but perceptible foreign accent in its tones, and I glanced round at the man, who was thrusting a half-washed, muscular hand, decorated by a heavy gold signet-ring, past me to lay his money on the counter.

With some surprise I recognised the Russian whom I had seen twice on that very afternoon in front of the jeweller's shop. The recognition did not appear mutual. He never looked at me, but re-demanded his ticket in a quick, angry manner, and having got it, he fell back and mingled with the crowd.

By the time I had reached the carriage in which Jones had arranged my lighter luggage, I saw him approach with the guard, who unlocked the carriage, held open the door for my entry, and, having received the usual silver compliment that has now become a vested interest on railways, closed and relocked it, saying that I should "have the compartment to myself if I wished to smoke."

On the well-lighted platform outside the usual bustle which precedes the departure of a train was going on. Porters were wheeling heavy barrowloads of luggage rapidly past me, all the quicker in their movements because the warning bell had begun clanging for the first time; mail-guards were dragging along the huge sacks of letters that were impatiently awaited by the sorters in the post-office carriage; newspaper boys were thrusting evening journals into the faces of nervous passengers, wistfully leaning out to see after the safety of those trunks that the porter had glibly assured them would "be all right"; and paterfamilias was gathering his strayed family round him, or wrangling over a charge of overweight.

"Open this door, you guard. Halloa, guard! Open the door of this carriage, will you?"

It was thus that my reverie was broken in upon. A strange traveller, with a railway rug over his arm, was roughly shaking the door of the compartment where I sat alone. The guard came up rather reluctantly. Railway guards are discriminating persons as to social conditions, and the new-comer's coarse manners and husky voice were not calculated to inspire respect.

"First-class, sir?" asked the guard, and when the man produced his ticket, the guard was still too loyal to my tacit compact with him to permit the invasion of my privacy without an effort to preserve it.

"First-class to C——, sir? This way, please. Plenty of room here." And he tried to draw the intruder towards a distant carriage that was half full. But this manœuvre failed.

"There is plenty of room in this carriage. Look sharp and let me in," said the obstinate traveller; and the guard, being an English and not a French official, succumbed and unlocked the door.

He apologised to me in a gruff whisper: "Couldn't help myself, sir."

"Never mind," said I smiling, and applied myself to observing the new-comer, who sat down, not opposite to me, but in the middle partition full in the glare of the lamp.

In a very short time I had, as I thought, taken the measure of this not very delightful fellow traveller. He was a young man, perhaps a year my senior, strongly built and with rather a handsome face, sadly marred by very evident traces of dissipation. He wore a coat of sporting cut; a blue "bird's-eye" scarf with a horseshoe pin in it, and a great deal of dubious jewellery in the shape of rings, watch-chain, and dangling trinkets. The railway rug that lay across the knees of his tight-fitting drab trousers was of a gaudy pattern, yellow and red. His eyes were bloodshot, his voice thick, and he smelt strongly of bad tobacco and worse brandy. To all appearances he was a betting man, or sporting "gent" of the lower substratum of that uninviting class.

The bell rang for the last time. There was the customary final rush and scurry of belated passengers and porters, and the voices of the newspaper boys grew

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shriller and more excited. Then the guards sprang to the steps of their vans, and the station-master looked warily up and down the line preparatory to signalling to the engine-driver. At that moment a man came darting across the platform, tore open the door, jumped in and sat down opposite to me. A policeman ran up and shut the door.

"All right behind!"

The train began to move. I looked at my opposite neighbour, and could hardly repress an exclamation of surprise and vexation. The Russian! Yes, there was no mistaking the man. I knew that red-brown beard, that flat tigerish face, those long crafty eyes, black and narrow as an American Indian's, perfectly well.

I had seen the man at the ticket-window, certainly, but that was more than ten minutes ago, and I had been confident that he had long since taken his seat in some other compartment of the train. Such however was not the case. Had he dogged me all that evening, tracking me with a bloodhound's pertinacity from the jeweller's door to the railway carriage? It was possible, though not likely. But in vain I tried to dismiss the idea as silly and romantic. It recurred again and again. And yet why should he or anyone dog my steps?

The answer to this self-question soon came. The jewels, the costly set of pearl and ruby ornaments I carried about me, and of which this man had probably overheard the garrulous old jeweller make mention! And yet the Russian had hardly the air of a pickpocket. There was something defiant and arrogant in his look, and an undefinable air of education clung to him in spite of his shabby exterior. And as for violence, I had a young man's confidence in my own power to cope with any single antagonist, and beside I was not alone with him.

So far my thoughts had gone, while I gazed abstractedly from the window, as if marking the last lights of the London suburbs as the dark hedges and dim meadows succeeded to houses and factories, but then I cast a glance round and saw a sight which caused me an involuntary thrill of alarm. The two passengers in the carriage were rapidly and secretly conversing by means of signs.

There could be no doubt upon the point. The two men who were my sole companions in that rapid and lonely journey, ill-looking desperadoes each in his separate style, were accomplices. Up to that moment I had not for an instant suspected any collusion between the two. They came at different times, one was English the other a foreigner, and between the shabby lecturer and the betting man sodden with drink, and attired in flashy finery, any previous acquaintance seemed improbable. Yet, there they were rapidly communicating with one another by means of some thieves' alphabet of finer telegraphy, unaware as yet that I had observed them. So far as I could make out, the foreigner was urging the other to some course which the Englishman was reluctant to pursue.

I am not, I believe, one whit more disposed to timidity than most of my fellow countrymen, and yet I must confess that my blood ran cold and my heart almost ceased beating as the truth dawned upon me. I was the victim evidently of an artful and treacherous scheme. That cab—that sudden appearance of the Russian at the terminus—that persistency of his English confederate to occupy a seat in the carriage where I sat alone. All was clear to me now. Robbery, no doubt, was the object of the two villains in whose company I was shut up, and probably they would hesitate at no crime to obtain possession of the valuable jewels I so incautiously carried about my person. Both were strong men; probably armed, too; and though I braced my nerves and set my teeth for a struggle, I had little hope of a successful resistance, none of rescue. The train was racing fast through the black stillness of a moonless night. There was to be no stoppage short of C——, and more than an hour must elapse before that station was reached.

At that moment when my thoughts had travelled thus far, I made some slight movement; the Russian looked up, and our eyes met. The villain saw that his by-play had been observed, and instantly threw off the mask. Grinding out an oath between his set teeth, he rose from his seat. I rose, too; and as the Russian noticed the action he sprang like a tiger at my throat, grappling with me so closely that the blow I dealt him but partly took effect. Linked together we wrestled furiously for a few seconds, rising and falling; but I was the younger and more agile of the two, and had nearly overpowered my enemy, when his confederate came to his aid and dealt me a succession of crushing blows upon the head with some heavy weapon, beneath which I fell, stunned and helpless, with my face covered with blood and senses gone. When I came to myself again, the ruffians were rifling my pockets as I lay on the floor of the carriage. The Russian had opened one of the morocco cases that held the ornaments, and he was examining the gems by the light of the lamp overhead. The other villain was searching for fresh plunder. He was livid with agitation, I noticed, and his face was blotched with crimson and damp with heat drops, while his hands trembled very much. He it was who first spoke, in a husky whisper.

"What shall we do with him?"

"Toss him out. The fall won't hurt him," sneered the Russian.

It was plain that they believed me to be dead. I lay still, resolved that no cry, no twitching of an eyelid, should betray that life was still not extinct. Too well I knew that mercy was hopeless, and that my chance would be far better if flung out, at the risk of being mangled and crushed beneath the whirling iron wheels, than if I remained in that luxurious first-class carriage with those two wild beasts in human guise ready to finish their work at the first sign that I yet lived.

The Russian leant out of the window, and cautiously opened the door. I felt the chill of the fresh night upon my cheek as I lay. Then I had to summon all my resolution to my help to repress a shudder as the murderers stooped and lifted me up, one taking me by the head, and the other by the feet, as butchers carry a slaughtered calf. The Englishman breathed hard and trembled perceptibly as he dragged me towards the gaping doorway.

"I don't half like the job," he growled out.

The Russian gave a scornful laugh.

"Pitch the carrion out, *blanc bec* that you are! One, two, three, and over with him."

I remember one agonised moment of suspense as I was violently thrust forward, one hurried, frenzied prayer that rose from my heart to my lips, but was drowned by the roar and rush of the long train of massive carriages as they tore along the iron way. I was launched out, and felt myself falling, and then I dropped with a crash, and my brain reeled and sensation seemed again to desert me.

On coming gradually to myself, my first vague perception was that I formed a part of some vast moving

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body speeding swiftly along, swinging and swaying, but rushing fast through the cool night air. Then, as memory returned, I began to realise my position. In falling, when the assassins had thrown me out of the carriage where the robbery had taken place, I had dropped upon the wooden plank that runs like an elongated step below the carriages, and my hand had closed mechanically, in a clutch like that of a drowning man, on some projecting portion of the ironwork above, which I presently conjectured to be the prop of one of the iron steps by which passengers ascend. And there I clung instinctively, like a limpet to a rock, while the swerving, swinging train flew madly on through the black night.

It was a position of fearful peril. True I had escaped immediate death; but to all appearances my fate was only deferred. The train was not to halt till it reached C——; I despaired of being able to hold on till then, for already my cramped sinews seemed to be stiffening, and my attitude was a painful and uneasy one. And by night there was no hope that my danger would be observed, and an alarm given, as I was hurled helpless and despairing through the darkness. The wounds I had received in the head caused me a dull aching pain, and I was weak with loss of blood; but my thoughts were coherent and clear.

I knew my risk well. If I fell *now* I must certainly be left behind a mutilated corpse, torn to fragments by the cruel wheels that whirred and spun close by me. My only chance was to hold on—to hold on till I reached C——, if my strength lasted so long. Once or twice I essayed a cry for help, but my feeble voice was lost in the noise of the train. And presently I felt thankful that it had not been heard, for, from the window of the carriage to the left of where I lay crouching, was protruded the head of a man who peered into the night; and I shrank still closer to the woodwork as I recognised in the faint lamp-light the flat white face, the red-brown beard, the tigerish grin of the Russian, my late fellow-traveller. He did not see me, however, but resumed his place with a well satisfied air.

On we went through the silent country, with scream and rush and roar—now diving into tunnels, now ploughing our way between deep banks, now among the dark trees and hedges. On past the lighted stations, where the signal was made that the road was clear, and where porters and passengers, waiting for some slower train that stopped there, were to be seen watching us as we flew past. But they never saw me as I clung, with desperate grip and aching limbs, to the swiftly-hurrying mass of wood and iron.

Twice during that phantom ride I heard the shriek of the steam-whistle of a coming train, and twice I saw the red lamps and flame of the advancing engine glaring through the dark like the angry eyes and lurid breath of some monstrous creature rushing down upon its prey. And then, with clang and clash, and deafening roar, and in the midst of a gush of wind caused by its rapid progress, the long array of carriages went by me. On, on, as if impelled by a demon's force, we flew; and still feebler grew my arm, and I felt despair and fatigue benumb my faculties and was half tempted to let go my hold and drop and face the worst at once beneath the grinding sway of the merciless wheels.

Should we never be at C——? How long would that hideous night continue? Was it possible that my tired muscles would much longer endure the strain upon them? And then came a new thought. I remembered that in dear Carrie's last letter she had made me a half-playful promise that she and my sister Clara and the rest would come down to the station and meet me there on the arrival of the night train. That recollection filled my tortured heart with a new anguish as I thought of our mutual love, of the wedding day so soon to come, and of poor Caroline's grief when she should be left widowed of the betrothed bridegroom of her choice.

And then the mental pain was conquered by physical weakness and distress, and my dulled brain preserved nothing but a vague terror lest I should fall—fall beneath those pitiless iron wheels so close to me. And then I seemed to fall again into a waking dream, through which the lights of C—— station gleamed very brilliantly.

Of what followed I have no very clear idea. I remember, in a sudden access of strength and fury, leaping up and springing wildly at the door of the carriage from which I had been thrown. I have a faint recollection of a struggle—of loud shouts and then—darkness.

Afterwards I learnt that the Russian and his confederate had been arrested after a brief struggle, while I had been carried in an unconscious state to a neighbouring hotel. Though badly injured I recovered after many weeks of suffering, and Carrie—who nursed me with the greatest devotion through my illness—wore her jewels at our wedding after all.

Agnes Jewley.

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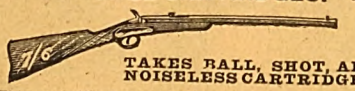

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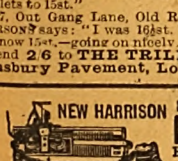

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NEW SERIAL BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN JUST STARTED.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 396. FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 1ST, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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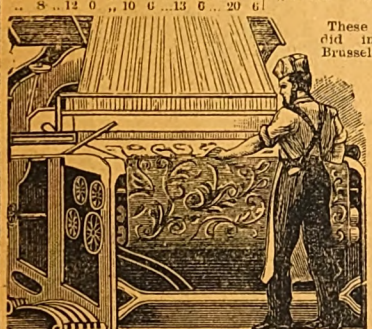
,, 2	9	0	,,	7	6	7	0	11	6
,, 3	9	0	,,	9	0	8	6	11	6
,, 4	10	6	,,	7	6	8	9	13	9
,, 5	10	6	,,	9	0	10	0	15	6
,, 6	12	0	,,	9	0	11	6	18	0
,, 7	10	6	,,	10	6	12	0	18	6
,, 8	12	0	,,	10	6	13	6	20	6
,, 9	15	0	by	9	0	14	3	22	6
,, 10	13	6	,,	10	6	15	3	24	6
,, 11	12	0	,,	12	0	15	3	21	0
,, 12	13	6	,,	12	0	17	0	27	0
,, 13	15	0	,,	12	0	19	0	32	6
,, 14	18	0	,,	12	0	22	9	36	0
,, 15	21	0	,,	12	0	26	0	42	0



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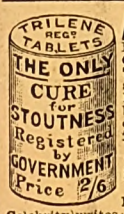

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No. 31
Aug. 1, 1896.
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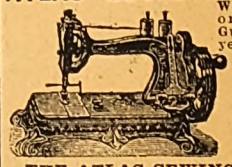

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 396.] For the Week ending August 1st, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

THE CURSE OF THE BELL

Should a babe be born by the church-side near,
When the Passing Bell is toll'd,
Lo! a curse on its life will cling and fall,
Nor broken by prayer—nor gold!

OLD SUPERSTITION.

SOLEMNLY the Passing Bell began to toll, its muffled note sounding clear in the summer air.

The nurse moved across the room and closed the window of the sick chamber hastily, as she did so a feeble wail came from the bed.

She took the child up in her arms tenderly. "Poor little mite, poor little thing!" she said. "Will it live?" she asked the doctor curiously.

"Live, woman! of course it will; it is as strong a baby as I have seen," he answered testily. "I wish I could say as much for the mother."

The nurse sighed.

"Then the Curse of the Bell will be on it," she muttered, as she stilled its wailing cry.

* * * * *

Stella Fairfield opened her window and looked out; the sun was streaming across the Rectory garden, throwing the shadow of the belfry tower from the adjacent church across the mossy lawn.

rights reserved.]

As she stood there smiling, a girl with a roll of music under her arm came out from the porch into the sunlight.

"Where are you going?" cried Stella, leaning out to pluck a rose.

"To the church. I am going to practise; I do not want to be in the way, you know. Roger will be here directly, I suppose?"

Stella laughed merrily and threw the rose at her cousin as she crossed the lawn.

"I believe you are afraid of him, Mona," she cried to the retreating figure. "You always try to run away when he comes."

The girl had slipped into the shadow cast by the belfry, and Stella did not see the colour flood her usually pale cheeks.

A step in the room behind made Stella turn abruptly.

"Why, nurse, have you come to wish me many happy returns? I thought you had forgotten that to-day is my birthday."

"No, miss, I had not forgotten," the old woman answered as she looked from the window across to the still churchyard.

"Then have you no greetings?" the girl began, but a cry from the nurse checked her.

Across the summer air came the solemn toll of a bell.

"Shut your ears, dearie, don't listen; I will close the window quick."

The girl laughed.

"How silly you are, that is for poor old Jimmy the sexton. Did you not know he was dead?"

The old woman closed the window with shaking hands.

"To-day of all days," she muttered.

Then she sat down on the window seat and covered her face with her hands.

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"The curse, the curse is coming," she moaned.

"But, Nannie," the girl broke in, "you have heard that bell so often, you never minded it before."

"It has not tolled on the 15th of June for twenty years, Miss Stella. When last I heard it——"

"I know," again interrupted the girl, then she went to the window and opened it once more.

"Poor mother!" she said softly, and she too looked out at the still churchyard.

The nurse shook her head feebly.

"It's the living, not the dead I was thinking of," she said, but Stella did not hear, she was gazing up at the belfry.

"There is to be a wedding to-day, and we are all going up to the belfry when the bells ring. Roger says it 's such fun."

The old nurse started up in alarm.

"Don't, Miss Stella, don't go up there to-day, you will come to harm for the bell is spiteful——"

She broke off, for the Rector was heard calling his daughter.

"I expect Roger has come," Stella cried; and, breaking away from the detaining hand of the old woman she ran light-heartedly downstairs.

"The curse, the curse is coming."

Stella Fairfield was an only child, her mother had died at her birth, and she had grown up the spoilt darling of her father, and the idol of her nurse's heart. When she was sixteen, her father, thinking it bad for a girl to grow up without the companionship of those of her own sex and age had sent for her cousin Mona, one of a large family and therefore easily spared; the two girls lived happily together, the one light-hearted, impulsive, and passionate, with the strong feelings of her Spanish blood (her mother had been of that race), the other quiet, cold, self-effacing and some said feelingless.

And now into Stella's life had come a new joy. Her old playmate and neighbour, Roger Thorlay, had asked her to be his wife, and before long the old church bells would ring their merry peal for her.

But now and then a cloud had dimmed her sunlight, a vague, uneasy feeling filled her heart; it was hardly jealousy—and yet—and yet——

Why did Roger consult Mona so often? It was to Mona he went for advice and help, to Mona he unfolded his plans and hopes. She was no longer a child to be played with and petted; she had Roger's laughter and caresses, but to Mona he took his troubles and asked for sympathy.

She could scarcely formulate her feelings. "It is because we both love you so," Roger said, when she had upbraided him for consulting Mona about her future, and his answer had silenced her.

As the first peal of wedding bells rang out, Stella skipped up the belfry stairs, humming a wedding march, Roger and Mona following.

Suddenly the footsteps behind her ceased and Stella stopped to listen.

"I cannot go on. Leave me, I am giddy; go without me. Don't think of me, dear Roger."

Dear Roger! The colour flamed into Stella's face, and she called out sharply:

"Come along, Mona, I will give you a hand. Come with us."

Roger stood aside as Stella came bounding back; she seized her cousin's hand angrily and pulled her up the winding stairs. At last they reached the belfry floor. Stella opened the door and drew Mona in with her.

"Come along," she cried as the other drew back. "What are you afraid of?"

"It is so dark, and it looks so dreadful down there. I feel as if I should fall."

"Nonsense, I have your hand tightly," Stella answered with a laugh. "I did not know you were a coward before. See, the bells are beginning again."

Mona gave a scream.

"Take me away, take me away. I shall throw myself

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down. I shall go mad! Stop them! stop those bells, Stella!"

Stella gave her companion a look of contempt, and, pushing her against the wall, walked steadily along the narrow platform to where the largest bell was hung.

She stood looking up at it with a strange feeling of impending misery and pain.

Suddenly she reeled and almost fell. Across the swaying bells she had looked at Mona. Roger was standing by her side. She saw Mona's outstretched hands, then the great bell came between, and when she looked again, Mona was clasped in Roger's arms.

For one second she stood hot and trembling, then she sprang across to Roger's side, struck the white face of Mona a stinging blow with her hands, and tore madly down the belfry tower, across the Rectory garden, and up into her own room.

When there, she threw herself on the bed, but no relieving tears came; she sprang up and paced the room angrily.

"She loves him," she muttered, "I saw it, and he held her in his arms. I hate her! I hate her!" the words came in short gasps, passion and jealousy were raging in her heart, and she tore at her slender fingers in mingled rage and pain.

Down the dark belfry stairs came Roger Thorley, a girl's limp form in his arms. He, too, crossed the churchyard, and, carrying his burden, deposited it on a seat almost beneath Stella's window.

His voice was curt and harsh as he summoned aid.

"What is the matter?" asked the old nurse who bustled up at his call.

"Mona has fainted! Poor child, she was nearly mad with terror. Stella has behaved disgracefully."

The last words floated up through the open window and reached Stella's ears. She bit her finger until it bled.

"What did she do?"

"Dragged her up to the belfry against her will."

"I didn't," muttered Stella, as the words came up, "I only told her Roger would laugh at her if she was frightened."

Then she moved nearer to the window: "She fainted; had I not caught her, she would have fallen."

Stella began to laugh mirthlessly.

"Into his arms; yes, I saw her. I hate her!" she muttered.

Presently the Rector's voice was heard. "Stella, I want you immediately."

His voice, too, was hard and stern. Stella shivered; never in all her life had she heard her father speak like that to her.

She turned the key in the door and remained obstinately silent.

Presently there was a tap at the door. "Mr. Roger wants to see you, dearie," said her nurse.

Stella did not answer, the anger in her face had not died down, and she could not see him yet.

"Leave her alone, nurse. I would rather not see her; her behaviour has both shocked and surprised me," she heard Roger saying.

A choking sob rose in her throat; but she changed it to a hard, bitter laugh.

"Go and comfort Mona," she cried as she listened to the retreating footsteps.

All the next day Roger Thorley did not come, though Stella watched and waited for him anxiously.

Then she heard that he had called early in the morning to ask after Mona and leave her some hot-house grapes.

She turned the key in the lock.

Mona seemed nervous and ill, her fright had affected her system; but Stella did not notice it, she was thinking only of Roger, and the Rector preserved a chilling silence towards his daughter.

The next day and Roger did not come; on the third Stella saw with beating heart his familiar figure crossing the Rectory lawn. She was springing to meet him, but suddenly she drew back, paused a minute, then rushed to her own room instead.

Mona was on the lawn with outstretched hands, crying: "My preserver, how can I thank you?"

All that day Stella did not go down, and her lover waited patiently, reassured by Mona's sympathy and advice.

"Leave her to herself, she will come round; don't write, don't attempt to see her, if you do so her temper will increase. If she submits of her own free will, it will cure her for ever." She advised, and he waited.

A week passed away and Stella grew white and silent, the laughing, bright-eyed girl had gone, the Stella of old days had departed, still she would not see Roger; and Mona, always quiet and gentle, comforted him, and told him how she had failed in her attempts to soften Stella's heart.

Then Stella took to absenting herself, and for hours no one could find her.

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"Mona, my child," said the Rector one afternoon, "will you look for Stella? I want to see her in the study; do not tell her, however, that Roger is with me."

Mona smiled sadly.

"I am afraid I do not know where she is, uncle; I have looked for her so often."

She stood at the door for a few minutes, then she strolled in the direction of the church. She paused at the foot of the belfry tower, then very slowly she began to ascend.

She looked in at the ringer's chamber—it was empty; no bells would be rung to-day. Then she ascended the next flight more boldly.

"Stella," she called softly, "Stella."

"What do you want?" came a sullen reply.

"Come down, Stella, I want to speak to you."

There was no answer.

Mona paused for a few minutes with a curious smile on her face, then she went on up the stairs.

As she gained the belfry room Stella sprang up from the floor.

"What do you want?" she cried angrily. "Go! go away, I came here away from you; I thought you would be too frightened to pursue me here."

Mona looked up at the bells.

"It is their ringing which is terrible. You don't know how frightfully they fascinate me. If I were left alone with them I should go mad, and throw myself down; I could not endure it. I do not mind them now."

"What have you come for?" demanded Stella fiercely.

"To talk to you about Roger," Mona answered calmly.

"But I don't want to talk to you about him, I—I—" —gasping—"don't think I want to see him again."

Mona smiled.

"He says the same thing, too. What foolish children you are."

Stella's eyes blazed ominously.

"What is it you want?" she asked.

Mona looked meditatively at the empty air.

Stella stamped her foot.

"Go away," she said, "I hate the sight of you; don't you think I can see you love Roger?"

"Yes, I love him," said Mona calmly.

"And you would take him away from me?" cried Stella.

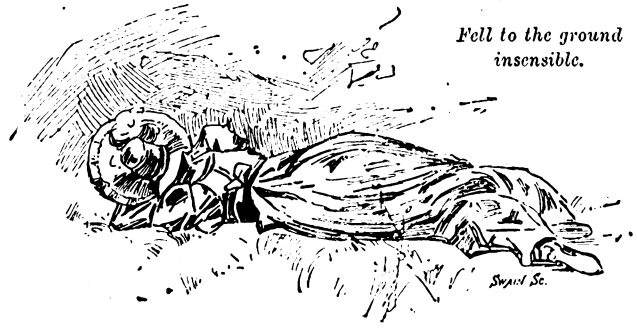
Mona shrugged her shoulders.

"Are you trying so hard to keep him? Do you think sulking and passion likely to prove attractive?"

Stella choked a rising sob.

"I hate you," she muttered.

"I am perfectly aware of that," answered her cousin, 'and at present you are doing your best to make everyone hate *you*."



Fell to the ground insensible.

In the silence which followed Stella threw a half imploring glance at Mona. She was fighting the passion within her. Had Mona opened her arms, and let Stella sob her rage away, the end might have been different; but she only stood with a smile upon her lips, humming Roger's favourite song.

"Then you shall stay here until I choose to let you out," Stella cried, suddenly backing towards the door. Closing it with an angry bang she turned the key in the lock and ran down the steps.

As she ran, Mona's voice reached her, screaming to her to come back, now angrily, now in terror; but she only shook her head, and it grew fainter and fainter in the distance, and at last died away.

Stella ran down the lane by the church and out into the open fields. She walked on with a sense of pain and misery fighting an angry battle with herself.

"Go back and let her out," her better impulse prompted.

"I won't, I mean to punish her; she has made me suffer, let her be frightened."

"What if she should fall?"

"Let her, I don't care," and Stella quickened her footsteps.

"Do you know what you would be if she fell?—a murderess."

"She won't fall, it is only nonsense on her part; I want to frighten her badly. She does not mind if the bells don't ring—I wish they would ring."

"Is there a service to-night? No, to-morrow, she will be all right; I will let her out before supper."

Farther and farther from home went Stella, her anger carrying her at a rapid pace.

Suddenly she paused and stood irresolute.

"There *is* a service to-night; I had forgotten," she exclaimed aloud.

Should she go back or forward? She hesitated, looked behind her, but the church was no longer in sight; then setting her teeth hard she went on again.

"You will be a murderess. You don't care? Yes, you do!"

"I don't," screamed Stella, "how dare you say so!"

"Murderess!"

"I'm not a murderess, I only want to punish Mona."

She stopped again with a gasp. "Was that a bell?"

A vision of Mona's face still and white arose before her; she put out her hands as if to ward it off.

Twice she went on but stopped with a shiver, then very slowly she turned her face homeward; as she did so distant bells rang out.

Stella turned deadly white and began to run. "What had she done? Was she a murderess? Would she be in time? Why, oh, why could she not go faster?" As she ran on and on, her breath came in choking gasps, and in her ears the wind shrieked "*Murderess!*"

She was trembling with fear and exhaustion when she reached the Rectory garden. A few more steps and Mona would be free. Why had she shut her up there? "Mona, forgive me, forgive me!" she gasped as she looked up at the big grey tower.

She would ask Mona's pardon. Never again would she let her anger——

"Good God! What is that?"

Across the lawn something was being carried on a stretcher.

Stella bounded towards it.

It was Mona, still and cold.

Stella clutched at the air convulsively, for the big

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grey tower was going round. She uttered a shrill scream, which turned to a wild, gurgling laugh, and fell to the ground insensible.

* * * * *

When Stella recovered her senses she was in bed, and the room darkened. She lay still, with a curious sense of lightness, regarding her fingers with a puzzled expression, they were so thin and white; then she lifted her hand to her head, a little cry escaped her, her long black hair had gone; she tried to sit up but fell back weakly on the pillow. Presently the sound of the organ came in through the open window. What were they playing? Mona's favourite hymn. Was someone dead? She tried to hum the air.

When our heads are bowed with woe,
When our bitter tears o'erflow.

There was a rustle behind the bed curtains.

"Is that you, Nannie?" asked Stella.

The nurse came from behind the curtain, wiping her eyes surreptitiously.

"Is someone dead, Nannie?"

The nurse shook up Stella's pillow in silence.

"Have I been ill?"

"Yes, dearie, lie still, don't ask questions now." Nannie's voice had a quivering sound.

"Is that Mona playing?" Stella asked presently.

The old woman gave a sudden start at Stella's words and let the cup she held fall from her fingers with a crash on to the floor.

A perplexed frown deepened on Stella's brow.

"Where is Mona? I want her," she said fretfully.

Then she looked at Nannie.

"Mona, I have come to save you!"

"What are you crying about?" she screamed. "Tell me quick, quick. I dreamt something about Mona. Why don't you answer me? No, I won't lie down—don't say she is——"

Stella paused, her eyes dilated with horror, as slowly the memory of the past came back. She was struggling out of bed. She would go to the window. She must lift that blind. Who was in the churchyard out there?

"Mona!" she cried, with a frightened catch in her voice.

Nannie put her arms round her charge and laid her gently down on the bed.

"Mona is dead," she said softly.

Stella stared blankly up at the ceiling.

"Dead!" she muttered. "No, she is in the belfry; Roger will bring her down."

Nannie wrung her hands convulsively.

"There, there, why did I tell her? I have sent her off again, poor lamb."

Late into the night Nannie watched by Stella's bed. Would she never sleep again? Oh! that moaning, it was terrible. Then Stella became still and quiet, and Nannie, with a sigh of relief, stole into the adjoining room, leaving the door open. Her head had scarcely touched the pillow when she fell asleep, worn out with watching.

When all was still Stella again opened her eyes and slowly got out of bed. "Mona is in the belfry. It is dark. I must go and let her out," she muttered.

Slipping on a dressing-gown she crept downstairs, pausing in the hall for the keys. They were in the same old spot; then she softly drew back the bolts of the door and stole out. The pebbles on the gravel cut her feet, for she had no shoes on, and the night air blew keenly through her fever-stricken frame, but she hurried on, muttering to herself and striving to collect her wandering thoughts.

How still it was. There! was that Mona calling?

"I am coming, coming," she called feebly as with trembling hands she opened the heavy oaken door.

Would she be in time?

"I am coming, coming," she called again as she began her weary climb.

Up the long dark winding stairs she crept. "Mona!" she cried, "Mona!" but only a long, wailing echo repeated "Mona."

She could hear the flutter of wings in the darkness; strange, weird noises broke the ghostly silence, and she shivered with terror.

"Mona, where are you?" she cried again to the blackness, and her voice sounded strange to her ears.

Her temples were burning, and bright lights began to dance before her tortured eyes. Now her hands were like fire, now damp with an icy chill, as with difficulty she felt her way up to the belfry tower.

The old doors shook with the force of the wind which howled and moaned about it. Stella fumbled with the rusty key, but it would not turn. The noises behind her grew louder; they sounded like the pattering of invisible feet.

"Mona!" she shrieked again, and threw herself against the doorway. It was not locked, and the fastening was worn and almost broken. It gave as her light weight touched it, and she fell headlong into the room.

There was a low, shivering sound among the bells. To Stella's disordered fancy it was full of menace.

There in the darkness she knelt.

"Mona, I have come to save you!" she whispered as she stretched out her hands. In the silence there was a laugh—a wild, harsh metallic laugh—it came from the corner where the tolling bell was hung. "Are you there?" whispered the girl tremulously. "Hush! I will come to you;" and she cautiously began to feel her way towards the sound.

Suddenly it began again, a harsh mocking laugh, above her, behind her, around her.

Where was she? In the belfry alone in the dark—and Mona? Mona was dead; she was a murderess. What was that laughing at her up there in the blackness?

Yes, it was Mona. Mona, dead, and she was laughing, laughing horribly. She could feel her icy breath; she was touching her; she was throwing her down!

Stella gave a wild scream, and threw up her hands as if to protect her face from an unseen enemy; she swayed to and fro for a minute, then fell headlong into the deeper darkness below. There was a wild laugh up among the bells, then silence for a minute. Then, solemnly, mournfully, into the night air floated the muffled toll of the Passing Bell.

MARY WEST.

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ST. PATRICK'S CHOICE.

THERE was a dew upon the hedgerow cobwebs, and in the air a faint hint of early violets. Since daybreak, a garrulous blackbird had been lilting from the old thorn tree above Tobe-Patrick well, and now the Ballycarney mass bell sent its summons across the valleys.

Two persons were coming towards the crossroads in answer to that clangorous call—the one a man, old and of feeble bearing, the other a girl, the prettiest in all the barony.

By the crossroads stile they met and gave each other "good-morrow."

"Yarrah, Maureen," said the ancient, leaning heavily on his staff, "you're the picture of good looks! But where's your shamrock? Sure, you didn't come out without the shamrock on Patrick's Day, did you?"

Maureen blushed under her shawl. "I—I gave it to someone," she stammered.

"Aha," he grunted. "An' this is how the land lies? Sure I was thinkin' Peter O'Hara wouldn't be keeping his daughter long. And who's the lucky boy? I don't know."

"Then you won't know, either, Mehaul," she said with some spirit. "'Tis none of your business at all."

Mehaul chuckled and made haste to guide the affronted beauty over the stile.

"Sure, I wouldn't offend you for all the gold between here an' Dublin town. All I asked you was because 'tis a serious matther to give shamrocks away on Patrick's Day—a mighty serious matther."

"How is that, Mehaul?" asked the girl, interested and somewhat mollified, as they set forth along the road together.

Mehaul Reagan winked furtively as he produced his odorous short clay pipe and filled it with tobacco. He was the recognised chronicler general of Ballycarney affairs, and, as such, it behoved him to discover the identity of Maureen O'Hara's swain.

Mehaul had all the traditions and superstitions of the county Kilmore at the ends of his gnarled fingers, and he now proposed to use his knowledge as a means of worming the desired scrap of information out of his fair companion.

"How about giving the shamrock away, Mehaul?" repeated Maureen eagerly.

The sly Scheannachie lit his dhudeen, fitted on the tin lid with care, and began to smoke contentedly.

"Well, alannah," he said, after a pause, "'tis an old superstition his riverence would be calling it. They say that when a girl gives a boy a shamrock on Patrick's Day she does it to test his true love."

"To test his love, Mehaul?"

"Aye, that's what my grandmother said. 'Twas like this, Maureen. I heard the old grandmother tell no less a fine lady than Dame Carney herself. I was only a slip of a boy when Dame Carney—she was Miss Fitzgerald then—came to consult the wise woman."

"'Tell me, Mrs. Reagan,' says she, 'if Sir Geoffrey Carney loves me.'

"The old grandmother took a bunch of shamrock that myself had plucked (for it was Patrick's Day) an' gave it to Miss Fitzgerald.

"'Miss Honor,' she says, 'if you want to find out the truth, give that shamrock to Sir Geoffrey. Then unbeknown to him, or anyone else, go by the hill path to the well of St. Patrick this very night, when the moon is high. There will be a blackbird sitting on the thorn tree over the well. 'Tis a fairy blackbird, Miss Honor, but it won't hurt you if you repeat St. Patrick's name three times, an' dip your little fingers into the water.

"'Then the blackbird will fly away to fetch the man that loves you best. Wait till the full of the moon, an' when twelve o'clock strikes from Castle Carney clock tower, you will see your true lover's face in the water of St. Patrick's well.'"

"Oh!" exclaimed Maureen, who had not lost a syllable of the reminiscence. "An' did she see him, Mehaul?"

"See him, is it? Sure of course she did. Next day she comes to my old grandmother an' gives her five golden sovereigns."

"'Mrs. Reagan,' she says, 'the spell came true. I saw Sir Geoffrey's face in the well last night, an' this morning I promised to marry him.'

"Marry him she did too, an' mighty happy they were. Now, Maureen, if you go to the well to-night, an' the boy that you gave the shamrock to really loves you, you'll see his face in the water."

Mehaul's dhudeen had gone out, and he stopped to light it. When he turned round, the operation performed, he was surprised to hear what sounded like a sob from Maureen.

"Eyah, Maureen, is it crying you are?" inquired the Scheannachie, peering under the coquettishly draped shawl.

Maureen was crying, not very bitterly, perhaps, but

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still undoubtedly crying. Mehaul Reagan's scheme had succeeded even better than he expected, and it only needed a little diplomacy and sundry words of fatherly comfort to make the girl unburden herself of her griefs.

"I've r-ruined it all!" she wailed. "O Mehaul, I've ruined the spell. Sure, I had two bunches of shamrock, an' I gave both away—to different boys. Now I must wait till next Patrick's Day to find out which loves me best."

But Mehaul came to the rescue.

"An' is that what you're crying for?" he shouted. "'Tis laughin' you ought to be. Sure, the two bunches won't hurt the spell, Maureen, for only one of them can be the fairy bunch. Never you fear, but go to the well at midnight, an' you'll see the face o' the boy that you're goin' to marry. By-the-way, alannah, who were the two boys you mintioned? The names have clean slipped my memory."

In Maureen's delight at hearing that the shamrock spell held good still, she revealed her heart's secret to the wily Scheannachie.

The two favoured "boys" were Bryan Kavanagh and Denny Nowlan—both strapping youths and promising withal.

They had plagued her with their intentions for a twelvemonth until she was utterly at a loss to choose between them.

"An' you've no choice at all?" queried Mehaul.

Maureen pursed her pretty lips.

"N-no—I've no choice. I did think I liked Bryan better, but then Denny came back from New York an'—an'——"

"An' he looked so fine in his broadcloth you couldn't resist him?" said Mehaul.

"No such thing!" cried Maureen. "He knows more in a day than Bryan does in a year. But where's the use o' talkin'? if the spell is as good as you say the well will show me the man to take."

"Aye, that it will," Mehaul answered.

Mehaul went chuckling across the churchyard after parting from Maureen.

The old man had a pretty little scheme in view. He, Mehaul Reagan, would himself be the *deus ex machina* in this interesting love episode.

Accordingly, after mass, the Scheannachie seated himself in a cosy corner of the churchyard where the young men on Sundays and holidays were wont to foregather. To-day being the festival of the patron saint there was a considerable assembly and the conversation was animated.

Mehaul smilingly noticed the twin bunches of shamrocks borne by Bryan Kavanagh and Denny Nowlan.

Young Kavanagh being a farmer's son and country-bred wholly, carried his bunch in the traditional manner—in his hat. His rival, however, had picked up some notions among the Americans, and sported the verdant keepsake as a buttonhole.

The stay-at-home seemed honest, but heavy; the returned American was a happy type of native Irish rumours, grafted on transatlantic experience. Oddly enough, they were old friends and swore by each other.

Which should be picked out for Maureen? Which sent at midnight to peep over the girl's shoulder into the mirror of Patrick's well? Such was the Scheannachie's crafty scheme for making his spell work—such the manner in which he hoped to render Maureen happy for life.

Finally the girl's own words rose to his mind. She had said: "I did think I liked Bryan better, but then Denny came back from New York——"

Moreover, she had added that Denny "knew more in a day than Bryan did in a year," and dwelt upon Denny's promise to take her to rich America. Clearly the girl secretly favoured Denny Nowlan. Therefore it was right that Denny she should have.

"Denny avic," he said, "you're after Maureen O'Hara?"

"You can bet I am," answered Denny.

"Very well, ma bouchal. I'll give you a spell to win her. Hold your ear close."

Then the Sheannachie unfolded to young Nowlan a wonderful phishogue by which he was to look into the waters of St. Patrick's well by midnight and there behold the face of his true love.

Now Denny was sceptical as regarded phishogues, but he shared the local respect for Mehaul and took care not to let that worthy see him laughing in his sleeve at this utterly ridiculous way of winning Maureen.

Thus it came to pass that old Mehaul went home sure of the success of his plan, and determined to be a third party by St. Patrick's well that night, while Denny Nowlan, laughing gaily, told the story of the proposed spell to the churchyard loungers.

"You go in my place, Bryan," said Denny to his rival. "For my part I prefer to court Maureen by her father's turf fire."

Bryan Kavanagh was the only one present who did not join in the laughter. He was thinking over the Sheannachie's spell.

Old Mehaul crouched in the copse behind the wall that Patrick's night as pretty Maureen came falteringly up the path. He heard her repeat the name of St. Patrick thrice, kneeling to dip her fingers in the water, and noticed with a grin that the "fairy" blackbird frightened from his nest, flapped through the branches even as he had promised.

Then he saw Maureen fix her eyes steadily upon the moonlit surface of the well.

"Clang!"

Out chimed the clock from Castle Carney, ringing clearly through the stillness of midnight, waking the watchdogs with its brazen voice. At the twelfth stroke there was a rustling in the bracken and some one stole past Mehaul's hiding place.

Next moment the old man uttered an exclamation of astonishment, for the tall figure that leant over the well in the moonlight did not belong to Denny Nowlan but to—Bryan Kavanagh!

There was a startled cry, and Maureen turned from the pale reflection of Bryan's face in the water to find herself clasped in the strong arms of a real, palpable Bryan.

"Ah, then, Bryan darling," so Mehaul heard her say, "'tis myself is glad you've come. Sure I was afraid it would be Denny Nowlan."

As the astonished Sheannachie crept out of his lair, and down the hillside, all he could say to himself was: "St. Patrick is a better match-maker than me, after all."

GERALD BRENAN.

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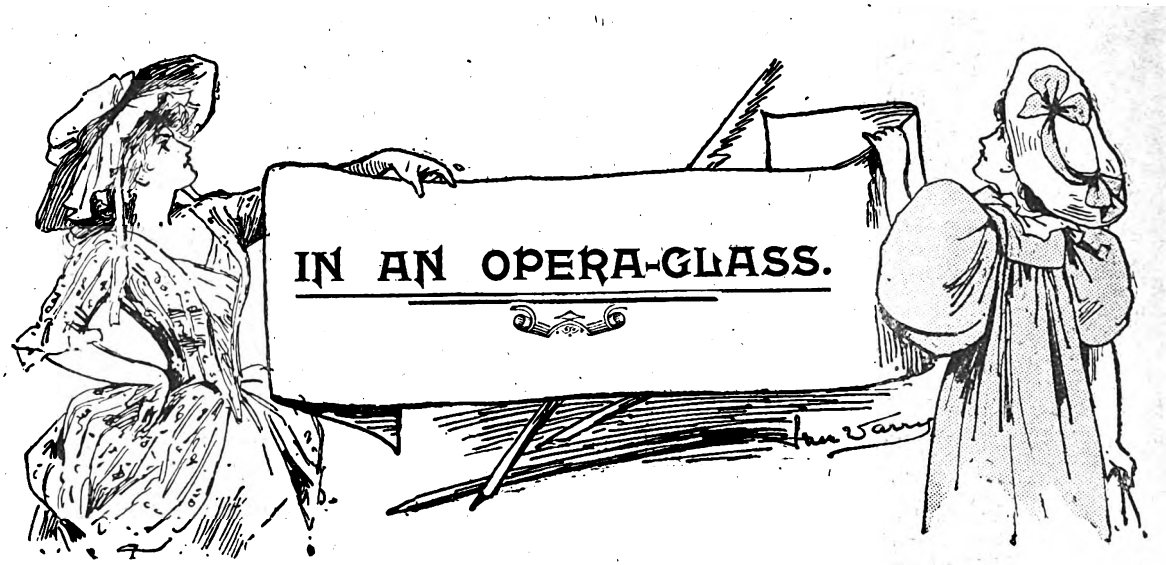

IN AN OPERA-GLASS.

"Would you like to use the glass, sir?" asked the whimsical looking man who sat in the row of orchestra stalls in front of me at *The Lady of Lyons*.

I had been watching him closely, on account of his odd physiognomy. He had a big face, carefully shaven except behind the jaws, and a throat-beard leaving his chin clear. His mouth looked as if it had been pressed flat by a determined hand, and had never since been able to reassert itself. His eyes, big, too, were heavily indignant in expression, suggesting that he had never quite got over the affront which Nature had put upon him by fixing his lips permanently in that shape.

I took his lorgnette with thanks, and gazed through it at the Pauline of the evening; but as I leant over to hand it back, "Wait a moment," he said, looking full at me in a singular way; "you haven't seen the best of it. Hold it up, small end down, at half arm's length, and see what the effect will be."

Doing as he suggested, I met with no unusual result. He saw from my face that I was puzzled; and bending near, so as not to attract attention from those around us, he asked:

"Don't you see a woman's face looking up out of the lens?"

"No," said I, rather curtly, thinking that he joked too familiarly for the brevity of our acquaintance, and that he had perhaps been drinking too much.

I mutely insisted on his taking the opera-glass again, and drew back into my own chair, leaving him rather disconcerted. He soon got over this, and continued to follow the acting, though without lively interest, and with an air of reverie. I noticed also that he did not use his glass on the stage, nor on the audience, either; but he several times lifted it in the way he had pointed out to me, and, after adjusting it to suit himself, contemplated the large end with rapt absorption.

I began to consider. I had noticed on the convex glass surface broken reflections from different parts of the theatre, the central cluster of lights, or dim fragments of the gold ornamentation of the gallery, and a Liliputian host of spectators, among whom were some of the ladies in charming costumes behind us or at the side. These had flitted over it as I changed the angle, but the images were so minute that I hadn't thought of them in connection with the lorgnette owner's eccentric inquiry. It now struck me that he might have more imagination or better eyes than mine.

So, at the end of the play, while he was putting on his overcoat, I touched him on the shoulder, and told him I had a word to say when we could get into the lobby. Having reached it, I asked him if he could direct me, a stranger in the city, to a good place near by where I could get supper before going back to my hotel. He told me of one, and I instantly asked him to come with me.

"I'm curious to know something more," I added, "about that opera-glass of yours. I'm afraid I didn't understand it."

He appeared pleased, and after a moment accepted my proposal to sup together.

"Speaking in confidence," said he, as we went along the street, "I'm not sure my wife will like it, my staying out any later. She's already jealous of me going to the theatre when I go alone. Though she doesn't say so, yet she fancies there's some woman in the case, you understand." Then after a pause: "If she only knew! There is a woman in the——" here he shook the leather receptacle in which he was carrying the glass—"literally, a woman in the case. Ha, ha!"

The revival of this fantasy and his odd frankness quickened my curiosity. At our restaurant there were, fortunately, little boxes partitioned off at one side, with curtains in front, and, taking refuge in one of these, I ordered a supper of roast oysters and a beverage which we were weak enough to call punch, and which was strong enough to bear the opprobrium of that name.

"Now for enlightenment," said I, when the glasses were refilled.

My companion had taken off his hat in deference to the oysters. His flat-pressed mouth, his indignant eyes, his crimson forehead, and grey hair jutting up oddly behind his head, all contrasted strangely with the singular tale he proceeded to relate.

"You see," he began, "I'm a plain man, without any show of romance. I'm level-headed in my affairs, and

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well-known in business circles. I don't go in for amusements or pleasures, and you couldn't engage me to read a novel. But there's one thing in my experience that would astonish my business acquaintances, if they knew it. I tell you because you're a stranger, and I've taken a fancy to you, and I think it may do you good, as a young man, to learn how to look below the surface."

Here the narrator gave a sly chuckle, glancing towards the lorgnette—which stood on the table—in a way that suggested a double meaning.

"I married late," he went on, "and some years ago, before my wedding, I was at the theatre one night, when a lady of decided beauty and fashion attracted my notice. She did more than that—she made me feel what I hadn't felt since I was a boy. When I went home to my bachelor quarters that night I had to admit that I was in love. I wasn't a society man, so my chances for seeing her again were few; but I found out after a time who she was, and met her once or twice in the streets. There came a very memorable evening when I met her in the theatre again. They were playing *The Lady of Lyons*. Between the acts, as I sat thinking of nothing, I was startled by an exclamation like a faint scream in the balcony just above my chair, for I was at the back of the orchestra stalls.

"I looked up at once, and saw this opera-glass falling through the air directly towards my head. It was so near that I didn't dare to move my head, for fear that if I took my eyes from the falling object I might dodge just where it would strike me all the more dangerously. I just put my gloved hands up, kept perfectly cool, and caught the glass as neatly as you please. There was a murmur of approbation from the people around me, and some impertinent applause, but the main thing was that, while I still sat looking up to see who had let the glass fall, my beautiful young lady's faced peered over the cushioned edge of the balcony, and her eyes looked down into mine. The opera-glass was hers! So instead of breaking my head, it simply broke my heart.

"The lady drew back at once, and another person peered over—a highly finished young man with coral studs and a white necktie—a sop, sir." (The old gentleman at once showed great anger and intolerance.) "Why wasn't I made, I wonder, with a face shaped like an almond, and not much colour in it; and why wasn't I taught to wear a moustache with a curl on the top end of it like the loose end of a banjo string? As I hadn't these charms, and the young man in the balcony had, I knew of course that there was no chance for me. But one thing I immediately resolved upon. When I started to go out of the door after the play, I naturally found the young jackanapes waiting for me. But instead of the opera-glass I handed him my card, saying: 'You'll learn my standing from that, sir; but I can't consent to part with this article. I will replace it with a new one. When a man has saved himself from hurt, as I have, without troubling anyone, he ought to have a reward, and I claim this as mine.' I put in that touch of humour, but the young man didn't take it humourously at all. He threatened to call a policeman and arrest me if I didn't give up the trifle.

"'Do,' said I, 'and have a ridiculous item in the papers to-morrow, with Miss N.'s name mentioned.' Some of the dispersing audience began to notice us, and my hint quieted him. He merely said: 'This is unjustifiable. You will hear further from me,' and went off. When you think of it, it was extraordinary; but I stuck to my point, and have always kept the souvenir, though there was some talk of a suit, and even of a duel with the young fellow Hefflebower."

"Hefflebower!" I exclaimed.

"Pshaw! yes. I oughtn't to have told you the name. But never mind. Gad, my blood was up. That was my time for romance, then or never, and I didn't even wink at the thought of fighting."

"But what became of the young lady?"

The whimsical gentleman suddenly got up from the table (having eaten his oysters and emptied his second glass of punch).

"I must go home," he said gloomily. "Miss N., of course, married Hefflebower."

"But I thought you spoke of being married, too?" I reminded him.

"Look once more in the glass, the way I told you," he proposed, ignoring my remark.

I took it up impulsively, and did so. Was my new acquaintance a magician, or was I deceived by some subtle influence in the punch, or overexcited by this story? Certainly on peering into the opera-glass I discerned somewhere between the large and the small end what looked like the interior of the place of entertainment we had left, and among the reflected faces that of a beautiful young woman especially prominent. Behind her, at one side, I was sure I could make out my friend Hefflebower.

"You see, I have it all there," exclaimed the owner of the glass, with triumph. "No one can take away these memories or associations, and they have the unusual advantage of being visible."

I glanced a second time in the lenses, but the figures I had seen were now gone. Before I could demand an explanation, my singular companion had said good-night, and disappeared, taking his visionary tubes with him.

I made no further attempt to clear up this mystery, and will make none now. But I spent some time in the restaurant box, ruminating on the queer abiding places of the romantic. The old man's case seemed to show how the poetic part of some lives stands in about the same relation to the prosaic as if seen through the wrong end of the opera-glass.

I afterwards learnt that this eccentric gentleman was Sheale, the bank director, who, after his disappointment, married his housekeeper, and was never seen at the theatre except when *The Lady of Lyons* was playing.

ESTHER NOANES.

If you are sufficiently broad-minded to take the advice of those who know, you will at once commence Mr. George Manville Fenn's story, "High Play," the second instalment of which appears on the next page, even if you don't usually read serials.

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HIGH PLAY.

A COMEDY OFF THE STAGE.

By George Manville Fenn.

SUMMARY.

The story opens with an interview between Lady Braetoun and her son Roderick, in which she endeavours to induce him to give up fast living and marry Olive, Isaac Emsworth's heiress. After the interview he goes to see his racehorse in the country with Lucy Lee, a chorus girl, familiarly known as "Baby," who rides the horse round the field.

CHAPTER III.

The Shadow Begins.

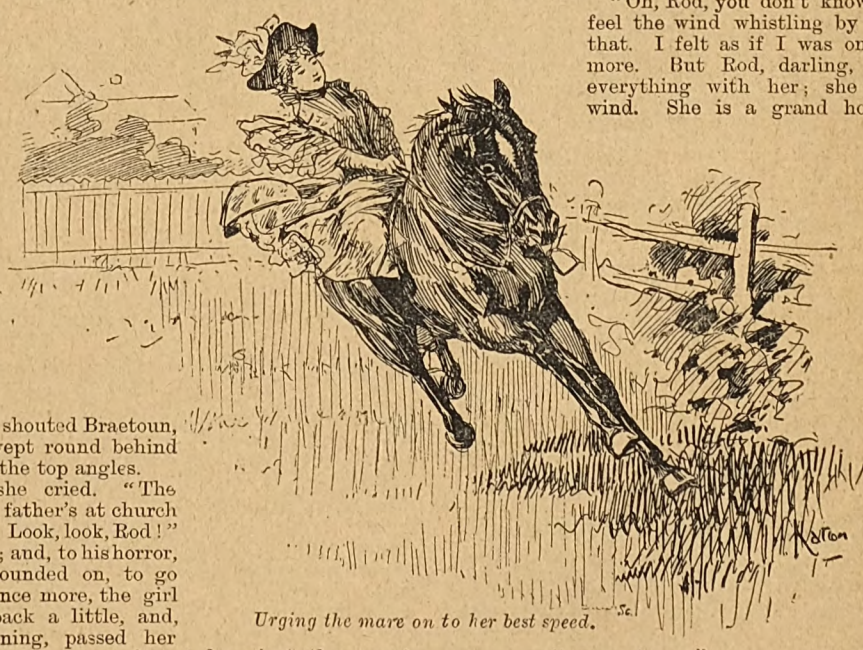
Braetoun stood as if turned to stone, while the mare skimmed over the grass like a swallow. He felt paralysed, expecting every moment to see the frail little figure thrown.

But after the first few wild leaps Lucy recovered her balance and sat nearly upright, her yielding figure giving rhythmically to the graceful movements, while the mare answered quickly to the light hand upon the rein.

As they swept round the great field, and began to turn, the girl's face was flushed with excitement.

"Stop, stop!" shouted Braetoun, as the mare swept round behind him, cutting off the top angles.

"No, no!" she cried. "The boy's gone; his father's at church—no one to see. Look, look, Rod!" she cried loudly; and, to his horror, as the mare bounded on, to go down the field once more, the girl threw herself back a little, and, quick as lightning, passed her right leg over from where it rested against the mare's shoulder, and rose again, seated *califourchon*, as the French term it, riding like an Eastern woman, and urging the mare on to her best speed.



Urging the mare on to her best speed.

"She is mad," muttered Braetoun, and the moisture gathered upon his temples and in the palms of his hands. "She must come off now."

Setting his teeth, he watched her gliding along and fully prepared for the catastrophe as the corner was turned at the bottom; but though the mare skimmed round there and at the next, leaning over like a horse in a circus, with the light lace and tulle of the girl's costume fluttering behind, nothing happened. This time she began to check the mare, and as they neared the top, easing more and more, and pulling up just beyond her companion, to wait smiling till he walked up looking black as night.

"There," she cried with a merry laugh, and her eyes sparkling with excitement. "You said I had no grip. That's how I used often to ride when I was a girl."

"You little fool!" he cried angrily. "I saw you the first time in burlesque; I nearly saw you the last time in tragedy. Are you mad?"

"Oh, Rod, you don't know what it is to feel the wind whistling by you again like that. I felt as if I was only twelve once more. But Rod, darling, you must win everything with her; she goes like the wind. She is a grand horse."

"How could you!" he panted, with his hand upon his breast; "you've given me a horrible palpitation."

"What! Did I frighten my darling boy? What nonsense! It was delightful; it made me feel so young and happy again. It was just like being at the old farm before I came up to Aunt Duncan and the theatre."

"Pity you ever came it seems to me."

"Oh, Rod, dear, don't, please, please, look so cross. It was only a bit of fun."

"So wild, so dangerous," he said, looking white, and as if his nerves had had a nasty jar. "I stood watching, expecting to see you fall with your foot in the stirrup, and be dragged to death."

"Oh, how horrid! To go thinking such things! I wasn't a bit afraid. I don't think I could be afraid of anything."

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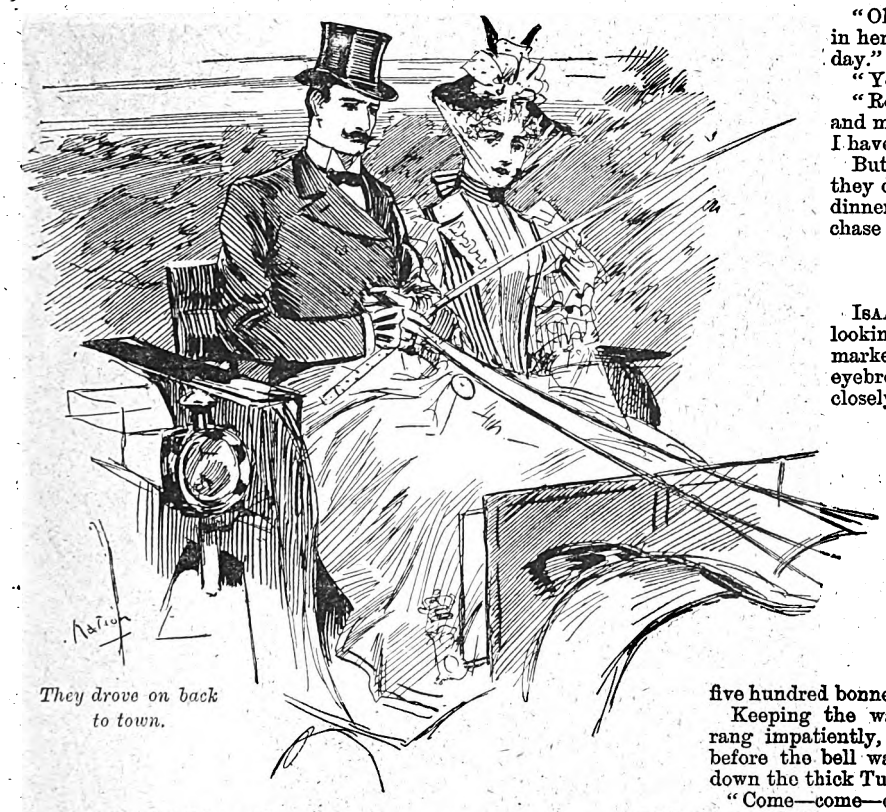

They drove on back to town.

"I know that," he said.

"Yes I am. There's one thing frightens me."

"Eh, what's that?"

"I often wake in the night and lie and think of it, and it makes me shiver, Rod."

"Bogey under the bed?" he cried mockingly.

"The bogey of my life, Rod."

"What is it—want more money?"

"It frightens me so that I lie there and cry."

"Poor little Baby! What is it, then?"

"What I talked about before I rode."

"Nonsense!" he said hastily. "Here! Hi! Vinnis, come and take the mare. Now then, jump," he continued, as he thrust his arm through the rein, and placed a hand on either side of the little waist.

She glanced towards the farm buildings, put her hands on his shoulders, and let them glide onward, as she leapt into his arms, clasping his neck and kissing him quickly twice before he shook her off.

"Don't be a fool, Baby. Do you want that boy to see? Here, come and take the mare. When is your father coming back?"

"'Spect him every moment, m' lord."

"You lying young scoundrel, you don't expect him for hours! Tell him from me that if ever I come down again at such an important time and find he has left the mare with no one to look after her but you, I shall get another trainer."

"Yes, m'lord," said the lad, as he walked away with the mare, and then to himself: "Likely. Who'd manage her but him or me? Kick 'em to the middle o' next week. He won't do that."

"Isn't one boy enough to look after her, Rod?" said the girl some time after, as Braetoun mounted beside her in the phæton, and he began to drive back.

"No. Half-a-dozen are not amongst such a set of rogues and thieves. Some one'll be getting at her and spoiling her for the next race. Bah! I get sick of it all."

"Oh, Rod, dear," she said with tears in her eyes; "don't spoil our delightful day."

"You make me," he said bitterly.

"Rod! When I am loving you more and more every time! I am so sorry if I haven't done what you like."

But the shadow gathered blacker as they drove on back to town, and the dinner and champagne did nothing to chase it away.

CHAPTER IV.

PAPA'S BLUNDER.

ISAAC EMSWORTH, a thick-set, keen-looking man of fifty, with strongly marked features, and over-hanging eyebrows of the same grizzly hue as his closely-cut hair and beard, sat in his library at Eaton Place, reading a letter.

"Confound 'em!" he said; "no sooner is the cat away than the cursed mice begin to play. I shall have to go. Such a nuisance, too, just now."

He banged the letter down on the table, and took out an old silver hunting watch by a piece of much frayed string.

"Quarter past ten, and not down yet. I could have put on five hundred bonnets and shawls."

Keeping the watch in his hand, he rose and rang impatiently, occupying the time that elapsed before the bell was answered by walking up and down the thick Turkey carpet.

"Come—come—come!" he muttered; "what a while you are. Oh, there you are, Johnson."

This to a very important-looking butler, who glanced rather contemptuously at the old silver watch lying open in his master's hand with the frayed string hanging down and ending in a roughly-tied knot.

"Is the carriage at the door?"

"Been there a quarter of an hour, sir."

"That's right! Send up to Miss Emsworth's room and say it is waiting."

"Yes, sir."

The important butler marched out—it was not a walk—and Isaac Emsworth, late of Laurentstroom, South Africa, stood opening and shutting the old well-worn silver watch with a series of sharp snaps.

"Yes, d——n 'em. I shall have to go and she won't like it. More do I! These things always happen at the wrong time. I shall have to ask Lady Braetoun to——Oh, Olive, my dear, what a time you have been! I could have—Humph! Ha! Yes! Well, you do look very nice."

He began frowningly and impatient of speech as the door opened, closed, and light seemed to have come into the gloomy room to brighten it in the shape of a charmingly dressed girl of twenty, whose dark brown hair, creamy complexion, and large, soft eyes, suggested the appropriate choice of her name. Then his voice grew softer, the hard, business look gave way to a smile, and father gazed proudly at daughter as he ended with the above homely words.

"You like my dress?"

"Hang the dress, my dear! I was thinking of you. H'm, yes, like the dress, too! But, I say, my dear, time's money, you know. You have been a deuce of a while!"

"Oh, papa, what nonsense! Why, Melson half scolded me for hurrying so."

"Oh, she did, did she? Strikes me, my dear, that I shall have to put my foot down with some of these fine gentlemen *and ladies here*. But there, let's be off."

He began throwing his letters into an open case, after

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thrusting his watch back in his pocket, leaving the string hanging outside. Then, as he banged down the lid and locked it, his daughter came close up.

"Eh, my dear, what is it?" he said, for she began smilingly to tuck the frayed string after the watch into his waistcoat pocket.

"You ought to have a gold watch and a handsome chain, papa, dear," she said, as she reached up and kissed him.

"I? What for? I wouldn't change that old watch for

"Don't be afraid, pet; I shan't get tired."

the best in London. Good old friend, my dear. Ha! that's nice; give us another," he continued, with his hard look softening more and more. "Don't be afraid, pet; I shan't get tired. You don't know how hungry I was for a few all those years when I was out there."

"And so was I, dear," said the girl, clinging to the muscular arm, and repeating the salute. "Madame Duvaille was so good and kind, but I often used to feel as if I must run away from St. Cloud to come over to you."

"H'm, yes, I wish you had, my darling. No, I don't. It wouldn't have done. H'm, what nice soft cheeks! But you look very pale. I mustn't have you ill."

"Now you are fidgeting again, papa, dear," said the girl earnestly; "and I really am quite well. Only a little tired, perhaps, with being out too much. Let's go somewhere into the country for a month, so as to be quiet and together more."

"H'm, yes, it would be nice, my dear, but—no, no, can't at present; I'm too busy, and you've too many engagements."

"Yes, papa," said the girl rather sadly.

"But I mustn't have you ill. Can't have you going away and leaving me as your poor mother did."

"Oh, papa!"

"My darling!" he said softly, with his eyes moistening. "But none of that nonsense. No use for me to make a big fortune for you, and you not spend it. But there; come along."

"Where are we going, dear?"

"Eh? Going? Oh, you'll soon see. Just to make a call on somebody."

"So early? And how mysterious you are, dear," said the girl merrily.

"Am I? Well, the mystery will soon be at an end. Now then."

He opened the door, and followed the graceful girl into the hall, holding up his head proudly, and putting on a stiff, important mien, as the footman waiting hurried down to a handsome barouche and magnificent pair of horses, and the butler handed hat, gloves, and cane.

"Seven hundred and nine, Wimpole Street."

The footman touched his hat, mounted to his seat beside the coachman, the horses started at a rapid pace, and Isaac Emsworth threw himself back and sat proudly watching with his eyes half closed, the bright eager interest his child took in the busy streets, the gay-looking park they crossed, and, above all, he felt his breast swell as he duly noted the looks of admiration that were darted at the unconscious girl.

Very little was said till Wimpole Street was reached, and then Olive said quickly:

"What a great, gloomy, dull place, papa! Please do tell me whom we are going to see."

"You'll know in a few minutes, pet. There, don't look like that."

The carriage was drawn up at a wide door bearing two brass plates, the footman knocked and rang loudly, his person preventing his young mistress from reading on the upper plate, "George Murray, M.D.," and on the lower, and much newer, "Allan Murray, M.D."

The door was thrown open. The footman returned after a brief colloquy with a grave-looking man in plain clothes, the steps were rattled down, and directly after the visitors were ushered into a large gloomy-looking room, the man taking away the card handed to him from a much-worn pocket-book.

"Why, papa!" cried the girl flushing, and then turning pale, as she caught excitedly at her father's hand. "You've brought me to a doctor's."

"Well, well, well, pet," he said, smiling, as he held and patted the delicately-gloved little hand. "Suppose I have? You're not going to be frightened by a dose of physic."

"No, no, papa, dear," she whispered in agitated tones; "but—but, indeed, I'm not ill."

"Of course not. Not ill. You see, darling, I didn't want to alarm you, but you have scared me. Your poor dear mother was so delicate, and you have changed so lately that, eh?—ha—ha—ha!—don't you see, your poor old dad wanted you to consult the best physician in London so as to make him happy, eh?"

"Yes, yes, you dear, kind old dada," said the girl in an excited whisper, as he ended his blundering speech and forced laugh, which sounded very dreary; "but, but—but——"

"Now, now, now, my own darling, but you must not be foolish and hysterical. Come, be brave. Why, pet, Olive, he won't want to cut off a leg; it only means pills every

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night and morning—well shaken before taken, and that sort of thing."

"But, papa, darling, you don't understand. *You* oughtn't to have brought me. I ought to have come with a lady friend, and——"

"Eh? Oh, I didn't think of that, my dear," said Emsworth, looking aghast, "I thought——"

"Doctor Allan Murray will see you now, sir," said the servant at the door.

CHAPTER V.

Papa's Blunder, which the Doctor Caps.

Olive rose from her seat, calm and dignified of mien, ready to face the difficulty.

"I sail in the 'Greyberg Castle' on Friday."

"Come, papa," she said.

"But—er—if you think that we ought, my dear?" whispered her father.

"It is too late now, dear," she whispered back, and she walked firmly to the door, followed by her father, who looked the more agitated of the pair, as they were shown into the doctor's consulting-room, where Olive changed colour on facing; instead of some grey, benevolent-looking old gentleman, a grave, dark man of some three or four-and-thirty, who rose and motioned them to seats, slightly raising his eyebrows at the rather unusual character of the visit.

Slight as was the movement, Olive Emsworth, in her then highly-strung, excited condition, saw and resented it; but, making an effort over herself, she was the next moment perfectly calm.

"I find I have done wrong, Doctor Murray," said Emsworth hurriedly. "I ought to have understood the etiquette of such matters better, and left my daughter to come with a lady friend; but I am a rough man. I could only think of checking whatever was wrong in my daughter's health, and hearing your opinion. There, sir, I beg your pardon, I beg my dear child's, here, for my mistake—I—I meant it for the best."

His voice sounded a little husky as he ended, and Olive's hand stole into his, while her beautiful eyes beamed upon him with a look of love.

As she turned now to meet the doctor firmly, the blood rose again to her temples in a warm flush, for she found that he was gazing at her intently, but with a quiet tact he turned at once to his other visitor, to say, in a grave, calm way:

"Perhaps it would have been better, Mr. Emsworth, and, of course, it is the custom for a lady to accompany a patient on such a visit; but I quite understand your position, and I feel sure that Miss Emsworth fully grasps a father's anxiety, and, under the circumstances, will excuse any little questions I may ask her—if," he said with a quiet smile, as he turned to her again, "I think it necessary to ask any."

Olive bowed coldly, but she felt as she now met his gaze, that he was looking at her differently. She could not have analysed and described the two glances, but she knew that now it was the physician addressing her, and the sensation of resentment from which she suffered grew less painful.

"By-the-way, Mr. Emsworth," continued the doctor smiling pleasantly, "I ought not to sail under false colours. You must have been thinking of my father when you spoke of the first physician in London. He has to all intents and purposes retired from his practice, and only sees a few

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of his oldest patients. I would, however, if this were a serious case, ask him to see Miss Emsworth."

"Then you don't think it is, sir?" said Emsworth excitedly.

"My dear sir, no. The matter is so simple that I can see at a glance what is wrong. Moreover, I can guarantee that in a very short time your daughter will be in perfect health."

"Then you don't think—her mother—that terrible——" faltered Emsworth.

"My dear sir, no. Look at your child's face. Nothing of the kind, I assure you. Pray tell me if I am wrong, Miss Emsworth," he said quietly. "You have been into society a great deal lately?"

She coloured at the directness of the question and bowed her head.

"You have been to a good many concerts, balls, and theatres?"

"Oh, yes!" she said naïvely, "a great many."

"And, I suppose, to many of those health-destroying crushes which fashionable ladies give and call 'At Homes?'"

"Oh, yes, for the last three months," said Olive, smiling.

"My dear young lady, do you keep pets? Have you a bird—linnet or canary?"

"I have a goldfinch," she said, feeling now half annoyed.

"Exactly. Then let me tell you this: If you had hung that bird's cage in one of the suffocating drawing-rooms that you have visited, the mephitic air it had to breathe would have poisoned it—the bird would have died."

"Ah, yes," said Emsworth quickly, "of course."

"Exactly. There, my dear sir, can you wonder that your daughter looks a little worn and pale?"

"But do you think that is all, doctor?"

"I am sure it is all, sir, and I hope Miss Emsworth will not be angry with me and feel vexed at having for a time to change her way of life."

"Indeed, no," she said eagerly, as the last trace of resentment died away.

"Then," he said, smiling, "I shall prescribe with the greatest rigour. Give up society for a time, and then enjoy 'At Home's' sparingly. Mr. Emsworth, take your daughter for three months into the country—the seaside for preference. A sea voyage would be better; but that is, perhaps, proposing what might be a difficulty."

"Eh? No, I think not," said Emsworth, starting. "If you would not mind, my dear?"

"Mind what, papa?"

"Going with me."

"Going with you?" she said, changing colour a little.

"Well—er—you see, my dear—letters—only this morning—I haven't had time to break the news to you; I was so anxious, too, about coming here. The fact is, I am obliged to go out to the Cape in the next boat."

"Oh, papa!" she cried, laying her hand upon his arm.

"You—you wouldn't like to go with me, of course?"

"Yes, yes. Don't go and leave me behind."

The curiously intent look came into Doctor Murray's eyes again, as he watched the beautiful face before him, and saw the quiver about the lips and the agitation which ruffled the brow.

"I don't want to, my darling," said Emsworth dolefully; "but what does Doctor Murray say to that—would it do?"

"My dear sir, nothing could be better. Miss Emsworth would find it, I presume, a delightful trip."

"Then, by George! Olive, my darling, we'll go together. I shan't mind it then a bit."

The girl's face lit up with content again, and she turned to look gratefully at the doctor, but felt almost startled at his earnest gaze, which once more passed away.

"May I ask you what vessel you would go by?" he said.

"The *Greyberg Castle* is the next."

"And you will go by it?"

"Certainly, if I can get berths; if not, by the next."

"This is a curious little world, Miss Emsworth," said the doctor, smiling, as he turned to her; and once more she felt quite at ease.

"I do not understand you."

"I mean that it is singular how we are all linked together in some form or another. I shall surprise you, I am sure, when I tell you that I sail in the *Greyberg Castle* on Friday."

"You do?" cried Emsworth boisterously. "Capital! Then you will be on the spot in the event of my daughter requiring medical aid?"

"My dear sir," said the doctor, "throw that idea entirely away. Miss Emsworth requires no medical aid—nothing but that which nature will give her. Lord Bourne——"

"The ex-Prime Minister?"

"Yes. He is an old patient of my father's, and he is rather exhausted by the late Session of Parliament. My father has prescribed a sea voyage and rest, and is coming back to take charge of the practice so as to set me free to go with Lord Bourne upon this trip—very much against my inclination, Miss Emsworth," he continued; "but good Prime Ministers are scarce, and we may want his Lordship again."

"I am delighted, doctor," said Emsworth warmly, "and if money can do it we shall go by the *Greyberg Castle*, sir. We will go. I'll buy somebody out if all the berths are taken."

"I shall be glad to meet my patient again," said the doctor quietly, turning to Olive, "though I have only quelled a false alarm."

"You've set me at rest, doctor," said Emsworth heartily; "but you'll write her a prescription or two, eh?"

"Write down 'Take all the fresh air you can,' Miss Emsworth; 'live well, and have a good quantum of sleep.' Surely that is not necessary?"

"But is that all, doctor?"

"Everything, my dear sir. I could do no more."

He looked as if the interview were at an end, and Olive rose, to hold out her hand and say naïvely:

"Thank you, Doctor Murray, for setting my father's mind at rest; thank you very much."

"I wish I could set every troubled parent's mind at rest as easily, Miss Emsworth."

He walked with them to the door, after touching a bell, while somehow Olive felt as if she would rather he had not taken the fee her father pressed into his hand.

But she did not see that it remained there after she had gone, and that as the door closed, the doctor stood gazing dreamingly after them, with the former intent look in his eyes, till there was a step on the floor-cloth outside, when he started with an angry gesture.

"What folly!" he said quickly, and resuming his chair, he thrust a rustling note into a drawer, and sat there ready and prepared for the next patient who was ushered in.

A dozen more came and went, before the grave-looking manservant brought in a card.

"No, no, Rouch," he said petulantly; "it is not fair. Let the patients come in their turn."

"Yes, sir; but his lordship said——"

The doctor glanced at the card.

"Oh, well, show him in," he said; and Lord Braetoun, looking very haggard, entered the room and threw himself in the patient's chair, to sit gazing in his medical adviser's face.

"Well," said the doctor coldly, "what do you want Roderick?"

"What do I want? Look at me. I'm d——d bad thi time."

"Yes, you do look bad, but why do you come?"

"Why did I come? I like that! I tell you I never was so bad before. I can't sleep; I can't eat; I can only take champagne, or brandy, or both."

"So I see. Your hand's like an aspen leaf. Who's the next heir to the title?—a distant cousin, I think."

"Hang it all, Allan, don't talk to a fellow like that! I'm half dead as it is; do you want to kill me right off?"

"If I did I needn't take the trouble. You're killing yourself. I've told you a dozen times, only you don't believe me."

"But I do believe you, old man. Oh, hang it, do set me up again; I will follow out your advice."

"Not you, never; but you've pretty well done it this time. Your nerves are regularly shattered."

"I've had an awful bit of luck."

"Turf?"

"Yes. Something that was a dead certainty."

"There is only one dead certainty," said the doctor coldly.

"Oh, I say, don't, don't! I want help, not for you to jump on me. I was as sure as sure this time; and it would have pulled me round a bit; but a set of cursed scoundrels worked the favourite that way, and I lost."

"Serve you right."

"Well, do you think I don't know that?"

"So as soon as you found you had been swindled, you went to the glass?"

"Yes," groaned Braetoun; "regularly ran *amok*."

"Well, I can't help you, and I have important patients waiting."

"Oh, don't talk like that, old man. I tell you I'm so run down that I could sit and cry like a child."

"An idiot, you mean."

"Don't, don't be a brute to me, Allan. For old Eton and college day's sake, stick to me and wind me up again. Start me once more, and I'll turn over a new leaf."

The young man reached over and caught the doctor's hand, clinging to it with tears in his eyes; and Murray looked down at him with pitying contempt.

"It's waste of time to do anything for you, Roddy, lad," he said. "You'll promise anything, but you've no moral power left to carry it out. You're no longer your own master. There's only one thing that would bring you round."

"Yes: what is it? I'm ready to do anything now."

"Very well; I'll try you. Go upstairs to my bedroom and lie down till all my patients are seen, and then I'll take you."

"Take me—where?" cried Braetoun wildly.

"To an asylum. There is no other chance for you!"

"Yes there is," cried the young man fiercely. "I have a revolver in my drawer at home. Six shots. I've got the pluck to fire till one of them does the business."

"Go and read what Hamlet says about that, and don't talk nonsense."

"I shall have to do it, but I don't want to, for the mater's sake. The old woman has picked out a wife for me."

"A what?" cried Murray contemptuously. "You with a wife! Why you'd do a kinder act in killing a woman than in marrying her. It would be an outrage."

"Yes, I know. It would be now, but I'm going to reform—I want to, now. I do, upon my soul."

"Poor oath. I don't believe you've got one, or a heart either. You are a complete wreck: morally and physically gone."

"Yes, yes, I know, old man; and it's horrid to think of being completely gone at two or three-and-thirty."

"Oh, I don't know. You have outlived all pleasure in life."

"Quite," said the poor wretch sadly; "but look here; you could pull me up again, and—and a wife would save me in the other way."

"One with a large fortune, I suppose?" said Murray scornfully.

"Well, a man must have money."

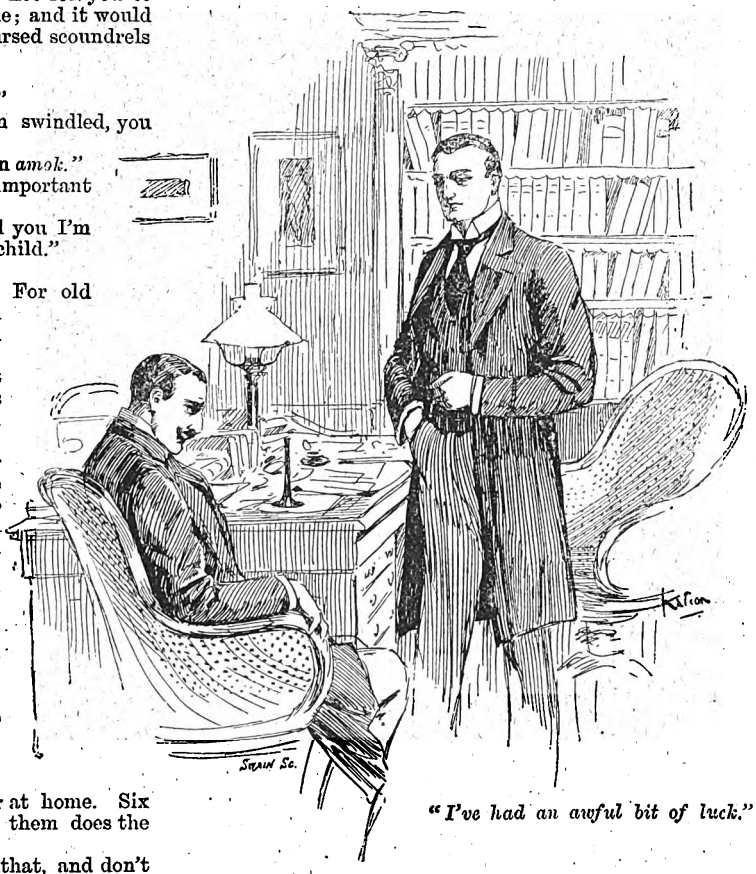
"To fool away. Braetoun, it would be a crime for you to marry an innocent woman, and I'm not going to be your accomplice by giving you the chance."

"Oh, you doctors are brutes—brutes—brutes!" groaned the wretched man. "I've told you I'll turn over a new leaf."

"I've proved the value of your promises a dozen times."

"Give me another chance, Al, old fellow, for the mater's sake."

"Go to some other doctor."



"I've had an awful bit of luck."

"No, no. There isn't a man in London who understands me but you. They'd kill me before they could get into the right treatment."

"Nonsense! Go and try."

"I won't," cried the wretched man fiercely; "but I swear that if you don't take me in hand again I'll use the revolver."

"You haven't even the courage to do that."

"Haven't I? You'll see; and when I've done it they won't stick a stake through me and burn me at the cross roads, will they?"

"No; they'll call it, correctly, temporary insanity: for you are mad."

"Almost raving. Well, when I'm gone I'd rather be the dead man than be you with a kind of murder on your conscience. Am I to go and do——?"

"Look here, Rod, I'll give you your last chance. If you don't do as I tell you and follow out my instructions, as well as lead a new life, I swear I will wash my hands of you for ever."

"I'll do anything—anything, old man."

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"Very well; I'll give you something to take now, and as soon as you are a little better, break the news to your mother, and then pack up."

"Break the news—pack up—what do you mean?"

"I mean that I am going on a voyage to South Africa."

"You are?"

"Yes, and I will take you with me. It may mean your salvation."

"But—but I can't leave London. There is my horse—and the mare, and—and—I don't see how I can get away."

"From the intended?" said Murray, with a look of contempt.

"Yes, I meant that," said Braetoun slowly; "but—but—yes, I will. I want to get on the right track again. I will go."

Murray took a sheet of paper from a stationery case, wrote out a prescription, and handed it to his visitor.

"Call at Bell's to get that made up, and take a dose before you leave the shop. Come and see me at twelve to-morrow."

"God bless you, old fellow!" cried Braetoun piously.

"Better leave His name out of our dealings, my lad. There, be off, off now. I'm busy."

"Won't you shake hands?"

"What is the use? I like to grip the hand of a man I respect."

"And we were such friends from boyhood," said Braetoun bitterly. "Never mind, I can wait, Allan, old chap. I really am going to turn over a new leaf now."

"Let's see, then," said the doctor quietly.

The next moment he was alone, gazing in a peculiar dreamy way at the chair where Olive Emsworth had been seated, seeing her there once again, recalling every look and gesture, the quick animated play of her countenance, and the soft pathetic tones of her voice.

A tap at the door made him start back into everyday life, feeling irritable and annoyed with himself, though he could not have explained why.

"Shall I show in the next patient, sir?"

"Yes, of course; I am waiting," he said quickly.

The dreamy picture was gone, and his last patient came into the mental field.

"Going to take a wife with money. Going to turn over a new leaf, eh, Roderick?" he said softly. "I wonder what will be seen on the next page?"

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION

No. 2.

THE KEY APPEARS ON PAGE 145.

REMARKABLE ingenuity has been displayed by most readers in this competition, with the result that several of them are very nearly correct. Mr. John McA. Boyd, of 32, Stevenson Drive, Langside, Glasgow, has been awarded £2; Mr. R. W. Witham, 11, Great Coram Street, W.C., £1; Mr. W. G. Parker, 52, Beckenham Road, Penge, £1; and Mr. R. F. R. Conder, 7, Bishop Terrace, Rothesay, N.B., £1. Penknives have been forwarded to the competitors whose names appear below:

J. Adams, Heath, Crayford, Kent.
J. Burton, 102, Glenparke Road, Forest Gate, E.
A. Davis, 17, Eve Road, Leytonstone.
Mrs. Greig, Hydropathic, Slateford, Midlothian.
Mrs. L. J. Parry, Riverdale, Carrog, Corwen, N. Wales.
Miss M. Gyles, 98, Lower Baggot Street, Dublin.
Mrs. Reed, Porloch, Fassett Road, Surbiton.
F. C. Perry, 39, Ilbers Street, Green's Park, London, W.
W. W. Ranson, 22, Lutton Place, Edinburgh.
H. P. Wright, 72, Everlina Road, Nunhead.
S. S. Smith, 85, Edith Road, West Kensington.
E. Berryman, 55, High Street, Cefn Coed, Merthyr Tydfil.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE CONTENTS OF

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A Question of Art. *F. Frankfort Moore.*
Illustrated by R. Sauber, R.B.A.

The Paris Exhibition of 1900. *M. Griffith.*
Illustrated by A. Robida.

In the Abyss. *H. G. Wells.*
Illustrated by Warwick Goble.

The White Slaves of England. *R. H. Sherard.*
No. 2.—THE NAILMAKERS OF BROMSGROVE. Illustrated by H. Piffard.

The Shah-in-Shah. *Moulvie Rafiuddin Ahmad.*
Illustrated with photographs.

Ostrich Farming in California. *Edwin Causton.*
Illustrated with photographs.

Secrets of the Courts of Europe. *Allen Upward.*
Second Series. No. 2.—"THE GHOST OF THE WINTER PALACE."
Illustrated by Hal Hurst, R.B.A.

Gold and Gilt. *Clifton Bingham.*

The Bands of the British Army. *Robert Machray.*
Illustrated by Seymour Nation.

Heart and Lip. *Mrs. Henry Mansergh.*
Illustrated by G. Grenville Manton.

The Nursery of the British Navy. *Archibald S. Hurd.*
Illustrated with photographs.

The Wives of the Cabinet. *Marie A. Belloc.*
Illustrated with photographs.

The Royalists' Ride. *Cranstoun Metcalfe.*
Illustrated by A. Jule Goodman.

How Lord Carew was Trapped. *Cuthbert Barmby.*
Illustrated by Trevor Haddon.

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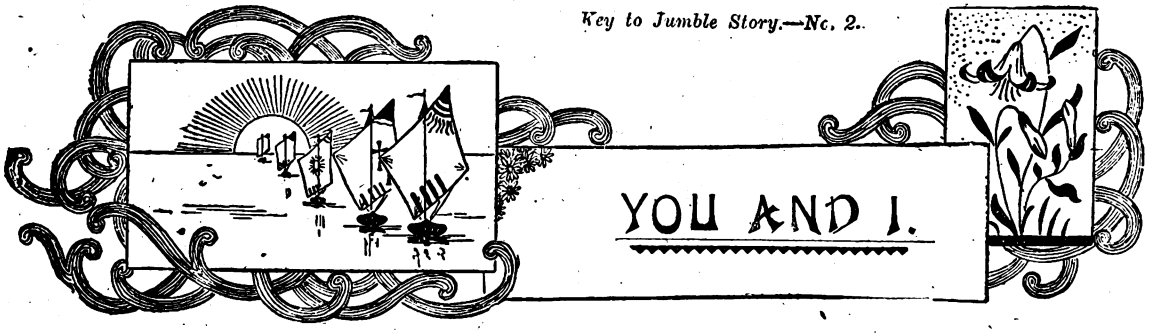
Key to Jumble Story.—No. 2.



A MAN and a woman. A pathway white with the milky pallor of the moon. Shadows lurking on every side, emblematical of their two lives.

Lovers. Oh, yes—or why was her cheek stained red as those roses sleeping within reach of her fingers, which were locked in the man's palm? He tried to speak, but his voice was choked by emotion. This was good-bye.

The woman raised her eyes, her lips, and the anguish of parting was forgotten in the ecstasy of a long embrace.

"I shall remember," she whispered, "always! You and I have been more than all the world to each other, you and I!"

These three words were repeated in lingering accents, that faltered and ended in a sigh.

"Stay," he answered passionately, "life is only an hour; take all that it can give while love is in your soul. To-morrow the summer may be over, the flowers will shrivel up, and we shall be old."

"And age spells death," murmured the woman with a shudder.

The man gazed rapturously on the beauty of her face. How pure it looked in the pale light! What a mask, what a mockery!

Yet, good or evil, he loved her; and the fragrance of the summer night was creeping into his very being; everything spoke of hitherto undreamed possibilities.

"Why must you go?" he asked fiercely, "you have no tie in New York! Your home? Bah! What is a woman's home before she marries? Stay, and be my wife."

The woman untangled her fingers, and passed them over her brow.

The grass was wet with dew, and there were drops of agony upon her forehead.

One word broke hoarsely from her lips: "*No!*"

"If you love me, why in the name of——"

But she clasped her hands, intreating silence.

"Ask for no explanations. Would I had never come to England, to lose my soul in yours. I return to-morrow, it is inevitable. I have two things to seek, Heaven only knows if I shall find them."

"What?" he questioned.

"Rest and repentance!"

As she spoke she broke away, rushed wildly on, till the shadows hid her white gowned figure, and she was lost in mystery.

The following day she sailed, and the man saw her no more.

He only treasured a few parched rose leaves, and her address in New York City.

But the fire of love burnt still in his soul, and at last he wrote to the woman who had said "No."

"I must follow you" (he penned the lines feverishly) "to your home, dearest, and plead again for the love you gave and denied. Remember your own words: 'We have been all the world to each other—you and I.' Cable me the single syllable, 'Come,' and as fast as the seas will bring me, I will come to kneel at your feet."

* * * * *

A woman was lying dead, with roses white and yellow in her hands. She was beautiful in death as in life.

She had found what she sought, rest and repentance!

Beside her still image sat her husband, his head bent, and one hand stretched across his face hiding the awful expression thereon. But the veins on that sinewy hand seemed bursting through the flesh, while his parted lips were dry and bloodless.

Between his trembling fingers he held a letter, addressed to his dead wife in her maiden name. He had only just opened it.

That morning's mail made the cold form of marble beauty horrible in his eyes. Vengeance was turning his soul to gall, mingled with the awful jealousy of the bereaved.

"He shall follow her to her home," he muttered, crumpling her lover's letter with suppressed passion.

Then he wrote the cable: "*Come!*"

* * * * *

Two men stood face to face. A lover and a husband. One with hope in his heart, the other maddened by his wrongs.

"You have come for my wife," he said slowly, "she is not here, but you shall go to her."

The lover staggered back, and fell heavily with a groan to the earth.

Only a cloud of smoke rose between his body and the woman's husband.

No horror crept through the murderer's veins.

"They are together now," he said, "in the land of falsehood and treachery. Let them love there, if they can."

Two days later the police received a detailed account of the crime, written by the slayer's hand, telling them where to find the murdered man.

"You need not seek for me," he wrote in conclusion. "I have gone where no one will discover me. Justice has been done, that is enough——"

Here the writing ceased abruptly, and the two men the woman had deceived were buried in oblivion.

WINIFRED GRAHAM.

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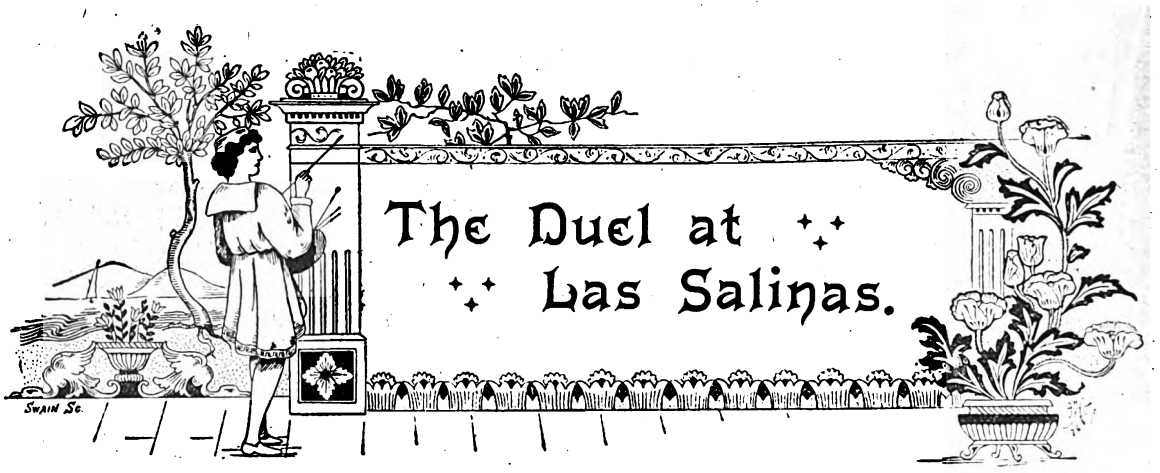

The Duel at Las Salinas.

Don Mariano Delgado and his English friend, on their way to Las Salinas, rode to the edge of the Mesa where it drops abruptly down to the lower levels. They were forty miles east of the Rio Grande, and fifty or sixty miles from Albuquerque. There lay before them a wide plain which rose into low tablelands off to the south and east. Far to the north-west towered the bold, handsome contours of the Sandia Mountains. Upon the plain, miles away from the foot of the Mesa, two large circular spots shone dazzlingly white. Don Mariano pointed them out to his companion.

"They are the salinas," he said. "Now let us look for the waggons. They should be in sight by this time. Ah, there they are. They will get a loading by noon."

Three waggons, each drawn by four mules, came round a bend of the Mesa at its foot, crawling along towards the white spots on the prairie. They were part of Don Mariano's ranch outfit going to the salinas for salt.

"Let us ride on to the salinas and await them there," said Don Mariano, and the two horsemen picked their way down the rough burrow trail to the plain, then put their horses to a long gallop, which brought them in half-an-hour to the salt lakes—for the salinas literally are lake basins packed solidly with salt. Part of their surface was smooth and level, like a water surface. Other places were rough, and dug out in great holes like cellars, showing where salt-gatherers had been at work. Deeply worn trails led to the lakes from the north, the west, and the south, and the ground about them was trodden with the feet of sheep, horses, and cattle and the wild beasts of the plain, drawn hither by their hunger for salt.

Going out upon one of the basins for a closer examination, the Englishman found that the pure white salt seen upon the surface was only an incrustation a half-inch thick, and that beneath this stratum the salt was darker, as if discoloured by earthy matter.

"How came the salt beds here?" he asked Don Mariano. "Are there salt springs at the bottom of the basins?"

The Don shrugged his shoulders. "*Quien sabe?*" he answered. "They have always been here. The Spanish colonists who first came to New Mexico, 300 years ago, got their salt here, and their descendants have done the same to this day. Since the railway came the salt we use on our tables, and much that we use for other purposes, is brought from the States. Yet many of the native people still get their salt from here, as my teams come to-day to get the year's supply for the stock upon my ranches. The trails you see centring here are worn by the travel of hundreds of years. And the buffalo and antelope in old times knew the salinas. Ah, I did not think an antelope was left so near the Rio Grande."

At the further end of the further basin three antelopes stood at the edge eagerly nibbling salt. Their hunger for salt had overcome their fear of man, and they acted as if unaware of the two men, who watched the timid, graceful creatures as the Don went on:

"I can remember the time when we had to have weapons in our hands and be a good-sized party when we came here for salt. The Mescalero Apachés and the Navajoes were liable to come as far as the salt lakes, and they were always hostile. The Comanches were supposed to be friendly with the New Mexicans, but even they were not always to be trusted when they met a weak party out on the plains. There has been a good deal of Indian fighting, first and last, about these basins and the trails leading to them. There was a duel fought here many years ago that was very remarkable. It occurred long before I was born, but the story has been handed down in our family, for my grandfather, Don Porfirio Delgado, was present when it occurred. It came about though a foolish promise that a Mexican made a Comanche chief, which he thought he would never be called on to fulfil.

"The man was a Comanchero as we say, who went out on the plains every year to trade with the Comanches. To carry through a bargain, or to help himself out of some tight place, he promised the Indian that he would give him his daughter for a wife when she should have grown large enough to marry. He was not called on to redeem his promise, for he was dead when the Indian demanded the girl, but it made trouble enough for other people, as you shall hear, if you care to listen to the story.

"It came about in this way. My grandfather, Don Porfirio Delgado, had come from his hacienda out to the salinas in August with a large party of his people to get his year's supply of salt. They came with a caravan of pack mules and carettas, as we call the old-fashioned carts made wholly of wood and raw hide, and drawn by oxen yoked by the horns. So many of his men at that season of the year were away herding sheep and cattle that to fill up his party he had brought with him some of the women that lived on his estate to help in their places.

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"Among them was Manuelita Trujillo, the Comanchero's daughter, then an orphan girl, sixteen years old. Our people, you know, mature early, and she was a young woman at that time, and a handsome one. Francisco Segura, a young *vaquero* in my grandfather's employ, thought so at any rate, and since she was one of the party, he had come along to herd the cattle and mules of the outfit.

"On the third day after arriving at the salinas they had all their carts and pack mules loaded with salt. They were yoking up the oxen ready for a start for home, when a band of Indians came riding towards them from the menas. Not knowing to what tribe they belonged, the Mexicans drew their carts into a circle, secured mules and oxen, got their firearms ready, and waited. When the Indians came near our people saw that they were Comanches, and felt easier in their minds; but still they knew that they could not trust them very far, in spite of the fact that they were at peace with the New Mexicans.

"The Indians halted just out of gunshot from the caravan, for they saw that our people had firearms and were on their guard. But their chief, a large fine-looking Indian, with war paint on his face, gave the peace sign and rode towards the caravan. Before he had come half-way down Don Porfirio recognised him, and the Mexican, who had fought against the Comanches in the past, said: 'It is Santarito.' All knew the name, for he was of the bravest and most warlike of the chiefs that rode on the plains. Manuelita knew about him, and at his coming she shrank behind the other women, and drew her *reboso* about her face, but he saw her.

"My grandfather has often described to me the way Santarito looked as he rode up to them on his war horse, a splendid mustang, full of fire and speed. He wore a hunting shirt, fringed leggings, and mocassins of buckskin, and in his black streaming hair were three eagle's feathers. Hung to his neck by a buckskin thong, and resting on his broad, sinewy chest, was a great star of gold set with precious stones, that he had taken from the uniform of some dead Mexican officer of high rank. Across his back was slung his bow and quiver of arrows, and he carried his long lance in his hand.

"When he had come quite near the party he stopped and spoke to my grandfather, calling him by name, for they had met before in war and peace. He spoke in Spanish, for it was told of him that he had been educated at a Franciscan Father's school, from which he had run away to join his wild tribesmen.

"'Señor Delgado,' he said, 'will you choose peace or war?'

"'We would have peace,' answered my grandfather. 'Why should we fight? The Comanches and the New Mexicans are friends.'

"'Then give up to me the girl Manuelita. Her father promised her to me when she was a child. Give her to me, and there shall be peace and gifts between us.'

"Don Porfirio looked towards Manuelita. She had sunk to the ground, her face ashy pale, her look full of horror.

"'What is this the chief says?' asked the Don of her. 'What does he mean by saying that your father promised you to him? Is it true?' She lifted her head. 'It is false,' she cried. 'My father never meant it. He had no right to give me, a Christian girl, to an Indian.'

"Don Porfirio looked very grave. He saw that some sort of a promise had been made, and knew that whether or not the father had spoken in jest, or had a right to give it, it would make no difference with the chief, who was there with his men behind him, and meant to have the girl. No one knew better than my grandfather the dangers and evil consequences of a fight with the Comanches at that time out on the lonely plain, encumbered with his loaded waggons, and far away from water.

"A third of his party were women, and the Indians outnumbered the men by two to one. The Comanches had no firearms, but they were brave fighters, and could do deadly work at close quarters with their bows and arrows. And then the women! If the Indians were victorious there was a certain and terrible fate for the men, but that of the women was as certain or worse. Manuelita was only an orphan girl whose father had been of no very good repute, and she had no relatives living to take up her cause.

"'Let the Comanchero's daughter be given up to the chief,' whispered some of the Mexicans whose wives and daughters were with them. 'She is but one, and it will save the lives of many. Her father liked the Comanches well enough, and she may get along as well among them. And did he not promise her to Santarito?'

"Manuelita heard, or felt, these whispers, and shuddered beneath the *reboso* she had drawn over her face. But there was one who came with her, and took her hand in his, and stood by her, saying that he would protect her while his life should last. It was Francisco Segura, the *vaquero*, and his example gave courage to others. Don Porfirio was not a man of a coward's way of thinking. He would protect his own whatever might befal, and Manuelita was of his household. He knew the risk he was taking for himself and his people when he said:

"'Santarito, the girl is not willing to go. Her father had not the right to say who would have her when she was a little child. She is under my protection, and shall remain with her own people, since she so chooses. See, here is a colt, fit for breaking next year, which I have reared to be my own horse. I will give him to you in acquittance of her father's promise.'

"The chief laughed scornfully, and made a gesture of contempt.

"'I will give you my own saddle besides,' the Don continued, 'so that you may be equipped in a manner befitting a great chief when you mount the colt next year.'

"Santarito's look was black, and he plainly was impatient to do the talking.

"'I count nothing for your colt and saddle,' he said. 'The girl I will have, with no words or waiting. For the last time I ask you, shall I take her in peace or in war?'

"'Let it be war, since you will have it so,' said Don Porfirio growing angry in turn. 'I have offered you all I have to give.'

"Santarito gave a swift glance round towards his band and lifted his lance. But he remained where he was and did not give the signal to his men to attack. He was not the head chief of his tribe, and it might be a serious thing for him to break a treaty on his own responsibility. Besides, he knew that if it came to battle some of his men would be killed, however the affair turned in the end.

"'We may settle the matter another way if you choose,' he said. 'Come out and fight me single-handed before all our men. Face to face we will decide whether I or your people shall have the girl. Or, if you are too old, send one of your younger men.'

"He looked as he spoke to Francisco Segura, standing

at Manuelita's side. At this word, Francisco took a step forward.

"'I will fight you,' he called out. 'Don Porfirio, give me leave to fight the Comanche chief.'

"Santarito looked at him, and his lip curled. 'I am a chief,' he said, 'and he is only a cowherd. But let him come out and be killed. I will carry his scalp on my lance when I ride with Manuelita back to our rancheria.'

"'Go, since you ask it, and God be with you,' said the Don to Francisco. 'But ride my black horse. You know him, for you broke him as a colt. He will not flinch or fail you.'

"On the Don's black horse, the swiftest in the Rio Grande valley, Francisco rode out to meet the chief. He carried in his hand a gun, and upon his saddle horn his braided lasso was loosely coiled. The women lamented and the men looked very grave at his prospects, for he could give but a single shot with his gun, while the Indian's quiver was full of arrows, every one of which he would send in surely in the time it would take Francisco to reload his piece. And then there was the lance, and Francisco had none.

"Santarito rode back, keeping to the left until he had reached a point equally distant from his band and the caravan. Francisco took up a similar position on the right, and the two faced each other a hundred paces apart. The Indian laid his lance in the loops of his saddle and took his bow and half-a-dozen arrows in his hand. Then with a shout to his pony he dashed upon Francisco, waiting to receive him with fusil raised. Half way to him the Comanche swung down sidewise from his saddle, so that his pony's body should protect him from a shot, and swerved the animal to pass Francisco in a circle. At the same time, from under its neck he sent arrow after arrow at him as fast as he could count.

"The second arrow sent struck Francisco's saddle, and the next passed through his sleeve, grazing his shoulder. At the same moment he fired, aiming to hit the Comanche's head beneath the pony's neck. The bullet missed Santarito, but it was a lucky shot for all that, for it struck the bow, breaking it. Instantly the Indian swung up in his saddle, grasped his lance, and charged straight at his enemy.

"Francisco set spurs to meet the charge, at the same time lifting from his saddle horn the coils of his lasso. With the gun held in his left hand, he parried the lance thrust, wheeled his horse behind the Indian's pony as it went by like a flash, and flung his lasso after Santarito. His aim was true. The noose fell over the Comanche's head and shoulders, and, before he could throw it off, Francisco had caught a turn of the braided rope about his saddle horn, wheeled his horse, and set the spurs hard into his flanks.

"With a bound the fiery animal was off and away, jerking the Indian from his saddle, over his pony's back, and dragging him helpless over the prairie. As he fell to the ground the lasso slipped above his shoulders, but tightened again about his neck, and held.

"At sight of this, the Indians gave their war cry, and started for Francisco. He did not pull rein till they were half way to him. Then he checked his horse, leapt to the ground, threw the lasso from the Indian's neck—the neck was broken—plunged his knife twice into the Comanche's heart to make his work sure, took the gold star from the chief's breast, and springing into the saddle dashed back to the caravan with a score of arrows whistling after him. The Indians pulled up their ponies before getting very near the Mexican party, and turned back to where their dead chief lay. They made no further hostile move, but seemed stunned and downcast at the result of the duel. They did not wait long but rode away to the eastward in the direction where their rancherias lay carrying with them Santarito's body bound across the back of his war horse.

"This is the story of the duel at Las Salinas. Francisco, of course, was a great hero after the affair. He married Manuelita that autumn, as he had wanted to do for years past, and he became head *vaquero* on my grandfather's ranches, so they were both prosperous and happy.

"When, after many years, his working days were over, his son took his place on my father's estate."

Just as Don Mariano finished his story the sound of hoofbeats near at hand caused the two to look round. The approaching waggons were still a mile away, but the foreman had ridden ahead to select the spot where they should haul up. He was a stalwart, handsome Mexican, about forty years of age, and the American noted his perfect seat in the saddle. He rode up to them, bowed respectfully, and stood awaiting any orders that Don Mariano might have to give.

"Have you your gold medal with you, Francisco?" asked the Don after their talk about the location of the waggons was ended.

For answer the Mexican put his hand inside his shirt collar and drew forth a large star of gold, somewhat dulled and worn, but still holding several of the brilliants with which it had once been thickly set.

"Yes, I see. You are taking good care of it," said Don Mariano. Then turning to the Englishman, "It is the gold star that his grandfather took, seventy years ago, on this spot, from Santarito."

P. McArthur.

MELODY.

The August number of this delightful musical magazine, which is published on the first of the month, contains an excellent variety of compositions by some of our best known musicians. There are songs by Liza Lehmann, Benjamin Godard, Blumenthal, G. H. Clutsam, Miss Davis, Cotsford Dick, Milton Wellings, besides solos for the organ, piano, violin, mandoline, and guitar, by other well-known composers. The number is completed by a polka expressly composed for *Melody* by R. Farban, and some notes on musical topics by Mr. R. S. Hichens, and Dr. Joseph Bennett.

Such a musical treat, as above indicated, can only be enjoyed in one way, and that is by buying the August number of *Melody*, price sixpence.

Please remember that no musical magazine is so well printed or contains so many original compositions as *Melody*, whilst the fact that *Melody* is printed on paper full sheet music size has made this popular musical magazine at once take the premier position, a position which becomes more and more impregnable as the volumes of *Melody* appear month by month.

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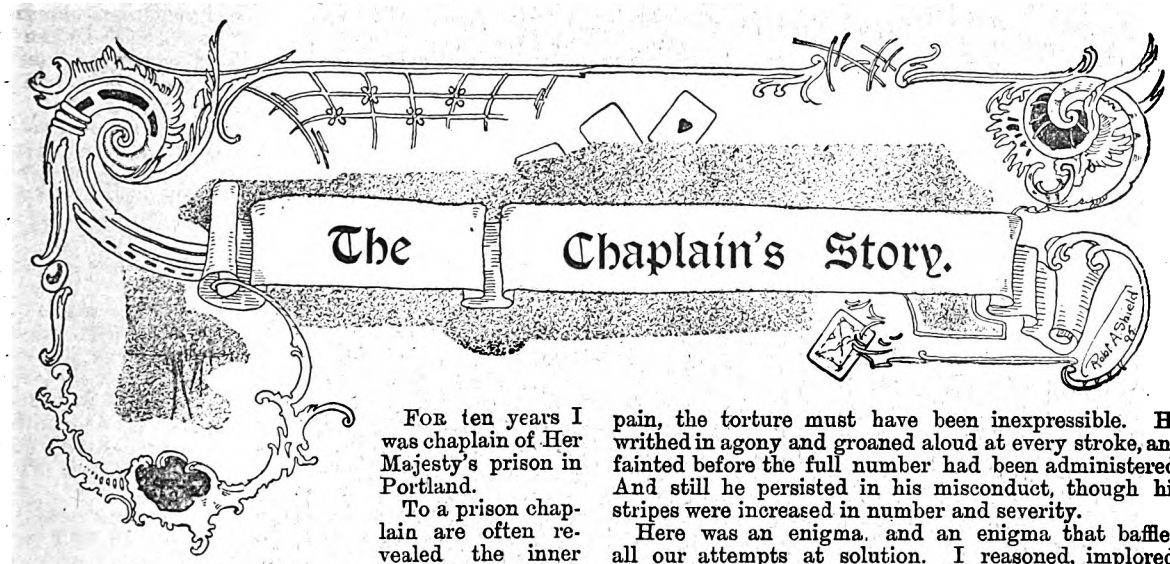

The Chaplain's Story.

For ten years I was chaplain of Her Majesty's prison in Portland.

To a prison chaplain are often revealed the inner workings of the passions that produce crime, and during my term of office many a heart was laid open to my inspection.

Still there were some who were unfathomable; but of all the convicts, many of them the lowest scum of society, I was brought in contact with, there were none whom I understood less than Edward Dominey.

There was nothing of the criminal in his appearance, rather the opposite. About thirty, tall, muscular, and well proportioned, with frank, open countenance, he was the beau ideal of attractive manhood. Nor was physical appearance all. He was well educated, well bred, and of engaging address, and all the faults in his character that I could discern were an overbearing and resentful temper.

He was serving two years for forgery, and forgery so heartless that the judge told him that his sentence would have been more severe if it had not been for his excellent character.

But what puzzled us most was his behaviour in gaol. Notwithstanding his intelligence and refinement, he was always being punished for some glaring offence, and singular to state, his insubordination was periodical.

The Governor, doctor, and myself were greatly pained and greatly puzzled thereat. I often spoke to him about it, and when these fits of misconduct were absent his behaviour could not be more exemplary. He was examined to see if he suffered from mental derangement, but the doctor could find nothing wrong with him.

Every punishment then in vogue was inflicted on him; even applications of the dreaded "cat." At first the Governor was disposed to overlook his faults and sent me to remonstrate with him, but the only result was that his conduct became more outrageous the more leniently he was dealt with, and there was no course open but to apply the lash.

Never shall I forget his first flogging. He seemed to feel the degradation more than the torture, and Heaven knows that was awful enough. Twenty lashes with the dreaded instrument is a prospect that makes the hardest and most callous tremble, and he was neither. He seemed to feel that this punishment put him out of the pale of respectable men—that the scars would be the ineffaceable stamp of his degradation.

To him, who hardly knew the meaning of physical pain, the torture must have been inexpressible. He writhed in agony and groaned aloud at every stroke, and fainted before the full number had been administered. And still he persisted in his misconduct, though his stripes were increased in number and severity.

Here was an enigma, and an enigma that baffled all our attempts at solution. I reasoned, implored, expostulated, prayed with him, but all to no purpose. Although he was nearly heartbroken on such occasions, his answer invariably was: "It cannot be helped; it must be as it is."

* * * * *

Two years passed away from the time he was first flogged, and I almost despaired of ever having any effect on him when an accident occurred in the quarries.

A party of convicts, among whom was Dominey, were removing a large block of stone, when from some unexplainable cause it gave way and Dominey was caught under it. He was rescued as soon as possible, and taken to the prison hospital. The doctor soon came to the opinion that his spine was fatally injured, and that he could only live a few days at most.

As soon as he could speak he expressed a desire to see me, and I went. He took my hand in silence, and after a pause, said: "I am fatally injured, Mr. Selame; I should not like to die without thanking you for your goodness to me, although you thought it all thrown away. Do you know why I am here, sir?"

"Yes, you were injured by the stone falling."

"No, I don't mean that. Do you know why I am in gaol and why I behaved so badly since I came?"

"You were sent here, you know, for forgery."

"Yes, that is why I was sent here by the judge," he rejoined solemnly, "but I am here, sir, because I am a murderer."

I looked pityingly and incredulously at him, for I feared his brain must have been injured, too, in the shock. He saw my look and said earnestly: "It is true, sir, I am here because I am a murderer. If it had not been for that I should not have been here on a charge of forgery. Murder is my offence. But I will tell you my history and then you will see what an overbearing temper has brought me to."

After consulting with the doctor I complied, and he narrated the following strange and fearful facts:

"I was brought up at a small town in the Midlands. My father was a gentleman farmer and intensely proud of me, who was his eldest son, and spoken of on all sides as a sharp boy. He sent me to a preparatory school, thence to a country grammar school, and at the age of eighteen I was placed in the branch bank in our town with the prospect of rising to a decent competence.

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"I said it was an overbearing temper that brought me here. The truth is that my temper from infancy had always been ungovernable. I was petted and spoiled at home; I was not allowed to be crossed, and, being a sturdy lad, I generally got my own way wherever I went.

"I fear I was a bully at school, and I was more than once in danger of being expelled. But the masters were proud of me, for, speaking frankly, I did them credit, and no one knew that better than myself.

"Six months after I entered the bank, Edgar Sturmell, who had been my rival at school, and disputed precedence with me in everything was, by some strange fatality, appointed to a post in the same bank. The struggle for the mastery between us became a thousand-fold intensified. We disputed precedence in our work; we were members of the same club, and there was a jealous rivalry between us in billiards; we were both good athletes, and on the cricket ground and river our mutual hate and jealousy had plenty of food to feed on.

"This continued for about six years, and all might have gone on as heretofore, when (fatality again!) love came like a sword between us.

"The wife of Mr. Willis, our manager, died, and his sister came to keep house for him. Sturmell and I were regular visitors at the manager's, and, truth to tell, I believe invited us so often that we might heal our dissensions.

"Soon after her arrival Willis gave a party to introduce her to his friends. Sturmell and I were there, of course. Would to Heaven I had never seen her! Would to Heaven that she had never crossed my path!

"Ethel Willis was a tall, dark girl of twenty. I believe I forgot good manners, and stared in wonderment at her. All the beauties of our town were plain compared to her. Her features were as regular as those of a Greek statue; her form and carriage were those of a queen. Her voice seemed more musical than any voice I had ever heard.

"But her eyes! There was the charm! To describe them would be impossible, but it seemed to me that one glance from them meant that no man could look but to love.

"Time after time since then have I cursed the Power that created her and her eyes. Fate, I have told myself scores of times, formed them to destroy me.

"Everybody there sought her out and owned her sway. She, quite unaffected, not one whit prouder, moved among us with a sunny smile and irresistible look that conquered all.

"I noted with a jealous eye that Sturmell was very attentive to her, and like the vain fool that I was, I cursed him in my heart for his presumption. From that hour he and I were rivals, in love as in everything else.

"It was at this time that an instrument was put in my hands by the Evil One that wrought my everlasting ruin. I went to London for a few days, and whilst there attended a *séance* of hypnotism. I was intensely interested; I sought an interview with the professor, and to make a long story short, I found that I was possessed of that dread power myself. A knife in the hands of a homicidal maniac would not be so dangerous.

"Nearly a year after Ethel Willis came to her brother's, I asked for an interview with her. I was shown into the drawing-room where I found her alone.

"'Ethel,' I said after a few commonplace words, throwing the burden and passion of my soul into the tone, 'I have sought you to-night to tell you that I love you. I never saw a woman like you before; none has ever touched my heart except you. I would do anything or give up anything for your sake. Tell me, oh, tell me,' I shrieked with wild passion, as I did not see what I sought in her face, 'tell me that you love me.'

"Alas for her answer! With infinite distress and in a voice that almost choked her, she told me that she would give worlds to say otherwise, but she did not love me, and asked to be allowed to be my humble friend.

"Passion reasserted itself, and I laughed bitterly. Then a light broke in upon me, and I asked in a schooled voice: 'Is Edgar Sturmell the favoured one?'

"She trembled like a leaf, and I read her answer in her face. 'Then he shall never have you,' I cried; 'you shall both die first. Look at me,' as the remembrance of my power come like a lightning flash. She looked. I exerted my will to the utmost to control her. But she neither quailed nor moved a muscle. When a woman loves she is proof against any other power. I saw that I had lost, and left the room. I never saw her again.

"From that day for many months I was a madman. I gave full play to every evil passion with which I was tempted, till my heart became a hell.

"About a week afterwards Sturmell, blind fool, said to me genuinely delighted, though with a little superiority in his tone. 'Congratulate me, Dominey, I proposed to Ethel Willis last night, and was made a happy man. Willis gave me his brotherly blessing. To tell you the truth, old fellow, I thought you had your eyes in that quarter, and I was horribly jealous.'

"'Oh, no,' I replied with as off-hand a manner as I could assume, and, putting the greatest possible amount of sting into the words, ended the sentence with a laugh.

"Sturmell looked at me in silence; then turned on his heel and left me without another word.

"Then the resolve grew upon me that Sturmell should never have her. It must have been the devil that put the remembrance of my fatal power into my head again. I laughed wildly. Yes, Sturmell might succumb. I tried my power on him, and found that sometimes I could control him. But to separate them was not enough for me now. I must have revenge. I must wreck their happiness as mine had been wrecked. It was only charitable to believe that I was insane.

"One night Sturmell and I were engaged till late in balancing the books. There was no one in the bank but ourselves. Mr. Willis had gone home to dinner, and would return to relieve me. Sturmell had already been to his meal.

"Some fatalism or some devil caused Sturmell to begin talking of his sweetheart. Oh, why in the name of Heaven did he? He showed me a smoking cap she had embroidered for him with his initials. It was too much for me to bear. I literally thirsted for his blood. I tried to put him under my power. I succeeded. Then a terrible idea flashed across my mind, and I acted on it. It was born in a moment, but that is no palliation, for it was my brooding hate that gave birth to it.

"I suggested to him, while he was under the hypnotic influence, that Mr. Willis did not look with much favour on his engagement. Then I wormed out of him that this was really the fact, and that he had been much irritated in consequence. Then, like the devil I was, I suggested to him that he should that night murder Mr. Willis.

"The next morning broke with the news flying swiftly through the town that Mr. Willis had been foully

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murdered the previous night in the bank, and Edgar Sturmell had been arrested.

"I cannot describe my feeling for the next month or two. I longed to go and confess, but the same devil that had tempted me to the deed, kept me back, and told me I had done well.

"At the assizes Edgar Sturmell was found guilty.

"He declared that he must have been insane, for he had no recollection of the deed, and his feelings for the murdered man were of the kindliest.

"As the judge's solemn words pronounced his doom, there was a wild shriek in the court. Alas! only another weight in my burden of guilt—Ethel Willis is now the inmate of an asylum, hopelessly insane.

"Edgar Sturmell did not live long enough to feel the hangman's rope. One morning he was found dead in his cell. How he met with his death was never ascertained.

"These are my crimes: I had murdered two and deprived another of reason. Can there be forgiveness for such as I?

"My crimes brought their own punishment. I have known all the pangs of the lost. I dared not confess, nor would confession have undone my crimes; I took a strong course. I committed an act of forgery that I knew would place me here for a number of years.

"I may say that I have always looked upon penal servitude as a living death, compared with which the hangman's rope is a thousand times more preferable.

"But since I came here I found that that was not punishment enough. Hence I became insubordinate that I might taste the 'cat.' You can think what that meant to me.

"But my scarred back, my tortured spirit, my living death have not brought peace. They are nothing to the pangs of conscience. I have suffered—oh! how I have suffered! Can there be mercy for me? Tell me, Mr. Selame, was ever guilt so black as mine? Could an eternity of suffering wash out of remembrance such crimes as mine are?"

* * * * *

Very tenderly and gently did I point him to the Great Consolation, not minimising his guilt, not pretending that his self-inflicted punishment could win pardon for him, but showing him that eternal mercy could even forgive such as he. He lingered for three days with only momentary gleams of consciousness, and his spirit fled without further conversation between us.

The tale he told me seemed so wildly improbable that I was at pain to verify it. I found on visiting the town where he had lived that the facts were quite in accordance with what he told me.

REGINALD BAIRD.

A Little Lunatic.

THE last good-bye had been said, and the comfortable country carriage, drawn by its two glossy bay horses, had disappeared round a knoll.

"They is do'rn," remarked the baby, as if just in possession of a solemn fact.

"Torse they is do'rn, you blessed baby," answered Florence, his fifteen-year-old sister, stooping down and lifting him in her strong arms and kissing him.

The baby, let me remark, was a sturdy boy of four, with bright brown eyes and red cheeks—cheeks so plump that when you had a side view of his face you could only see the tip of his little pug nose.

"Well, if anybody has earned a holiday, they are father and mother," said Cassie.

"Cassie, dear, your sentiment is better than your grammar," laughed Rose, the eldest of the three sisters.

"Never you mind my grammar, Miss Eglantine. I mayn't have much 'book larnin',' but I've got a head on my shoulders, as father frequently remarks—which is a good thing, for I couldn't bear to look at myself in the glass if I hadn't—and, besides, how could I do my hair up so neatly"—Cassie's hair was the joke of the family—"if I hadn't? And now I'm going upstairs to cry, and I'll be down in three minutes to help with the supper."

It was a pleasant scene in the old-fashioned, roomy kitchen an hour later. Supper was laid, and Rose had just stopped to ask the baby whether he would rather have honey or preserves, when a stealthly step was heard upon the porch. A moment later the door was pushed slowly open, and a man walked in.

"Good-morning, ladies. Is your father at home?"

"N—no," faltered Rose, trying to settle to her own satisfaction whether this dirty-looking stranger might be some new neighbour, who had come upon legitimate business, or whether he was her one horror—a tramp.

"Any of your big brothers in?" with rather a jocular manner.

"N—no, sir."

"And I don't see anything in the shape of a bulldog loafin' round," he added.

"Our dord, he is dead," explained the baby solemnly.

"Well, then, ladies, since you are likely to be alone, I think I'll stay and keep you company; and since you press me, I will have some supper and spend the evening here. Don't go to any extra work for me, though; it looks very nice. I'm rather hungry, so you may dish up that ham at once. I've usually a very fair appetite, and I'm sure I will relish it."

He tossed his hat down beside the chair which he drew up to the table.

With the light falling on his dirty, insolent face, Rose knew that her greatest dread was before her. With her knees sinking under her she started towards the stairs, for she felt that she must let the intrepid Cassie know—and find out what she advised.

"Where are you goin', my dear?" asked the tramp suspiciously. "You've not got any big cousin or uncle or anything of that kind upstairs that you are going to call to tea, have you?"

"Oh, no, there is no one upstairs but my poor sister," she managed to gasp. She could not have told why she said "poor sister," unless it was from the sense of calamity which had overtaken them all.

Rose dragged herself up the narrow inclosed stairs, and into Cassie's room.

"Well, Rose, you must be about tired out. You come upstairs as if you were eighty," said Cassie, looking up from the shoe she was fastening. "Why, what ails you? You look as if you had seen a ghost?"

"Oh, Cassie, there is one of them downstairs!" came in a whisper.

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"What do you mean, Rose? A ghost downstairs?"

"No—no—a tramp."

"Whew!" and Cassie gave a low whistle. "And I suppose you're scared?"

"Oh, Cassie, I feel as if I were choking! Do hurry down; he may be killing poor little Florence and the baby. What shall we do? The baby has told him we are all alone."

"The baby ought to be soundly spanked for that."

"What can we do? Try to think."

Cassie sat swinging the button-hook in her hand, and thinking very hard and fast.

"Does he know I am here?"

"Yes; I've told him."

"Then it would be no use for me to pretend to be Ned," thinking aloud.

"I'm afraid not."

Another silence dedicated to thought.

"Rose?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to be crazy. I'm going to chase him off the farm."

"Oh, Cassie, you can't! He is a great, big, impudent wretch. What folly to talk about chasing him off the farm!"

"It's our only chance."

"Don't count on me. I can't help you. My teeth are chattering with terror, and my legs are doubling up under me this very minute. I couldn't help chase a fly."

"You can scream, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, I can do that."

"Well, you can do the screaming, and I'll do the chasing. Rush downstairs and scream, and bang the door, and just shriek: 'She's out—she's out—she's coming downstairs!' And you'll see what a perfectly beautiful lunatic I will be. It's a good thing I have this old dress on, and only one shoe. Now make a rush and scream."

Rose's overstained nerves were her best allies, and as she flew down the stairs it was the easiest thing in the world for her to give one piercing shriek after another. They resounded from the narrow stairway through the kitchen, and for the moment seemed to paralyse its inmates. As she burst in upon them, Florence was transfixed midway of the table and the fireplace, with the plate of ham in her hands; the baby had climbed upon a chair, and the tramp had risen with a bewildered air from the table. As her skirts cleared the door she turned and slammed it, and flung herself against it, shrieking: "She's out—she's out of her room!"

To the mystified Florence there came but one solution to her behaviour—fright had overthrown her sister's reason, and with a wail she rushed towards her, crying: "She's crazy! Oh, she's crazy!"

"Who's crazy?" yelled the tramp.

The baby, now wildly terrified, set up a loud weeping, while from the stairway came a succession of blows and angry demands that the door be opened, a moment later it was forced ajar, and a head crowned with a mass of tossed hair was thrust out, and quickly followed by a hand in which was clutched a gun.

"She's got the gun! Oh, Florence, run to the baby!" cried Rose.

"Who's that?" demanded the apparition, making a rush towards the tramp.

"Here, keep off! Leave me alone!" backing away and warding off an expected blow.

She stood before him, tall, strong and agile.

"I won't leave you alone. What do you mean by locking me in that room? I'm no more crazy than you are. What's this?" as she stumbled over the hat which the tramp had laid aside, and into which he had deposited the silver spoons from the table. "Oh, I see; you are all in league to rob me of my gold and precious stones!" and catching up the hat on the muzzle of the gun, she gave it a whirl which sent the spoons glittering in every direction; then advancing upon him she thrust hat and gun into the face of the horrified man. With a volley of oaths he sprang backwards, upsetting his chair and falling over it.

"Oh, don't kill him, Cassie! don't kill him!"

"We'll have a merry time," gaily dancing about him, and prodding him sharply with the gun as he tried to scramble to his feet.

"Keep off with that gun, can't you?" he yelled. "Can't you hold her, you screaming idiots?" and half crawling, half pushing, he gained the kitchen door, which had stood partly open since he had entered.

"Where are you going, my pretty maid, don't you try to get away?" shouted Cassie, as she sprung lightly after him. The tramp stayed not to answer her question, nor to obey her command, but clearing the door, fled wildly away through the dusk.

"Here's your hat: I'll fire it after you," she called, and a sharp report rang out on the quiet evening air, then all was still.

The three girls stood for a moment in the door, watching the dim outline flying across the meadow in the direction of the highway.

"He'll think twice before inviting himself to supper another time," quietly remarked Cassie, with a satisfied smile.

"Oh, Cassie, darling, you have saved our lives," cried Florence, flinging her arms round her sister.

"I don't know about that; but I've saved the spoons, anyway."

"There, there, baby," going to the still afflicted boy; "don't cry any more. Sister Cassie was just making a dirty old tramp hop; she didn't really shoot him, she was playing."

"Oh, Cassie, you splendid, brave girl. How did you ever happen to think to go crazy?" asked Rose, as she looked over her shoulder from the door she was barricading.

"Well, I knew something had to be done, and that just popped into my mind. I was doing 'Ophelia' the other day up in my room, so I was in practice, and didn't I make a sweetly pensive maniac? Now, I hope you girls will never again make disrespectful comments upon any little private theatricals of mine. If I had never cultivated my dramatic talents, what would have become of you, I'd like to know?" EDITH SUMMERS.

Jumbled Story Competition.

(No. 5.)

SEE OPPOSITE PAGE ☞

Six Prizes, one of £5 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the opposite page, in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, and the first line is in its correct position, but the title and signature are jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumble Story."

All competitions to be in by Tuesday, August 4th.

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Jumbled Story. } No. 5.

MAN O' WAR STICK.

Briefly, the situation was this: Lord Douglas had in a moment of pressing need, had tied himself down for a suitable trinket for a wedding present.

He was a hard working, capable man, if not particularly brilliant, and he had every right to expect that she would like to shriek. Here was an opportunity by which she might work the combination of Lord Deane."

For they had noticed that his lordship made himself dropped right at her feet. She had only to stretch this plot that she had devised. It was a chance, however, game. She had thought all the morning of some means to send the parcel which I received by mistake in spite of the fact that with every package he inclosed flowers and jewels. Certain it was that she was now pretty Mrs. Montague, and here was the solution.

And it was known that she was for ever in dearth of Douglas' compliments.' I still keep the necklace, and something less acceptable (and less substantial) than life to a very ineligible personage.

Now Diggles, as all the world knew, was brother-in-law to his old college friend, Deane; he had, in fact, intimated that he was. With his wife, however, it was different. Two roads lie before me, and I do not know which to take. Craven Road, Park Lane,' and below: 'With Lord Douglas and his jealous wife, and Lord Douglas and Rubett. As an esteemed customer she was privileged to leave her down in the country, through fear that she was brother-in-law to Mrs. Montague.

That afternoon Mrs. Deane dropped in at the well wife as they were taking their first sip of coffee one of unique form.

Perhaps, for this reason, she cultivated Lord Douglas, as every year advanced. Finally, he was compelled to reach his wife's ears that anything beyond the strictest known jewellers of Bond Street, Messrs Brightstone and declined to give the appointment of Minister of Pepotoi this post.

The blow had fallen on Deane and his pretty little letters. Among others was one which made him turn out her hand and take it, and she would win her uneaten breakfast. She read the letter through, and kept very well supplied with them.

He himself bore his years well, and looked, especially to Mrs. Montague; but whether this had anything by the five-o'clock post without fail. Would his lordship of Pepotoi, had long lived in hopes of obtaining the offering.

It should be mentioned, moreover, that Lord Douglas, line of acquaintanceship passed between Mrs. Montague and, with a mumbled apology, he gathered his other in his long frock coat, every inch the Cabinet Minister was in town.

His wife looked wistfully after him, and then at his post.

And Mrs. Deane chuckled to herself when the next man enter.

"Then you may leave it," said Lord Douglas. Although engrossed in the tray of knick-knacks which the the firm continued, holding up for inspection a necklace in his formal letter, that he had selected Diggles for the one, but a different one. and one of superior quality. On I ordered a pearl necklace, and this morning I receiv d two immense bronzes had been placed for the time. She seemed to grow stouter and shorter and redder counter. They were very sorry, but it had not arrived; this morning from Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett with the purchase.

"Lord Douglas has just ordered a similar one to this," in a loud voice, and strode angrily from the shop.

Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett bowed low to the glass doors swing open, and a tall, commanding-looking assistant was displaying, she noticed, herself unseen, the morning at breakfast. His face fell as he read the letter, post came in.

Could they send it off for his lordship? It would go it would come in a couple of hours.

Lord Douglas read this letter through three times; a card inside was written: 'To Mrs. Montague, 203, and himself.

"Is that pearl necklace ready yet?" he demanded.

Mr. Deane, the disappointed aspirant to the Ministership be good enough to give the address?

"203, Craven Road, Park Lane," replied his lordship. papers together and hastily left the room.

It meant a good deal more to him than people might have one at a bargain.

To make the situation clear, it should be added also "I have decided, after all, to give the position to direct to you, and hear what you said. Yesterday of ousting Diggles, and not to be missed.

Mrs. Deane's heart stopped beating. She felt as though her mouth took a determined expression.

"Have you any pearl necklaces?" she asked.

Messrs Brightstone and Rubett had a few in stock, to do with the matter it was not known. People said it had.

It happened that her search led her to a counter where very pleasant to that lively and vivacious widow.

Mrs Deane concluded the bargain, and drove away but, unfortunately, all of an inferior quality. Madame grew still paler.

She wondered, as she went home, if it was very wicked, it should have been his. It was clear to see that Diggles supposed.

At his office next morning the first thing Lord Douglas should be mistaken for his housekeeper, whenever he wander about the shop at will until she should chance on that letter to Diggles yet?"

No, my lord," the man replied; "I was about to address the envelope."

It was written in a feminine hand, and ran as follows:

"Dear Lord Douglas,—I am in terrible perplexity: I ought, I feel, to let your dear wife know everything I did was to write to Diggles, informing him of his appointment as Minister of Pepotoi. Then he looked at his very pale when he had read it. He studied it again, and that his lordship lived in mortal dread lest it should have learnt. But on second thoughts I determined await your reply as to what I shall do with it.—Yours had obtained it merely on account of the fact that he then he bit his lip hard, and his voice was very shaky, as, turning to his secretary, he said: "Have you posted sincerely, Mary Deane.

"P.S.S.—I still feel that I ought to write to your wife.—M. D."

"P.S.—Your letter was such a disappointment. Will you not reconsider your decision?—M. D.

M. Jurcas.

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PAUPER BLUE-BLOOD

SUMMARY.

GEORGINA PLUFF is a governess in the employ of the Ravenscrofts. Her charge is Eva, daughter of Sir Reginald and Lady Ravenscroft. Sefton, the only son, is engaged to Lady Norah Cannington, whose father, hearing on good authority of Sir Reginald's impending ruin, compels his daughter to write a letter to Sefton, saying that the engagement must be broken off. Before the financial crash arrives, Sir Reginald commits suicide in his own grounds, and Sefton's cup of bitterness is filled by the arrival of Lady Norah's letter. Georgina Pluff is aware of the late Sir Reginald's past, and threatens to expose his misdeeds unless she is married to Sefton. After the wedding Georgina visits her wealthy cousin, John Pluff, a retired grocer, and impresses him with her social position. Lady Norah receives a visit from a friend of Sefton, Douglas Shirling, who gives expression to his opinion concerning her treatment of Sefton. Georgina goes to stop with Pluff at Queen's Gate House. Lady Norah becomes engaged to the Duke of Malvern, but at the cost of her own happiness. Sefton's mother and sister go to stop at Ermyn Way, and he joins them.

CHAPTER X.

TOMMY'S JOKE.

THE Hon. Miss Shirling was wrapped in beautiful abstraction, her arms folded, her body sunk into the recesses of an enormous chair, half of which was occupied by a sleek red setter. At a table by the open window Sir Sefton sighed over a letter, which evidently caused him some annoyance, for he eventually tore up the sheet and an envelope addressed to Lady Ravenscroft at Queen's Gate House. He crossed to a sofa on which lay a pile of newspapers, selected one, and stood reading it at the back of Miss Shirling's chair.

This was her own most private sanctum, into which she had invited him to wipe off his arrears of correspondence, a strangely unfeminine room. The walls were decorated chiefly with a fine collection of horns, sporting pictures, and photographs of horses and dogs. Her literature ranged from the QUEEN to the PINK 'UN. Every imaginable paper lay strewn about, no books, save a volume of "Modern Dogs," and a racing calender.

Wrapped in beautiful abstraction.

She and Sefton had been chums since childhood. Her acquaintances knew her as Sarah Shirling, but to her intimates she was "Tommy," always Tommy, nothing more. That was the name she loved the best, the name that seemed part of herself. Petite, with the trimmest figure and the brightest eyes, she was one of the prettiest and smartest little women in the county. Some people called her empty-headed and wild, on account of her daring horsemanship and passion for the stables, but none could deny she was a Shirling to her finger-tips, her natural refinement was her salvation.

She leant her head as far back as possible, and tried to look at Sefton over her eyelids.

"It gives me an uncomfortable sensation, the feeling that you are standing there, like a ghost behind me. Won't you come and sit down?"

He did not answer her remark, but stiffened out his paper, and gave vent to a low laugh.

"What's the joke?" asked Tommy, passing her white hand over the setter's waving coat.

"Listen. Did you ever hear such an advertisement? What *are* we coming to? 'A lady of position would be received *sub rôsa* as paying guest in a titled family. County society; old family mansion; carriages kept; terms £500 a year.'"

"Who ever can it be?" asked Tommy curiously, rising to the disgust of the dog whose nose and front paws used her knees as a pillow. She took the paper from Sefton, and scanned the paragraph.

"I *should* like to know! Couldn't we find out? It would be such fun!"

Her suggestion was made purely for the sake of a joke, and from no prying meanness. She was utterly thoughtless, and in harmless merriment resolved to unearth the "titled family" for her own amusement.

"I know," she cried—"I'll write a letter, and ask for particulars."

"Wouldn't that be rather a shabby trick to play?"

"Not if we keep it quite to ourselves, don't tell a soul. I have all my letters forwarded from the club, and will use that address."

"But probably these people, whoever they are, will know all about you, and guess it is humbug."

Tommy shook her head wisely.

"I am not going to give my name, and there is just the chance they may not trouble to look me up. See," crossing to her writing table, "I shall word my epistle something like this."

She tore out the paragraph and pinned it on the top of her letter.

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"Let me see," biting the tip of her penholder. "Oh, yes, I have it. 'A lady of position would be glad to have particulars of the above advertisement, name of family, and in what county the "mansion" is situated, address:

"'The President of the Sportswoman's Club,
"'106, Piccadilly.'"

"You ought not to do it, really," Sefton protested, hoping she wouldn't take his advice.

But feminine curiosity prevailed, and Tommy, laughing at his scruples, stuck down the envelope, addressing it in her dashing masculine hand.

The letter was posted, and the subject forgotten for the time.

His visit to Ermyn Way was making a fresh man of Sefton. No one had failed to notice on his arrival his altered looks, and unmistakable depression. They one and all determined to rouse and cheer him, and thought it a thousand pities that since his marriage he cooped himself up at Ravenscroft Park, and dropped most of his old friends.

"You see, mother," he explained, when the Dowager Lady Ravenscroft took him to task about this. "I absolutely have not the money to go into society, or Heaven knows I would not stay a day at home. It seems almost foolish clinging on to the old place, but I believe you would break your heart if it were sold, even though you never go there now."

"You are right, Sefton. It is a horrible idea to think that after centuries it should pass out of our family."

Biting the tip of her penholder.

Her son bowed his head without a protest. It appeared quite natural and right that he, as head of the old house, should martyr himself for the sake of the estate.

These days at Ermyn Way, with his mother and sister and a host of affectionate old friends, were very dear to him, though destined to be all too short.

Miss Shirling was always up early and had generally finished her breakfast before the rest of the household were down. Since Sefton's advent she had a companion at her lonely meal, for to sleep late on summer mornings was impossible to him.

She was pouring out his coffee and running her eyes over a pile of correspondence when a letter, re-addressed from the Sportswoman's Club and marked "Personal," met her glance. She held it up with a merry smile, addressing Sefton across the table.

He could not see the writing, only a large purple seal.

"Here it is at last," she cried. "The letter from the titled family."

But even as she spoke jestingly, a sudden qualm of conscience crept over her soul. Perhaps it *was* mean after all! What did it matter to her who these people were, or how they added an extra £500 per annum to their income? Now the answer was actually in her hand—the flavour of the joke had fled. It was tame, unkind, unnecessary.

She almost longed to tear it up unopened, but was loth to reveal her penitence to Sefton.

"Read it out," he said expectantly, an amused twinkle in his eyes.

"Wait a moment. Let us toss who shall open it—you or I!"

"Very well," replied Sefton, drawing a coin from his pocket.

"Heads, you; tails, me," said Miss Shirling. "Which is it?" as the shilling fell and rolled along the cloth.

"Heads!"

"Catch!"

With a sigh of relief she threw the letter at him. It fell in a dish of scrambled eggs.

He picked it out (the mauve seal still uppermost) and cut it open with a knife.

A strange look passed over his face as he read, his brow grew dark, the lines round his mouth deepened, the strong likeness to his father had never been more distinct.

Miss Shirling could not fail to notice the change. What could the letter say to upset him so? His hand shook, his lips were set, and the silence in the room became oppressive.

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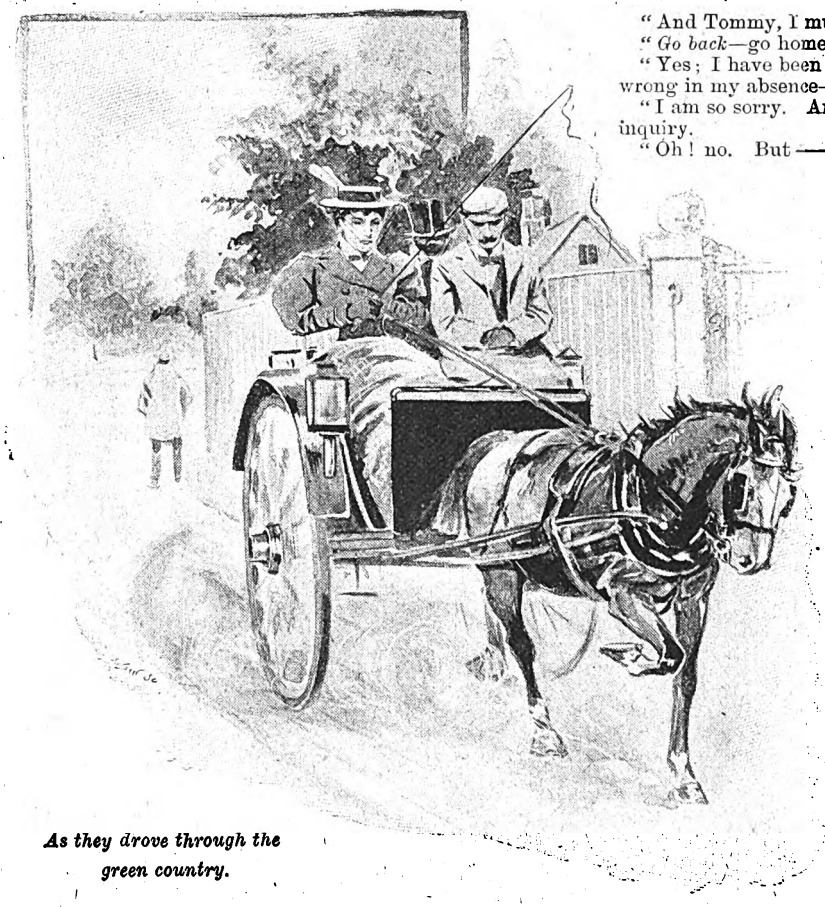

As they drove through the green country.

"Well?" she asked softly, raising her eyebrows and leaning her elbows on the table.

Sefton rose and came across to her, the letter crushed in his clenched fist. He spoke with an effort, the flash of anger in his eyes.

But they grew pleading and wistful as they met hers.

"I want to ask you a favour, Tommy. Will you let me destroy this answer without your seeing it?"

"Why?"

"Because it comes from someone I know intimately—a woman. We both know her—myself more especially. It is not fair to her or the husband. Their secrets can be nothing to you. They are well-known people, and we had no right to make fun of their poverty for the sake of our own diversion. May I?" holding the sheet ready for destruction.

Who could resist his earnest tone? Certainly not Sarah Shirling. She nodded her head and turned again to the coffee pot.

"By all means," she murmured. "I was feeling desperately ashamed of myself when we tossed."

Sir Sefton tore the letter to shreds, and walked gloomily back to his seat, but he ate no breakfast, and hardly spoke.

Tommy's sympathetic eyes watched him furtively, seeing he was thoroughly perturbed, and tactfully refrained from pressing food upon him.

He read his own letters silently, perhaps something in them troubled him.

"Are you driving into the town this morning?" he asked.

"Yes. The cart is waiting for me now."

"May I come with you? I want to send a telegram."

"Certainly."

"And Tommy, I must go back to-day."

"*Go back*—go home—to Ravenscroft Park?"

"Yes; I have been away long enough. Things are going wrong in my absence—very wrong."

"I am so sorry. Any of the horses ill?" with anxious inquiry.

"Oh! no. But——"

She waited for the solution of that "but," only it never came. Sefton thought better of it, and walked out of the room, leaving his sentence unfinished.

"I shall be ready in a minute," she cried, running for her hat.

Sefton snatched a cap in the hall, and went out to cool his boiling blood.

"How dare she!" he muttered fiercely between his clenched teeth, the overwhelming pride of his nature stinging and cutting him through and through. "Curse her!" the words were wrung forth involuntarily, the outcome of a sudden and awful hate for Georgina. At first he had tried to make the best of his wife, but gradually the strain of her presence told on his nerves, and this last action, the advertisement, inserted *sub rôsa* without his knowledge, awoke an unholy loathing in his soul.

"A paying guest at Ravenscroft Park! Bah! I would sooner break stones on the road. We may have sunk low, but not far enough down for that, not to harbour boarders under the dear old roof. It's enough to make my father turn in his grave."

Sefton thrust his hands in his pockets, and paced the gravel walk, indulging resentful thoughts, and rehearsing the scene he should have with Georgina, the forcible language wherewith to bring her to her senses. She did not realise her position, when she proposed to make a lodging house of her husband's home, and as to the county society, who would look at Georgina and her paying guest?

It only showed him what a fool the woman was—not to be trusted a yard out of his sight. Perhaps even now she was haggling over terms with possible customers.

So his thoughts ran on till Tommy's voice broke this unpleasant reverie with: "Are you ready?"

He started as if aroused from sleep, and took his place beside her in the dogcart.

"I've ordered you an early lunch. I suppose you will catch the two o'clock train?"

"Yes. Thanks for thinking of it."

The beauty of the morning was lost on Sefton as they drove through the green country. The telegram he wrote was addressed to Georgina, at Clapham, tersely worded, but to the point: "Return to-day. Must see you."

When Lady Ravenscroft opened it she was starting for a drive to Hyde Park with John Pluff in his landau.

"I call that real cheek!" exclaimed her cousin as she handed the message to him. "'E gives you no reason, just sends an order as if you was his servant instead of his missus—with no regard to your engagements or my convenience. Don't he know we are entertaining, and that you're my hostess, at least to the week end?"

"It's just a draw to get me back," said Georgina. "If it was anything of importance he might have spent sixpence extra in telling me."

"Oh! he's getting home sick at Lord Gattons, and wants

his little wifey, is that it?" asked Mr. Pluff, calming down. "Let him come and fetch you, Georgina, that's the way to treat a young husband. Make him run after you. It will do Sir Sefton a lot of good."

Lady Ravenscroft hesitated.

"I think if you don't mind, cousin John, I will go to-morrow; but to-day it is impossible, I have a business appointment with a lady—she is coming to see me while you are out at the Owens, and of course to-night I must go to Mrs. Humphery's musical evening. She would be quite broken-hearted if I failed her. I like her immensely, she is such a charming, affectionate little woman, and asked me to write to her when I go home."

"Please yourself, Georgy, but you know as far as I'm concerned the longer you stay the better. Perhaps you'll pop up again soon, and bring the young man with you, eh?"

"Perhaps."

Georgina spoke wistfully.

"I will write out a wire to Sefton 'Returning to-morrow, have engagement in town to-night.'"

"Add an 's,'" said John Pluff, "make it engagements, and we'll look in at the Gaiety first, and dine at a restaurant for a change."

"How I love life!" murmured Georgina, as they rolled away in the direction of Hyde Park Corner.

CHAPTER XI

The General's Widow.

That same afternoon Georgina sat in state in the large drawing-room, awaiting the advent of Mrs. Rathbone, who had answered her advertisement, and requested an interview. She adorned herself in costly array, smothered the tables, piano, mantelpiece, and chiffonier, with the loveliest flowers to be bought at Gérards, and practised her greeting and elevated hand-shake before the mirror.

Presently the sound of wheels reached her ear on the gravel without; the rustle of a skirt in the hall, and "Mrs. Rathbone" was announced in a sonorous voice by the footman.

A lady, feigning to be young, but past the bloom of girlhood, advanced with a simper. Her eyes were certainly strikingly magnetic, her face well moulded, but her whole appearance marred by a very palpable red wig, dressed high on the head. The coils and twists of brilliant hair were marvellous beyond description, while a tiny bonnet of lace and blossoms rested on the summit of a much curled fringe. Her figure was slimmer than nature intended, much compressed by whalebone, and the excessive tightness of a close fitting bodice.

"Lady Ravenscroft, I believe."

"Lady Ravenscroft, I believe," she said.

Georgina bowed and motioned her to a chair with the sweetest smile.

"It was just a chance my being in London. I return to Ravenscroft Park to-morrow. It is so much pleasanter to have a *personal* interview."

"Yes, indeed. Your advertisement was just the very thing that I was looking for—a comfortable home in a *good* family. I have not many friends in England, having lived abroad for a great many years. I must tell you, Lady Ravenscroft, that I am the widow of a General, and before my marriage was one of the Bottlemeads of Basingstoke."

She muttered these words proudly, and Georgina dared not expose her ignorance by asking who the Bottlemeads were.

Mrs. Rathbone's face grew keener.

"Your mention of 'county society,'" continued Mrs. Rathbone, "was especially attractive to me. I suppose you have a very large acquaintance?"

Georgina shifted her eyes uneasily.

"I fancy you will have no cause to complain," she murmured, her heart sinking, "though, of course, it is not gay like London. Since I came here my engagements have been numberless. I am perfectly worn out. No one could wish for a more ideal place than Ravenscroft Park—so stately, so imposing! My husband, as I dare say you know, is one of the oldest baronets. Lord Gatton's son stays a great deal with us."

Then the conversation drifted to the bathrooms and domestic arrangements.

Mrs. Rathbone desired to bring her maid, for which she would pay extra, informing Georgina that it was all her *own* money, left her by the Bottlemeads. The dear General had not a penny, but was very well connected, and a most charming man in society.

"How soon may I come?" asked Mrs. Rathbone. "I am living now at a South Kensington hotel, where I am not at all comfortable."

"I will consult my husband and let you know the day after to-morrow. The fact is, I have had several answers to my advertisement, and among them a lady who writes from the Sportswoman's Club in Piccadilly. My husband is very fond of sport, and there is good hunting in easy reach of Ravenscroft Park."

Mrs. Rathbone's face grew keener, and her voice more persuasive on scenting a rival.

"But I am sure, Lady Ravenscroft, *I* should give you far less trouble. These sporting women rise so early in the winter and want endless attention."

Lady Ravenscroft murmured: "Do you think so?" and rang for tea.

As the two ladies continued their conversation and Mrs. Rathbone had all but extracted a promise that she might settle in early the following month, John Pluff returned earlier than Georgina expected. The sight of him annoyed her beyond measure. She particularly did not wish "the lady of position" to meet this vulgarian under whose roof she was staying.

"Introduce me, Georgy, dear," he said, bowing low to the smartly-attired widow. "Delighted to make your

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acquaintance, Mrs. Rathbone," as Lady Ravenscroft muttered the name, inwardly fuming at his untimely appearance. "I've been stewing myself at a big At Home, left early, and here I am!" plumping his heavy figure on to a chair beside her and ogling with his ugly eyes.

The widow blushed and appeared delighted.

"What a charming house," she cooed. "I admired your garden, too, so much, as I drove in. Perhaps you would show me the grounds after tea? I am fond of shrubs and things. I see you have a great quantity."

Mr. Pluff beamed.

"It ought to be a decent garden, considering what I pay my head gardener."

"Oh! John," broke in Lady Ravenscroft for once daring to omit the "cousin." "I am sure his wages cannot possibly interest Mrs. Rathbone."

"Really you are quite mistaken, I want to hear *all* about it," as John Pluff swallowing down a second cup of tea, rose to escort her round the grounds. "I left my little sunshade in the hall, but please don't trouble to fetch it," as Mr. Pluff rushed away, and returned with a flimsy chiffon parasol, of a pink rose-tint that clashed with the red of her wig.

"I will come too," said Georgina, a determined ring in her voice.

"No, no, my dear, I positively won't let you," exclaimed Mr. Pluff. "You are looking just fagged out by this sweltering weather, and a rest will set you up for your dissipations to-night. I don't want to drag you about 'alf fainting. Bide a bit, and don't you make a fool of yourself. 'Ealth is 'ealth and we can't afford to despise it, can we, Mrs. Bathboney? I beg your pardon, but I get so mixed over names," as a horrified protest broke from the widow. But she smiled and forgave him, as she sailed away, murmuring that she *was* a Bottlemead once before the General—etc., etc. Georgina watched their departing figures with a sinking heart.

Was John Pluff never to be free from designing females? Had she herself placed a fresh danger in his path? Mrs. Rathbone *could* not be a nice person, or she would have been disgusted at the vulgarity of the ex-grocer. Georgina almost hesitated at taking her into her home, but the £500 a year was very tempting. Lady Ravenscroft sat watching the clock, becoming momentarily more annoyed. How long they were? What could they find to talk about all this time? Eventually she peeped through the open window.

She moved back unperceived.

They were coming towards the verandah. She could hear the widow's affected voice, and her cousin's lusty laugh.

As they approached she moved back unperceived, but they had no intention of returning to Georgina, and passed on heedless of her frowns.

"I never saw such a bold-faced creature!" exclaimed Lady Ravenscroft, back at the window again. "If she has not lured that foolish old man away to the seat under the trees."

When about half-an-hour later Mrs. Rathbone returned to say good-bye, Georgina's manner had stiffened.

"I will write," she said simply, in reply to the widow's gushing intreaties that she would not keep her in suspense.

"I am so looking forward to sharing your beautiful home, Lady Ravenscroft. I see we shall get on."

When John Pluff returned from a final farewell with Mrs. Rathbone at the hall door, he asked his cousin bluntly "if she'd got the hump?"

"My dear John, what an expression! I am sure I could never be annoyed with *you*," laying a tender accent on the word, "but how you *could* have dangled round and danced attention on that Judy with a wig is past all comprehension."

"Wig!" cried Mr. Pluff, bridling up. "It was certainly nothing of the sort. I do not know if you were jealous, but the texture, the colour, and the quality, were quite uncommon. I have never seen anything so tasty and more to my liking."

These words were as thunderbolts to Georgina.

"Nevertheless, it *was* a wig," she muttered resolutely. "I would stake my last farthing on it."

"A most fascinating woman," replied her cousin, "and one I should like to know more of."

Oh! how bitterly Georgina repented asking her, inwardly reproaching and then justifying herself.

"How could I tell the creature would have that disgusting red hair and those brazen manners?" she thought as she went sadly to dress for dinner, thinking of the £500 a year she must now resign for the sake of her cousin's absurd fancy. "He shall not meet her at *my* house—the old idiot. I knew she was a serpent the first moment she returned his preliminary stare. My life won't be worth living till John has made a will in my favour, and is safely in his tomb."

Then she rang for one of John's servants to do her hair, and enjoyed herself for the rest of the evening at his expense.

Every now and again the thought of the woman in the red wig came to Georgina's mind, but she consoled herself by saying:

"I'll take the lady from the Sportswoman's Club instead. She will have got my letter by now, and I shall probably hear from her to-morrow. I don't suppose John will ever see Mrs. Rathbone again."

* * * * *

Sir Sefton Ravenscroft left Ermyn Way amidst general lamentations, Miss Shirling being the only one who did not drive him nearly distracted with pressing invitations to stop.

His mother and Eva argued that there could be no reason for his return yet, and Douglas counter-ordered the carriage, while Lady Gatton put off the lunch.

Now all this, though doubtless flattering, was highly trying to Sefton's temper.

Lord Gatton eventually came to the rescue, declaring he would not see a fellow so bullied, and accused his family of illegally detaining their guest.

Eventually Sefton found himself steaming back to his homestead made so distasteful by the presence of Georgina, with war in his heart against the paying guest.

Man-like, he had never thought to inform the servants of

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"I want a word with you, Georgina!"

his advent, thus he arrived to find the house in a general state of discomfort, and no dinner prepared. The worst of it was he could blame no one but himself.

Georgina's telegram annoyed him. He could not bear to think of his wife, Lady Ravenscroft, bandying the name about in John Pluff's circle. His pride suffered again, the pride that was destined to endure so much, and be driven finally beyond endurance.

The following morning another telegram came from Georgina stating the train she wished to be met by.

Sefton handed it to the servants, and went out riding.

"You've done me no end of a service coming here, and giving me the benefit of your title and 'igh bearing," said John Pluff, as he signed a farewell cheque for Lady Ravenscroft, before bidding her good-bye.

He saw her to the station, in order to buy a first-class ticket for her return.

"Here's a basket of apricots, some books, and papers," he said, placing his purchases in the railway carriage "Ta-ta, my love, and keep your pecker up. You are wonderfully strong and hearty, or I would not let you travel alone."

As she waved him a last adieu, her thoughts turned to the pecuniary profit of the visit.

"The penalty of his smacking kiss on the platform was worth a small fortune," she told herself. Embraces in public were always embarrassing, but from John Pluff they were positively outrageous. Still, after all, Georgina had no cause to complain.

Though she would not own it even to herself, she had secretly, in a half-ashamed, apologetic manner, enjoyed her stay at Clapham immensely.

The admiration she excited among her cousin's friends, and the respect with which they treated her, proved soothing in the extreme to Georgina's conceited nature. She recalled their honeyed, and frequently ungrammatical phrases, with a pleasurable tingling of her unblue blood.

She would repeat them for Sefton's benefit when he was in a good temper, and she could induce him to listen. There was also the scheme of the paying guest to unfold, and if one—why not many? The idea developed as the train sped onwards. She saw the disused rooms at Ravenscroft Park occupied with men for the shooting, and dreams of a fabulous income from these profitable people passed through her vision.

It was not till she stood alone on the country station looking for Sefton, who, however, was not forthcoming, that a nervous tremor disturbed Georgina's calm.

What if her husband's wretched pride frustrated all her plans?

Well then she would laugh at him, point out the folly of it, and gain her end victoriously.

No sign of Sefton as she drove up the long avenue, nor was he at home to greet her.

An hour later he came into her room, with a look on his face that boded ill for Georgina, already piqued and nettled by his neglect.

There were fresh streaks of grey in the young baronet's hair. Never before had she traced so vividly the resemblance he bore to Sir Reginald. Yet how different to the guilty but warm-hearted lover of departed days. The dark light in Sefton's eyes was as significant of hate as his father's had been of devotion. The contrast appalled the erect, defiant woman who advanced to meet her husband.

She opened her lips to speak, but his chilling expression froze her sentence.

He closed the door behind him sharply.

"I want a word with you, Georgina!"

(*To be continued.*)

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 2.

The guinea this week has gone to Mr. W. Martinnant 212, Algernon Road, Ladywell, whose card bearing the correct answer was the first received. The sentence which appeared twice in *Short Stories* dated July 11th was "Sitting on the table swinging her legs," on page 34.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 3.

The guinea has been this week sent to Mr. J. R. Wilson 74, Ferndale Road, Leytonstone, whose post-card came first to hand. The longest word in the issue dated July 18th without a high or long letter was *unconsciousness*, page 74, line 8.

POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 5.

A guinea is offered to the first person within 100 miles of London who first points out the longest word in this issue (not including cover) in which the same letter occurs only once. A similar prize is offered to readers residing more than 100 miles from London. The competition closes on Friday, July 31st.

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PETRUS THE INTERPRETER.

Colonel Greet was one of those men who have been everywhere, seen everything and know everything. Not that he was conceited; on the contrary, he was the most unaffected man I have met. His father was English, his mother French. Brought up in France and England, he joined the English navy when a boy, and after having served five years or so he deserted and joined the French Army, retiring some years later with the rank of Captain.

Then he went roaming about all over the world, filling various positions—manager of a company in New York, explorer, engineer in charge, and much else besides until 1870, when he returned to France and took up arms against the Germans. He continued in the service of the French Goverment for years, and finally retired and settled down in Paris in 1890.

I made his acquaintance at a club in Paris. It was his delight to relate stories of his adventures to two or three of his club friends who were English. He spoke our language perfectly, with just a trace of the French accent and a dash of American humour which pleased them considerably. I only heard him narrate one incident and that he shall give in his own words as nearly as possible.

* * * * *

In 1885 I was in charge of a small station at Long-Sai. My duties were not particularly agreeable, for they consisted in dealing out summary justice to Annamite pirates and robbers. These malefactors were brought to my headquarters—a few huts—on the shore, and I had to see that the sentence of death was carried out. We had a small vessel anchored close to the shore, and some of the sailors were told off to act as hangmen.

It was quite a common sight to see five or six strong fellows swinging on the gallows; and although in such places and circumstances very little is thought of the life of a black, yet I soon got tired of it and felt that I should like to hear what these poor wretches had to say for themselves. Perhaps some were not so bad—even innocent—and I might get them off. But not one of them could speak a word of any language but their own, and I could find nobody to act as interpreter.

"I must have an interpreter!" I exclaimed one morning.

The boatswain of the vessel mentioned, who was acting as hangman-in-chief, and liked the job, suggested that I should apply to the French mission in the interior.

"Right you are, Jack; I'll try it!" I said.

He was English. I like your English sailors, they can be so confoundedly cool and independent.

The application was made and the priests promised to send a man along.

The next morning came a batch of seven malefactors for execution; objects of pity they were in appearance, and I longed for the arrival of my interpreter, so that I might have a chance of ascertaining whether they were really as bad as their record seemed to show. And just at that moment up came a long thin shadow of an Annamite, and, with a polite bow, handed me a letter.

This was the interpreter. The letter was full of his praises: he was a thoroughly honest young man; one of their most promising converts; would certainly rise in the world and so on. He would be useful to me as an interpreter, and they had christened him Petrus.

"I've got a treasure here!" thought I. And I decided to make use of him at once.

"Pierre," I said, addressing him in French, "ask that fellow when he committed his last murder."

The interpreter looked at me vacantly for a second or two and then shook his head.

"*Ego sum Petrus*" (I am Peter), he replied in excellent Latin.

It was my turn to stare at Petrus, who began to reel off some more of what sounded like the language of Cicero. Then the truth dawned upon me; the idiots at the mission had actually taught this fellow Latin! He couldn't utter a word of French!

I muttered some tolerably good strong French under my breath and proceeded to make the best of a bad job. I brushed up my best school Latin, and by means of that and a few gestures, I got along pretty well.

It is a relief to know something about the crimes of a man you are about to help into another world; and it is annoying to hear a man swearing at you and not be able to appreciate his remarks in the slightest degree. Petrus was a conscientious interpreter; he never tired in his endeavours to make me understand, and such swear words as were too strong for such a flexible language as Latin he did his best to explain. You can't translate swear words to advantage; the original and the translation bear the same relation to each other as a landscape and a bad photograph of it.

I signalled for the boatswain and his men to come on shore and do their work. The escort had orders to return as soon as they had handed over their prisoners. I told Petrus to make himself comfortable in one of the huts till I returned, and I went off into the interior to inquire into another little matter—my presence was not required, for I knew that Jack could do his work.

It was about three hours later when I returned. I saw the row of robbers hanging, and Jack smoking his pipe, seated outside one of the huts. For form's sake, I strolled up and counted the bodies. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, *eight*.

"Why, there are eight, Jack!" I exclaimed.

Jack took his pipe out of his mouth and pointed to each one as he counted.

"K'rect, cap'n! That the proper number!"

"But it isn't the proper number at all!" I shouted. At least, that was the meaning of what I shouted, but I put it a little more forcibly. "Why! Yes! *You've hanged the interpreter, Petrus!*"

"Petrus," repeated Jack stolidly. "There *was* one of 'em who knew a little English and kept saying: 'He go some Petrus.' But I soon gave him *Petrus!*"

It was useless to argue the point; all the talking in the world wouldn't bring him back to life. I was really sorry for the poor fellow, and I didn't care about the prospect of facing anyone from the mission. I was therefore glad for more than one reason when, on the following morning, I received orders to start for another post. I have often wondered whether the mission-folk ever learnt how high in the world poor Petrus actually did rise!

George Day.

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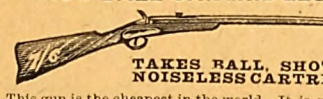

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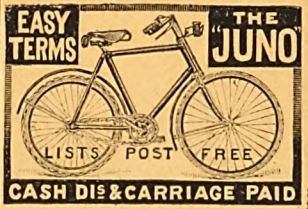

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THE TWO KINDS OF LUCK.

THE other day a lady I know was walking along Regent Street on a shopping excursion. Suddenly her eye caught the gleam of some bright thing on the pavement. She stooped and picked it up. It was a beautiful and valuable diamond pin. It had no doubt dropped out of some gentleman's scarf.

"What a stroke of good luck!" said the lady, as she stowed it carefully away in her purse.

"What a confounded stroke of bad luck!" said the owner, when he came to miss it.

So there you are. What is bad for one is good for another. One cries and another laughs over the same job. Your loss is my gain. You let fall a five-pound note on the floor of a 'bus and rush on your way. At Charing Cross station you want the money for fare. You put your finger and thumb in your waistcoat pocket. *Gone?* Sure as you live, it's gone. You have a cold chill. But the person who found (and kept) it feels warm as toast.

By the same token it was most unhappy and unfortunate for Mrs. Gray to have seven successive attacks of rheumatic fever; yet the fact that she did have them proved to be a lucky circumstance for James Greendale. I'll show you the way it came about.

Mrs. Gray's first attack was in March, 1888. She says she had dreadful pains all over her; and we can well believe it. Her joints were stiff and swollen, so she couldn't move her fingers. For seven weeks she was scarcely able to bear the touch of the bed-clothes. Her temperature was 104 degrees, and she was rubbed with embrocations and wrapped in cotton wool. She was confined to her bed for three months.

After this Mrs. Gray had rheumatism in a milder form, with so much pain at the heart that she was often afraid to go to bed. The doctor said her heart was diseased. From March, 1888, to July, 1893, she had six attacks of rheumatic fever, and had got so low she despaired of ever being better. Having described her experience thus far she ends her letter in these words:

"In August, 1893, I went to Cleethorpe, and whilst there I had my seventh and last attack. I was so bad I never expected to reach home again. The doctor at Cleethorpe said I would, at best, be an invalid for life. When finally I arrived home at Nottingham I was so altered that my friends hardly knew me. My bones almost protruded through my skin. I could just hobble about the house and that was all.

"In the following October I read in a pamphlet about how Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup had cured cases of rheumatism as bad as mine, and at once bought a bottle of Mr. Widdowson, the chemist, in Arkwright Street. In three days I felt better, and in less than two weeks I had no more pain. I kept on with the Syrup and soon felt like a new woman, gaining flesh and strength every day. Since then I have had no rheumatism or indigestion. I can eat anything, and do my work with ease. You can publish this and refer inquirers to me. (Signed) (Mrs.) Annie Elizabeth Gray, 77, Bunbury Street, Nottingham, March 14th, 1895."

Now for our friend James Greendale. His mother writes that he is eighteen years old, and last November (1894) began to suffer from rheumatism. His symptoms were practically the same as Mrs. Gray's, although he didn't suffer so long as she did. Still he was so bad that for weeks he wasn't able to get about. He had the same treatment (embrocations, etc.), and they failed with him as they had failed with her. Having told us all this, his mother adds:

"In January (1895) I was telling my neighbour, Mrs. Gray, of Bunbury Street, about my son, when she told me that after seven attacks of rheumatic fever, and being at death's door, she was perfectly cured by Mother Seigel's Syrup. So I got this medicine from Boot's Drug Stores, in Arkwright Street, and gave it to James. When he had taken two bottles he was well as ever, and went back to his work. He has had no rheumatism since. (Signed) Isabella Greendale, 76, Battey Street, Nottingham, March 15th, 1895."

Thus we see that what was a misfortune for Mrs. Gray was good fortune for James Greendale, for through her he found help. But above all it was good luck for both of them that Mother Seigel's Syrup cures rheumatism by curing the cause of it—chronic indigestion or dyspepsia.

And what is luck after all but the mysterious process by which we help or hinder one another? Write us your opinion.

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NEW SERIAL BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN JUST STARTED.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 397. FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 8TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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No. 32
Aug. 8, 1896.
S.S. S.S.

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BANK HOLIDAY NUMBER of SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON

LOVE ROMANCE ADVENTURE WAR HUMOUR & PATHOS

No. 397.] For the Week ending Aug. 8th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

ALONE ON THE SEA.

How José Andres Claimed the Life he had Saved.

AMONG the smiling villages and hamlets which border the Cantabrian coast is one little seaport town, gay and charming, whose sands and shore have made it a summer resort for the richest and most luxurious of those Spanish families who hasten with every recurring season to take refuge at some favourite watering-place from the vernal heats of the great cities.

Among the many tales, now grave now gay, which the fisher-folk love to relate to the gentry who come to sojourn amid them, not the least popular is the history of José Andres Villalba, whose fame yet lives in enthusiastic regret in the hearts of his fellow townsmen. He was a gallant fellow, a model of manly beauty, so says the recollection of those who have embalmed his memory—tall, slender, supple, with the satiny black hair and the clear, olive skin of the ideal type of Spanish beauty.

But what excited most candid wonder, and most trenchant comment among his class, was the insensibility

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of José Andres towards the charms of women. In vain the fisher-girls came running down to greet the coming of his boat, as they hailed the arrival of the others, chattering like magpies, their black hair streaming in thick plaits across their coral-red bodices, their gay-striped petticoats fluttering about their rounded knees. If José Andres showed his white teeth in a brief smile at their sallies, it was much to boast.

Save during the *temporada* (the bathing season), work was scarce and wages scant at the village; even the fish industry was declining for want of an adequate market. He felt a daily increasing need of larger earnings, and so, one summer when the season was at hand in which the old blood of Spain took wing for this modest village, as their prototypes of Germany and France for Biarritz and Baden-Baden, it occurred to José Andres to apply for "papers" to serve as *bañero* (bathing or swimming master).

One morning, when the blue waters seemed actually to leap and dance about the sportive band of doves which were the charge of José Andres, their number was augmented by the arrival of one about whom all the rest, maids and matrons, quickly gathered, with an affectionate warmth of reception which proved how little of jealousy or resentment they felt towards her for her exceeding beauty, which outshone theirs as the full blaze of the sun deadens moonlight.

She was no longer youthful. Thirty years must have brooded over her, but they had only perfected and completed her attractiveness. Tall, slender, dark, and pale, with black flashing eyes, her lovely face showed spirit, fire, and passion, such as might have been the gifts of Venus Aphrodite, when she sprang from the sea-foam.

When José Andres faced that splendid beauty, he felt that the spell of his fate was upon him. He grew pallid and tremulous, and when his hand, tanned and calloused by the oars, touched the silken, aristocratic palm of the lady, to lead her into the sea, he closed his eyes to give himself up the more to the delight of the moment, such as he had never expected to enjoy.

That was the beginning. From one day to another, the bathing master's passion grew more and more intense for this great worldly lady, who was to him the embodiment of all that he had dreamed of and longed for—the sublimation of the charms and graces of all the other women whose mere presence had intoxicated him. But she never dreamt of the youth's infatuation—she was so far above and beyond the little vanities and coquetries of the others. She, at least, could not stoop to accept, even had she known it, to tolerate, the adulation of a hireling, a menial of her service.

But for José Andres there was now no longer work—no father nor mother, no world, no space, no time—only the two divisions of time, when he saw, or saw not, his divinity. And the hours when she bathed in the sea seemed to him less than so many minutes.

There came a day which long should be of dismal memory and melancholy regrets in the history of that seaport village. The sands were covered with bathers. Seldom, indeed, they gathered there in such numbers. Suddenly the waters shivered, whirled, and eddied, circling in foamy whirlpools, and then retreating for a space, and then uplifting themselves as if with intelligent malevolence, they hurled themselves upon the beaches.

There was a hell upon earth. The gay and merry dawdlers, horror-stricken, struck down in the midst of their joyousness, acted each according to the individual's nature; some shrieked and then stood gazing stupidly upon their doom; some fell swooning; some turned and fled for their own salvation; some set their teeth, drew hard the breath, and turned to perish with helpless loved ones.

Bathing masters battled nobly in conjunction with the few who kept their self-possession; but when the tidal wave had spent its force, and the mighty pendulum swings of it in their diminishment had become dangerless, few were they of all the gay throng, so lately gathered there who were left among the living.

When the first shock of impulse reached them, José Andres was with the woman for whom he felt so mad an infatuation, so far out beyond the breakers that the shoreward rush of waters left them short of the land, and the retreating movement swept them again seaward. Instead of struggling towards the beach, the young man struck out with mighty strokes towards the wide waste of water, as if he were aiming for mid-ocean.

The undertow now caught them and now set them free; drift and tangle of weeds and buffeted human corpses were dashed around them in menace, but when at last the commotion subsided, they two were floating, still together, beaten, spent, exhausted, but alive and quite uninjured. Then failed her, womanlike, the noble courage of the woman, who had until now ably seconded with her splendid physical powers and her valiant self-possession every effort of her guide, her servant-protector. But now that the danger was virtually over her forces deserted her ignobly.

She threw up her hands and covered her eyes.

"Oh, heavens!" she cried, "can it be that I must die? No, no! I am too young to die yet!"

"These also were young—and lovely!" responded José Andres, indicating the floating corpses, "and now—only see them!" he strained her convulsively in his arms. "Is your life, then, so dear to you?"

"So dear! so dear! What would not I give for it?"

"Will you chose to live then?" demanded the man, devouring her with his flaming eyes.

"Oh, yes, yes! but save me, José Andres, and my gratitude will be eternal!"

"And do you know what will be the price of your safety? for I can save you; yes, believe me. What to me is this stretch of water? I could swim it yet, and carry you, three times over!"

"The price! I will give you what you will! but save me! save me!" sobbed the poor lady.

"Then I will," cried José Andres, "that you shall love me!" The madman pressed his fiery lips upon that proud, delicate face.

The woman screamed with terror, and struggled to free herself from the burning arms which held her with herculean power, while the bathing master murmured in her ear, wild, incoherent words of passionate vehemence.

"Andres, have mercy!" cried the unhappy woman, fixing upon him her starting eyes; "I will make you richer——"

"Make me rich?" cried José Andres; "you would offer me money? Know, then, that souls like mine care nothing for vile money! It is your love that I would—that I must—have, señora. I love you!—love you madly! Parents, home, life—all are lost to my eyes. You fill the world with your beauty, and you have made me the most wretched of men. Decide! Will you die, or will you love me?"

The lady looked once more across the water. Did she remember that one there loved her well enough to forgive her a sin as the price of her preservation?

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"You shall have your will," she murmured, "but—you must take me ashore, I am near to dying!"

José Andres dragged her weak form across his shoulder and turned towards land, cleaving with giant strokes the restless water that seemed to part before him and own him master.

As they came near enough to the shore to hear the wails and lamentations of the few survivors, he paused again, and said sternly: "A pledge! You must give me a pledge of good faith! The chain round your neck! What, you will not? *You must!* and swear upon it that you will keep your word to me!"

She took from her neck the golden chain, and hung it about the throat of the man who sustained her.

"I swear!" she murmured faintly.

José Andres uttered a cry of joy, and once more sped onward and plunged with her through the breakers. He would give her over to none, but carried her, almost lifeless, to the dwelling of her people.

Andres bore away the golden chain, which he kissed frantically at every other step. If he remembered the gulf between himself and the daughter of one of the first families in the realm, the madness of his daring passion blinded him to its width and its importance.

The next morning the little town found time, in the midst of its grief and excitement, to wonder over the departure, late the night before, of the noble lady who had been miraculously preserved from drowning. So great was the shock, it was said, which she had received, that she could not bear to remain on the scene of her great peril, but had so strenuously urged her family to remove her that they had consented, fearing disastrous consequences to her health from a refusal.

A year passed by, and another, and the village was solitary and abandoned by its old friends; its beaches deserted, and its villas empty; so sinister a remembrance had cast an anathema over the waters. But everything yields to time; so that tragic history was forgotten little by little, and when twelve years had rolled round, the little port had returned to the joyousness and fullness of its best days, and was the theatre of reunion of the flower and cream of three aristocracies.

One evening, smiling as almost always are summer evenings by the sea, there came to the favourite beach of the bathers, a cavalier and a lady. The gentleman looked about for a bathing master to whom to confide the lady, but none was disengaged at the moment. Presently approached them a man whose gait was light and whose limbs were nervous, notwithstanding his white hair and wrinkled countenance, as of one very aged. He humbly begged that he might be allowed to take the lady into the water.

"What! are you a bathing master?" demanded the new arrival, wondering to see one of that calling at that place in such unfortunate plight.

"Ah! yes, my lord! and none will dispute my ability to battle with the waves that have known me for such long years!"

There was such accent of truth and sincerity in the words of the man that the cavalier intrusted the lady to him with the utmost confidence.

She, although beyond the fortieth birthday, was still so beautiful as to need fear no comparison with younger rivals. The bathing master led her into the water, so gently, so slowly, that when she at last cast a look around to take her bearings, she saw that they were far beyond the other bathers.

"Look at me, woman!" suddenly exclaimed her guide, clasping her in his sinewy arms, and fixing upon her his brilliant eyes, which gleamed like coals in their sockets; "look at me! Does nothing in these waves which rock us remind you of other days?"

"Oh, heavens! it is José Andres!" replied the lady, but half convinced, and still endeavouring to trace in those worn and aged features, the bold, audacious lineaments of the young fisherman.

"Yes, it is José Andres! he the poor victim of your black, disloyal treachery; your love has been for me an abyss that has swallowed up everything—home, friends, parents, youth, hope, life itself!—all devoured by your love! I saw Heaven open before my eyes when in a supreme moment you swore to be mine for ever, and the dark pit opened beneath my feet when you left me, committing the blackest perjury. Woman, woman! you did not know, or you would not understand, my love, nor how my heart adored you with all its force—with delirium, with frenzy! I have tried with all the force of my will to forget you, and the struggle has only resulted in destroying the best part of my life, and in leading me to premature old age."

"Andres!" the lady murmured, terrified, "I shall always remember the generosity of him who saved me!"

"But that is a chimera! the years cannot return. The man to whom you have belonged—oh, he has at least been happy, while the hapless José Andres has been consumed by one sole idea. Oh, that man—that man is happy; he was rich, and he could obtain the hand of her whom I worshipped. But I, who have sacrificed everything for her—I, who was swallowed up in the waters with her—I, who saved her, and who, in return, despising reward, and only asking that she should love me—what is left me? Her ingratitude, her treachery, her——" His voice chokéd in his throat and he could not continue; but he pressed her convulsively to his heart and frantically kissed her perfumed tresses.

"But you will forgive me?" intreated the lady, encouraged by the thought of the strength of the love that had survived so many years, so many changes.

"Will I pardon you? Yes! oh! your beauty causes in my heart a fatal vertigo, that awakens in me again the wish to possess you for ever—to unite you to me for that endless eternity whose secret is known to God, and to him only!" And José Andres, trembling, palpitant, re-living in that moment all his life of deprivations, clasped in his arms the neck of his beautiful companion, murmuring in her ear sweet words of love that the breezes bore away on their wings, to whisper to the seaweeds of the shore.

The unhappy woman, struggling in vain to free herself from the arms that clasped her, turned a last look towards the beach, most sorrowful, most despairing, and saw, arising above the blue shadows of the twilight, the gay little town with its white walls, and its chestnut groves, where the winds went, sighing, to blend with the sighs of lovers. Never is life so dear as when one's hold on it is loosened. Never seem so beautiful such scenes as when they are about to be blotted out for ever.

Pale, stunned, the unhappy wife struggled faintly yet a few moments longer, with the instinct of self-preservation; then her head drooped upon the breast of the man who blessed the fate of dying with her in his arms, as he held her beneath the water. He gazed upon her for a few minutes, and then gave himself up to the force of the waves; a few bubbles sprang to the surface, and it seemed as if one prolonged sigh was breathed forth, saluting the pale moon as she rose above the water.

Y. H. Addis.

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The Crystal Magnet.

"What is this 'odic force' we hear so much about?" I said, looking up from the paper.

"Odic force," said Grimsby—Grimsby is one of those men who know everything—"odic force is one of those serviceable and comprehensive terms for which we are indebted to modern science, as it embraces, under one simple head, all the phenomena which used to be separately classed under such heads as electro-biology, animal magnetism, mesmerism, trance, etc.—in fact, it is one of those nine days' wonders which will soon make room for something else."

"Still," I suggested, "the present day, at least, is not lacking in liberality of idea, or breadth of view. I, for one, hope, within the scope of the coming generation, to witness many of the occult phenomena of Nature laid bare, reduced to law, and made to subserve the exigencies of everyday life."

"By-the-way," interrupted Grimsby, as if struck by a sudden idea, "did I ever tell you—it has just come to my mind now—of that experience with Count Kolnaky? It is a case in point—or rather you can take it as such or not, as you like. At any rate, it was a very curious coincidence, and, if you are all agreeable, I will tell it you.'

As Grimsby usually monopolises the conversation, in any case, when he is of the company, it did not matter very much to us what he talked about, and accordingly taking our silence for consent, he settled himself into an easy attitude, and told the following story:

"I do not know whether you remember, about a year ago, the advent of a certain Hungarian count or noble—at all events, he went by the name of a count—Count Kolnaky, we called him. He had been making the tour of the world, like most gentlemen of leisure of the present day, and, of course, passed through London. That he was immediately seized upon, introduced to the best society, and made a lion of, goes without saying. His full, black beard, and aristocratic bearing, were features of the most refined drawing-rooms of the West-end during his stay. And Count Kolnaky had many claims to social recognition. He possessed attractions which made him welcome wherever he went. He was a philosopher, a gentleman, and a brilliant conversationalist, all in one. I happened to meet him one evening at the Wyatts', and struck up an acquaintance with him, which lasted during his sojourn here.

"I recollect that evening, in the drawing-room, he became the centre of an attentive circle of scientific men and admiring ladies; for the Wyatts, as you know, are people of tact, and had chosen their company to suit their guest. I forget how it occurred, but the conversation somehow drifted, after having run the gamut through astronomy, optics, and electricity, to a discussion of the properties of the 'odic force.'

"My knowledge of the odic force was extremely limited, as was also the case with most of the company present, and we listened with much interest to what the Count had to tell us about it; and it was a subject he was well qualified to speak about, having been a personal friend of the Baron von Reichenbach, the discoverer of this mysterious principle in Nature. What? You are not very clear yourselves as to the properties of the odic force? Very well, I will begin by giving you a general idea about this mysterious and occult element, or principle—for no one yet really knows which or what it is.

"Some thirty or forty years ago, in 1845, I think, an Austrian nobleman, Baron von Reichenbach by name, in the course of some experiments he was making—he was a man of large means, and a scientific investigator by nature—discovered the existence of a new force, or principle, which he called 'od,' or 'odyl,' or 'odylic force.' Having ample means to indulge his tastes, he instituted in his spacious castle, near Vienna, a series of experiments for the purpose of thoroughly investigating the nature of the principle he had stumbled upon by chance.

"This principle involved, in general terms, the relations existing between animated beings and inanimate things. He demonstrated, to his own satisfaction, that such relations did actually exist—relations of sympathy or antipathy, if we may use these terms—between certain persons whom he styled 'sensitives,' and certain substances, such as crystal, and some of the metals. Thus, when one of his 'sensitives' was introduced into a dark room which contained an oblong block of crystal, luminous smoke or vapour appeared to emanate from one end of the block; and if the sensitive approached it, its presence was made manifest by a distinct sensation of cold.

"All beings, urged the Baron, are more or less sensitive to the contact or approach of some susbtance or other. Some cannot bear the sight of certain animals, or are strangely affected by certain sounds or noises. I myself, for instance, cannot bear the touch of velvet, or the sound made by drawing the nail over the surface of crape. In short, each and every one of us, who is in the least degree 'sensitive,' has his affinity, and his pet aversion, in some form or other.

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"Reichenbach's theory met with determined opposition and ridicule by many scientific authorities, notably the late Dr. Carpenter, the distinguished physicist; but, on the other hand, it enlisted the support of many *savants* of almost equal eminence. But I do not mean to deliver a lecture on the subject just now; so, hoping I have given you a glimpse of the inner mysteries of odylism, I will proceed with my story.

"Well, Count Kolnaky, as I said, was the centre of an admiring and intellectual coterie, all standing in the middle of the drawing-room, and the scientific discussion went bravely on for a considerable time. But even the charms of science will not serve to keep an evening party, if it contains a leaven of youth in its composition, in perfect accord, and, one by one, the ladies were observed to detach themselves from the group, sounds of more or less levity were heard from distant corners, and presently none but a few old professors and intellectual fogies surrounded and metaphorically buttonholed the Count.

"Presently Mrs. Wyatt, a charming woman, as you may know—as clever as she is pretty, and always on the look-out to amuse her guests, drew out from a little knot of ladies, who had evidently been concocting some plot or other at one of the doors of the conservatory, and made straight for the gathering in the centre of the room. Approaching Count Kolnaky, she said, at the same time making a pretty little mock obeisance:

The centre of an admiring and intellectual coterie.

"'I am commissioned, a deputation of one, to bear to your countship the ultimatum of the ladies present. It is that you will stop talking, and proceed to action. In fine, we desire you to give us an object lesson in this "odic force," that you have been so learnedly expatiating upon for the last half-hour. Is not that the message I was to deliver, ladies?' concluded our hostess, turning to her fair guests, who had followed to give moral support and backing to their spokeswoman.

"Then followed a medley of voices, from among which one could distinguish such expressions as: 'Yes, *do*, Count;' 'It will be *so* nice!' 'Oh, you *must*, now!' '*Please* oblige us!' 'I am *sure* you will;' with others of like tenor, during which the count, who, by-the-way, like most of his countrymen, speaks capital English, disengaged himself from his scientific *entourage*, and smilingly professed himself delighted to promote in any way he could the enjoyment of the evening.

"'I shall be most happy,' he said, 'to conduct an experiment with a view of demonstrating the existence and potency of the "odic force," provided I can find a subject sufficiently "sensitive" to practise upon. I see no reason why, in an intellectual assemblage like this,' with a comprehensive bow to the company, which numbered some twenty persons, 'I should not do so. Permit me to make a tour of the *salon* that I may inspect;' and the Count proceeded to pass leisurely to and fro, beaming good-naturedly through his spectacles, first at one, then at another, and imperturbably running the gauntlet of the masculine smiles and feminine titters which met him on every side. He did not, however, seem to be very favourably impressed with the adaptibility of any of us to become exponents of the mystery of the 'odic force,' for, after completing his round, he paused near the folding-doors, rubbed his chin reflectively, and was silent.

"The sound of the turning of a leaf in the book in the other drawing-room—we were a small party, and until then I thought we had all collected in the larger of the apartments—attracted his attention. He turned, looked in, and then walked in the direction whence the sound proceeded. All of us followed, as there was no one who had not now become interested in the proceedings of the Count. Seated at a table, reading, was a gentleman whom all of you know, at least, by sight, as he is quite a prominent member of the legal profession, and may be seen every day at the courts. As what afterwards transpired in this connection might possibly exert an injurious influence upon this gentleman's reputation and practice, and as I am convinced that he is a thoroughly estimable and honourable man, I shall, if you please, call him Copeland.

"Mr. Copeland looked up as we approached the table, surprise depicted in his frank blue eyes, and then rose as it struck me, to apologise for having withdrawn from the party. Count Kolnaky, however, anticipated him by remarking, in an easy manner:

"'Forgive our intrusion, my dear sir. I had the pleasure of an introduction to you, if I remember right, before dinner—Mr. Copeland, I believe. We have had

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quite an interesting talk in the other room, since dinner, as to the merits of the "odic force," and our lady friends here have pressed me to make a practical exposition of it, if I can. It has just struck me that your organisation is of just such a kind as to be sensitive to this force. The question is, are you willing to contribute to the instruction and entertainment of this company by permitting me to ascertain whether it is so or not?'

The Count sat down and penned a brief note.

"Mr. Copeland, who is a tall, fair-haired, intellectual-looking man of about five-and-thirty, smiled, said he had heard and read something about the mysterious force Count Kolnaky referred to, was interested and desirous of further information regarding it, and should be delighted if he could be of any service in elucidating its mysteries for the benefit of Mrs. Wyatt's guests.

"The Count bowed and thanked him, then after consulting his watch, turned to Mrs. Wyatt and said:

"'I must trouble you, dear madam, to let me have someone to carry a message to my servant at the Palace Hotel. Had I anticipated that I should be called upon to experiment with the "odic force" to-night, I should have come prepared. As it is, I must send for my crystal.'

"The Count sat down and penned a brief note, which he handed to the messenger, who had meanwhile been summoned. During the half-hour which elapsed between the departure and return of the messenger, and which was spent in desultory conversation, I noticed that Count Kolnaky engrossed the undivided attention of Mr. Copeland, with whom he talked in low and earnest tones. I thought I remarked, too, during this time, a dreamy expression stealing now and again over the lawyer's face, as if he had become oblivious to his surroundings. At length the messenger returned with a small parcel, which he handed to the Count, and which being unwrapped was found to contain an oblong section of clear rock-crystal, some eight inches in length by two in width, the polyhedron being almost as regular in shape as if cut from glass. The Count then asked Mrs. Wyatt for some silk thread, and while it was being procured for him he asked Copeland to take hold of one end of the crystal while he held the other. The two men sat facing each other for about five minutes without speaking. At length Copeland began to manifest signs of uneasiness.

"'Do you experience any strange sensation, Mr. Copeland?' asked the Count, in evidence to the state of his *vis-à-vis*.

"'The crystal feels like a lump of ice,' replied the latter. 'It has been growing colder and colder ever since we began holding it.'

"'Good!' exclaimed the Count approvingly. Then, turning to us, he said: 'Ladies and gentlemen, it is as I expected. Our friend, Mr. Copeland, is a "sensitive." I think I can with his assistance, make some demonstrations of the actuality and potency of the "odic force." Mr. Copeland, the touch of the crystal pains you; you can now let it go.'

"Copeland did so, apparently nothing loth. The Count transferred the crystal to his left hand, and then proceeded to make some preparations. He first lifted one of the chairs and set it down near the wall of the room opposite the conservatory, and facing the side with the folding doors. He then asked Copeland to take his seat in that chair, and next asked us all to accompany him into the other apartment, leaving Copeland alone in the smaller drawing-room. He then pointed out to us that, from the position Copeland occupied, all the interior of the larger drawing-room was invisible to him, accept a certain angle. In this angle he requested us to station ourselves.

"He next unwound a long silk thread from its reel, tied one end round the centre of the oblong crystal polyhedron, and getting upon a chair, attached the other end to one of the branches of the chandelier which hung in the centre of the room, gauging the length of the thread so that the crystal, when it swung free, would be on about a level with his head. From the point at which the crystal hung it was impossible to see Copeland, accordingly it was equally impossible for Copeland to see the crystal, the wall between the

"I want two gentlemen to stand near me."

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drawing-room blocking the field of vision between these two points; while from the angle occupied by Mrs. Wyatt's guests there was free and uninterrupted vision of both Copeland and the crystal, it being possible to observe both simultaneously, so to speak.

"'I want two gentlemen to stand near me,' now said the Count, 'so that they can minutely observe my actions and hear my whispers, and at the same time have a full view of Mr Copeland.'

"I was first to volunteer, as I happened to be standing close by the Count at the moment, and was also anxious to lose no detail of this interesting experiment. I have always been fascinated by the occult and marvellous. The place next me was almost simultaneously taken by a tall, dark, somewhat sinister-looking figure, that of a gentleman to whom I had been introduced that evening, and whom, for reasons which will afterwards appear, I prefer to call Mr. Daintry. This gentleman had, I noticed, been taking peculiar interest in the proceedings and was evidently well acquainted with Copeland, as I had seen the two conversing very earnestly before dinner, though, as I thought, in rather a disputatious than an amicable mood, and with a somewhat abrupt finish on the part of the lawyer.

"'Now,' said the Count, addressing the party in general, "you see how this crystal hangs. Its longitudinal axis points straight to where Mr. Copeland is sitting, like a needle to the pole. What is the reason of that? Simply, that during the few minutes Mr Copeland and myself were engaged in holding the crystal, a sympathetic relation was established between us, through the intermediary agent of the crystal. One peculiarity of this relation is that the crystal, or rather the "odic force," which passes through it, and emanates from it, acts as a conductor between our respective intelligences. By means of this mysterious force, messages are conveyed from the one intelligence to the other, with as much facility and certainty as if they were transmitted along substantial wires, by the electric fluid, in the ordinary manner.

"The Count then went through a variety of motions, such as taking out his watch and looking at it, yawning, scratching his head, and so forth, all of which were simultaneously imitated by Copeland with such absolute precision of gesture as to excite the greatest enthusiasm and merriment among the ladies, and engage the keenest attention from the *savants* behind them, all having of course, a clear view of both the actors in this odylic drama.

"'That is the simplest form of mental intercommunication provided by this odic current,' explained the Count, when, after a minute or two, the mimicry seemed to grow monotonous. 'A much higher order will be developed in my experiment.'

"As he spoke, he reached at random for a book from a table near him. He opened the leaves casually, about the middle, and I noticed that it was an edition of Moore's poems. He fixed his eye steadily upon a page—in the 'Fire Worshippers,' I think—and said:

"'Our friend, Mr. Copeland, will now favour us with a little recitation.'

"No sooner said than done. In a full, sonorous voice, with appropriate inflection, Copeland proceeded to declaim line after line of the page at which Count Kolnaky was looking, beginning, oddly enough, in the middle of a clause, as the page did. When he had rolled off some twenty lines, the Count gently closed the volume, and the declamation ceased. The ladies were in raptures; the scientific gentlemen looked sheepish and bewildered.

"'Pardon me,' said a voice at my shoulder, 'one moment, Count Kolnaky, before we stop these interesting experiments. I am sure a minute or two, more or less, will not matter to my friend, Mr. Copeland, and he would be the last to object, did he know it was in the cause of science.'

"I turned, and recognised the sinister-looking gentleman, who had stood with me, next to the Count, during the proceedings, who had taken the greatest interest in all, more especially the last experiment, and whom I have, for the nonce, called Daintry. If I described him fully, you would all know him, and, taking everything into consideration, there is just as much reason for preserving his incognito as that of Copeland, as no good could be effected by exposing him, and a possible injustice might, and in the opinion of the world at large certainly would, be done.

Mr. Daintry.

"'What I wanted to know is simply this,' went on Daintry, in suave accents, 'could anyone else—could I, for instance—carrying on the mental intercourse with my friend Copeland, in the same way you have done through this bit of crystal? I am asking the question purely in the interest of science, you know.'

"I was somewhat amazed, knowing, as I did, Daintry's reputation, to hear him talking about the 'interests of science,' and inwardly wondered what there could be in the experiments we had just witnessed to excite such lively interest in one whose tastes were certainly not noted for elevation of character, and whose science did not soar, so far as I was aware, beyond the billiard table or the pigeon trap.

"The Count, however, answered him with gravity and politeness:

"'You are asking a very hard question, my dear sir,' he replied, 'and one, which, I am free to confess, I cannot answer. Everything depends upon the sympathy or *rapport* existing between the parties communicating. The odic force is, indeed, constantly emanating from that crystal. The question is, can that force be so controlled by you, or another, as to affect Mr. Copeland in the manner we have just witnessed? In my case a mutual *rapport* was established, by our together holding the crystal for some time before I began my experiments. It may be that you can establish communication, without resorting to that method of doing it. I know that enough of Mr. Copeland's magnetic, or, rather, odic *aura* will cling about that crystal for several days to come, to enable me to hold communication with him.'

"'Will you allow me, Count, to try whether I can influence my friend Copeland?' in a curious voice.

"'Certainly,' acquiesced the Count, 'unless the ladies are tired by this time?'

"The ladies, however, disclaimed any such feeling, and Daintry proceeded to apply his hand to the crystal as he had seen Count Kolnaky do.

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"Copeland was sitting in the same easy attitude on his chair in the other room, and I kept my eyes on him, as I was as curious as anybody to witness the outcome of the experiment.

"About a minute passed without noticeable effort. In about a minute more, Copeland began to fidget upon his seat, as before. A few seconds afterwards he got up, lifted the chair he had been sitting on, and deliberately set it standing upon the drawing-room table.

"The action was so ludicrous and unexpected, that there was a general laugh, and much merriment among the ladies, during which Daintry explained that this was just what he had willed Copeland to do.

"After this, it was agreed by everyone that the existence and power of the odic force had been amply

Set it standing upon the drawing-room table.

demonstrated, and that it was time to release Copeland from his mystic thraldom, if, indeed, he was so enthralled, for it was certainly impossible to tell from his mere appearance that he was not in perfect possession of all his senses. And, so far as I am concerned, where Copeland crossed the division line from somnambulism, hypnotism, odylism, or whatever condition it was, will always remain a mystery; for, after he had set the chair upon the table, he turned, stopped for a moment, saw us laughing, realised, evidently abruptly, that there was something to laugh at, turned again, took in the incongruity of the chair perched upon the table, rubbed his eyes, looked again at us in a bewildered sort of way, and coming up to where we were standing, said he fancied he must have been dozing for a minute or two, under the pressure of Count Kolnaky's mysterious force, and asked us whether he was responsible for the misplaced furniture.

"The party soon after broke up, Count Kolnaky accepting a seat in Daintry's conveyance, which was waiting for him at the door, while I took the train, having first made an appointment to call upon the Count the next day for some further information about the odic force.

"Next morning, accordingly, I sent up my card to Count Kolnaky's rooms, at the Palace Hotel, a message being returned by his servant, requesting me to come up and wait, as the Count had left orders to that effect, in case he was out when I called; I did so, and was passing away the time till the Count's return by looking over some interesting books which were lying around, when the door opened, and the servant ushered in our friend, Mr. Daintry.

"We exchanged salutations, but our tastes having little in common, I returned to my reading, while Daintry sauntered here and there about the room, looking at things in general. I was not so deeply engaged in reading but that I was conscious of what was going on around me, and I noticed that, after a time, Daintry stopped before a little table and seemed to be examining some object that lay upon it. I saw that this object was nothing more or less than the crystal which had afforded us so much entertainment the night before. Daintry looked at it a considerable time. Then he took it up in his hand, walked over to one of the windows, and looked out. He seemed to me to be taking bearings. Then he held up the crystal in his hand, about the level of his breast, dipping it a little from the horizontal, till its other end pointed in a north-easterly direction.

"His actions had so much method in them, that I began to get interested, and determined to give them a more thorough inspection. I was sitting in the centre of the room, while Daintry was standing with his back to me, near the window; thus I had a good view of the position. The first thing I remarked was that a straight line produced through the long axis of the crystal would cross the City in about the direction of Chancery Lane. The next was that Daintry remained standing there motionless about five minutes, keeping the crystal pointed steadily in the same direction. Then his hand began to shake a little, but he kept it up for two or three minutes more, till it seemed to me that he could do so no longer; suddenly he hurriedly walked to the little table he had taken the crystal from, and dropped it like a hot potato.

"'Been experimenting a little with the odic force on your own account?' I remarked carelessly.

"Daintry coloured, and looked confused, but said nothing, and presently Count Kolnaky came in. The incident was forgotten, and passed out of my mind, till revived by a somewhat remarkable circumstance the other day.

"And this is what that remarkable circumstance was: About three weeks ago there died a rich old gentleman, whom I shall call Jelfe. Jelfe was Daintry's uncle, but did not take kindly to his nephew's peculiar ways. The old gentleman was reported to be worth about half a million, all of which would go to Daintry as next of kin, provided there was no will. But there was a will, and this will devised all the property to certain charities, with the exception of a small monthly income to the nephew. This will was drawn by Lawyer Copeland, attended by his confidential clerk, who is a personal friend of mine, and deposited along with other valuable papers in the safe of Mr. Copeland's office. When old Jelfe died, no will could be found. The safe was emptied, every drawer in the office was ransacked for the missing will, but it did not turn up, and, accordingly, the money went to Daintry.

"Of course a most minute inquiry was made by Copeland as to any circumstances which could throw any light upon the matter, and in the course of this inquiry

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one of the junior clerks testified that he had seen through the open door, about a year before, his employer rise from the table at which he was seated in his private office, go to the safe, unlock it, take therefrom a paper, which looked like a will, go to the fireplace, place the paper in the empty grate—it was summer—and deliberately set fire to it, watching it burn till it was consumed.

He seemed to me to be taking bearings.

"He said nothing about it at the time, as he did not dare to question the acts of his employer. When asked if he could remember the day when the strange occurrence took place, he said he could, as he had bought a new suit of clothes the day before, and had made a note of the date, which was the 17th of May, and the time was about half-past twelve, as he recollected he had just returned from lunch.

"Now, the curious coincidence to which I want to call your attention is this: It was on the sixteenth of May that I attended the Wyatt's party, and accordingly it was the 17th of May that I was at Count Kolnaky's rooms at the Palace Hotel. It was also between the hours of twelve and one that I was there, and it must have been about half-past twelve when Daintry behaved so strangely with the crystal, or when at the time that Copeland burnt up that legal paper in the extraordinary manner related by the boy, an act, by-the-way, which he has no recollection of doing.

"Another strange point in the affair is, that a line drawn in the direction the crystal was pointing would just intersect Chancery Lane in the neighbourhood of Copeland's office.

"Now, the question is, whether these points are mere meaningless coincidences, or whether they bear a strange and momentuous relation to each other. Are we to believe that Daintry deliberately directed the odic force, the use of which he had learned the day before, so as to inspire Copeland with the purpose to burn his uncle's will? He had ascertained the day before that he certainly possessed the power to influence the lawyer to obey his will. What so natural that as he should exercise the power for his personal benefit? He had also learned from Count Kolnaky that the crystal would continue to exert its influence over Copeland for a time, possibly a day or two. What so natural, then, as that he should seek to prove its efficacy on the following day?

"I will not pretend to answer these questions, or to venture an opinion on this strange coincidence; but you can now see why I was anxious to conceal the real names of the parties implicated in the affair, as a public disclosure might injure the lawyer, and might also be doing an injustice to the nephew, who, after all, has only obtained what many persons thought should have been his in any case."

T. M.

THE ALL-ROUND HOUSEWIFE

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Key of Jumble Story, No. 3 (see p. 185).

THE TRUSTED FRIEND.

"THE gloomy house at the end of the street is surrounded by a high wall, and a mystery," the Doctor of the suburb was fond of saying, and the epigram had made the place notorious.

There were few, however, who troubled themselves about the matter; those that did merely shook their heads as they went by and passed on. That there was a mystery, it was nevertheless very evident. So the busy-bodies discussed the matter, with the result that a watch was set on the house, and several facts of interest brought to light.

In the first place it was found that there was one young person in the house at least; and then it was noticed that she was usually alone, and, what is worse, was very pretty. And when she was scanned yet more closely, and her every detail, from her hat to her shoe, had been discussed, it was observed that behind the fresh beauty of her face there was a tired expression of sadness and worry: she must be very lonely, and yet the busy-bodies did not think of comforting her.

In truth there was a mystery behind the high walls of the gloomy house, and yet how deep a mystery, and how tragic, no one even suspected.

For the girl who took the lonely little walks by herself was a young wife, whose husband was something in the City. That meant that he would go away, and return at all times of the day; sometimes he would be absent for days at a time, and even weeks. Then he would come home worn out and fatigued, but invariably with a swollen banking account.

One day, after he had been home all the morning and afternoon, he had taken his hat when it grew dark, and bade her a more tender farewell than usual, he had made sweet promises to her, saying that when he returned they would leave their gloomy house, and perhaps would take a holiday abroad for a year or two. And then he would never leave her again, and they would be rich and happy.

So he went away, and his wife waited anxiously for his return. But the days passed by and he did not come; the days lengthened into weeks, and the weeks into months, and still she was left alone.

Then gradually she used up all the money he had left her; friendless and relationless, she knew of no one to whom she might apply for aid. She sold the furniture, piece by piece, until there was none left; all the fine old furniture worth fifty times the amount she got for it.

The jewels went, one by one, and after those her clothes. The wind was blowing cold now, and she had but one old dress with which to clothe herself. Lastly she parted with her wedding ring, and then she awaited the end.

And the husband of this poor woman, starving, and deserted, alone in the gloomy house—what was it that he was doing?

The mystery is soon explained—he was in prison.

"Fourteen years penal servitude." He had not dared to tell his wife. It would kill her. He knew that she would soon be in want of money. Oh, the bitter irony of it—the cursed, bitter irony. Within ten paces of her door lay hundreds upon hundreds of pounds of his ill-gotten wealth.

And he could not let her know. His hair turned white with the agony of the thought; his health broke down; the doctors knew that he had but a few months to live.

Now it happened that in the exercising yard this man met a companion in misery who was an old friend. Sentence by sentence, sometimes only one a day he told his secret when the warder's back was turned. In the garden, six yards from the pear tree, beneath a dandelion plant, lay buried his hidden treasure, half in notes, and half in gold, amounting to thousands of pounds; he did not know how many. The man was to dig it up, and keep the notes himself, and give the gold to the "little wife." He was to tell her that her husband was dead.

By the last day of his friend's confinement the wretched husband had told him everything, and demanded his solemn oath that he would do his commands faithfully. The man swore by everything sacred and unsacred that he would do so; the two men looked each other earnestly in the eyes, and then one of them was taken back to his cell, and a few hours later found himself free.

He set out immediately in search of the out-of-the-way suburb his friend had mentioned. He had no difficulty in finding the big gloomy house, surrounded by the high wall. It was apparently deserted. Not a soul was to be seen. Only a few sparrows hopped on the overgrown drives. He went to the back of the building, scaled the walls, found the pear tree, and the dandelion plant, and drove his pick savagely into the soil. The dandelion broke asunder, and yielded up its treasures. He came to a heavy iron box, and drawing it out, he prised it open. His heart gave a great bound of excitement as he found within everything that his poor friend had described. He put the notes hastily on one side, and gazed at the gold. "He was to keep the notes for himself, and give the gold to the little wife." His friends' words came back to him, and he remembered the oath that he had sworn. Then a thought from the Devil entered his mind;—there were only two people in the world that knew his secret; and one, though living, was dead.

The moon came out from behind a cloud, and shining on the golden metal transformed it into a thousand stars. The man ran his fingers through the coins, and listened to their music.

Then he looked nervously behind him, and put the notes back in the box, and the whole in the bag. He threw the soil in its place again, and raised the sack to his shoulders. Then he hurriedly left the garden.

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THE GRAND LAMA'S TOOTHACHE

LOUD was the wailing. The Grand Lama had the toothache!

All Thibet was in mourning, and a special ten days' prayer was being offered up in every temple throughout the land. But somehow prayer did not seem efficacious, and His Divine Individuality's ailment grew worse each day.

Nourmahal, fairest of the fair, tried in vain to ease the troubles of her lord and master. She hung about his neck, and mingled her tears with his. For—it must be confessed with sorrow—the Grand Lama actually wept. The Venerable Vizier was stricken with horror at this sight. "Go," he screamed to an attendant bronze, "go and bear hither the golden vessel wherein the sacrificial oils are blended. One drop of those precious tears ought not to be lost."

The sacred bowl was brought, and the Vizier with trembling fingers held it under the very nose of his imperial master, so as to catch the scalding tears as they fell. Still Nourmahal, fairest of the fair, continued to mingle her tears with those of the Grand Lama. This disgusted the worthy Vizier, who was a stickler for etiquette.

"Will the brother-in-law of the moon pardon me if I make a suggestion?" he said at last.

"The demons catch thee," growled the suffering Lama. "Don't you see I am in no humour for suggestions? Say thy say, and get it over."

"I merely wished to point out," observed the Vizier, "that it is scarcely meet to see the tears of one, who, though beautiful, is yet but a common mortal, mingled with the tears of a Grand Lama. Hadn't your Divine Individuality better put Nourmahal aside for the present? or shall we procure another weeping bowl for the fairest of the fair?"

At this the beauteous Nourmahal waxed exceeding wroth, and buried her lovely head in the imperial bosom. "Oh, dear Grand Lama!" she wailed, "the old wretch wants to separate me from you."

"I assure you," began the Vizier—but he was rudely interrupted by his sovereign.

"Take that ridiculous bowl away," yelled his majesty, giving the offending vessel a kick with his royal foot which sent it flying over the heads of the courtiers and spilt all the precious tears it contained. Nourmahal was enchanted. "A myriad of thanks!" she exclaimed, kissing the Grand Lama upon the cheek.

But, alas for Nourmahal! She had pressed her ruby lips upon the wrong jaw! Unconsciously she had aggravated the imperial toothache!

The Grand Lama bounded from his throne, and, clutching his former favourite by the long black hair, sent her flying after the sacrificial bowl.

"To the dungeons with her!" he howled. "Let her be decapitated to-morrow!"

At this moment the poor Vizier reappeared. "Your Divine Individuality is quite right," he said. "The minx was far too forward."

It was an unlucky remark for the Vizier. "You are as bad as she!" shouted the enraged monarch. "Take him away, guards, and unless he can find me a cure for this devil-born toothache within twenty-four hours, bring me his head in that same golden basin he has dared to annoy me with."

Then the Vizier was marched off, and His Divine Individuality sank back upon his throne, and resumed his interrupted weeping.

With the earliest streak of dawn, upon the following morning, the Grand Lama arose. He had spent a horrible night. The physicians had burned fire before his mouth, and the priests had prayed for the healing of his throbbing jaws. But it was all to no purpose. He was worse than ever.

The Vizier was brought before the throne loaded with chains. He had made good use of his time, however, and had one of his suggestions to make in regard to the imperial toothache.

"Let your Divine Individuality make a proclamation," he said, "to the effect that if anyone cures your toothache he shall be given a mighty herd of sheep, and made Governor of the Northern Provinces; but that, if he fail in the attempt, a lingering death shall be his portion. I have said——"

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The Grand Lama dried his tears, and, with one hand on his jaw, extended the other to the Vizier. "Take off his chains!" he said, "he is temporarily pardoned. We will see how his plan works. Meanwhile, make the proclamation, and leave me in peace!"

* * * * *

Arung, the handsome, was a shepherd of the mountains, and his father, old Zebe, had been a shepherd before him. All the maidens were in love with Arung, for he had a soul above ordinary shepherds. The tails of his sheep were more neatly plaited, and their horns more quaintly carved than were the sheep of any other mountaineer. But the love of the maidens was not returned by Arung. He sighed for beauties with noses less flat, and lips less thick. In point of fact, he was a very unconventional young shepherd.

Now it came to pass that old Zebe, Arung's sire, fell sick; and his sickness was a mysterious malady in his sole remaining tooth. It was painful in the extreme, and Arung felt sad to see his father suffer. So he sat him down to think out a remedy.

"If I have in my flock a tainted wether," he said, "what do I do? I remove him. Why shall I not do the same with the tooth of my sire? It will not kill him to remove his tooth; and, as all his other teeth have come out by themselves, there must surely be a way of getting out this one!"

It was a brilliant thought. Arung was more than unconventional; he was original! He tied his father to the earth with thongs of osier, and, taking two flints used by him for carving his sheep-horns, he extracted the offending molar.

For a long time the old man would not look upon or forgive his son, but presently, as the pain began to die away, he recognised the good which had been done him, and wept tears of joy upon Arung's manly shoulders.

At this moment the door of the shepherd's hut was thrown open, and a herald of the Grand Lama appeared.

"Hearken, shepherds!" cried the new-comer, "to the proclamation of his Divine Individuality!"

And then and there he read aloud the celebrated toothache proclamation, which the mind of the Vizier had conceived.

* * * * *

Nourmahal, the fairest of the fair, was being led before the Grand Lama to say her last farewell before her execution. As she entered the great hall of the palace, a youth in the guise of a shepherd passed close by her shrinking form. He was a handsome youth and stalwart withal. The favourite, used to close-shaven and stoop-shouldered courtiers, gazed with admiration upon the young stranger. And was the shepherd regardless of the beautiful being who thus scrutinised him? Hardly, for the shepherd was none other than Arung, the son of Zebe, and Arung had long sighed to look upon true female loveliness.

In point of fact the two fell in love at first sight.

* * * * *

"You say you can cure me?" said the Grand Lama to Arung, the son of Zebe.

"Divine Individuality!—yes!" replied the venturous youth. "But to do so I must be alone with you, and you must be bound hand and foot. I also request that

Sent it flying over the heads of the courtiers.

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the fair maiden shall be my portion instead of the promised governorship."

"Your demands are granted," said the Grand Lama. "You can take the girl; I will be very glad to get rid of her. And now, my subjects, leave me entirely alone with this youth. Young peasant, you can proceed with your cure. Recollect, torture and death are the rewards of failure!"

Arung set his teeth hard and thought of Nourmahal. "I remember," he murmured.

Arung as he pulled at the royal tooth. His trembling wrist did not do its work so well as in the case of his father's tooth, for then no hideous death stared Arung in the face. However, all this came to an end, and so did this first royal dentistry. Arung's natural pluck and the memory of Nourmahal, nerved his arm, and at last he pulled the Grand Lama's tooth clear from the detaining jaw. At the same moment he unwisely removed the gag, which he had placed inside the Grand Lama's teeth. The long-deferred yell at last burst

Pulled the Grand Lama's tooth clear from the detaining jaw.

The Grand Lama was bound hand and foot, and before the monarch could cry out, Arung had securely gagged his imperial master, placing the gag inside the divine gums. Then began the dangerous experiment. His majesty, the moment he felt the first twinges of tooth pulling, tried madly to burst his bonds. His imperial countenance was a horrible picture of strong rage and pain. If his mouth were but ungagged he would have uttered yells loud enough to bring every guard in the palace to the spot. But Arung's foresight had settled that!

It would be impossible to describe the fear of poor

forth, followed by another and another. The Lama had not as yet realised the situation. He still, in imagination, felt the awful grinding pains of tooth-pulling.

Instantly the hall was full of guards and courtiers, the Vizier and Nourmahal among the rest. One look was sufficient. They beheld their ruler bound upon the floor, his imperial lips flowing with his divine blood!

With one accord they rushed upon the young shepherd.

"Divine Individuality," cried the kneeling Vizier, "to what death shall we doom this man?"

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"Roast him alive!" spluttered the half-suffocated Grand Lama.

* * * * *

The baleful fire burnt in the square of the temple. Pale and haggard, the victim—Arung, son of Zebe—was standing by the lambent flames. The Grand Vizier was making ready to give the signal for the holocaust.

But the signal never came!

A breathless maiden, with streaming robes, leapt into the crowd, waving over her dusky ringlets the sacred parchment which none but the Grand Lama might use. It was a message from the palace!

The Vizier stayed his signal, and stretched forth his hand for the parchment. The girl advanced and delivered it into his hand. And Arung saw that the bearer of the message was none other than Nourmahal, his beloved.

Then the Vizier cleared his throat, and read aloud:

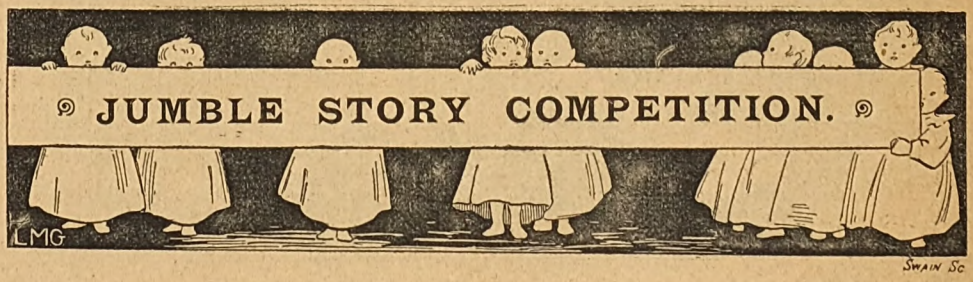
"To my worthy servant and Vizier, greeting—Thou hast been too hasty with the young peasant. For lo! I have recovered from the pain he occasioned unto me, and the racking toothache, sent by the demons, has entirely departed. Wherefore, let this youth go free. Conduct him before me, and I shall give him the reward which is his due."

The chains were thrown from Arung's limbs. He was free! Then, with shouting and beating of drums, he was led before the Grand Lama, who sat, with a white cloth tied about his jaw, on his throne of cedar-wood and gold.

"Arung, son of Zebe," said His Divine Individuality, "thou hast fulfilled all that thou didst promise. Therefore, I proclaim thee governor of my northern provinces, and command my Viziers to bestow upon thee great wealth of flocks and gold. Also I give unto thee my former favourite, Nourmahal, the fairest of the fair. I have been long thinking of getting another favourite, and this will be an amazingly good opportunity. I have spoken."

And so Arung, the son of Zebe, became a very great man, and was the father of all the tooth-pullers from that day even unto this. Ever afterwards he could, metaphorically, wind the Grand Lama round his finger.

George Perdos.



No. 6.

Six Prizes, one of £5 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the opposite page in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, and the first line is in its correct position, but the title is jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, August 10th.

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JUMBLED STORY NO. 6.]

THE FACT OF AN OLD MEEPOREGO VOW.

"OUR love is perfect, if ever love was," the man of our gurgling stream went splashing down at the foot of the black shoes and stockings which tried so hard to whistled to each other in the trees, while the swallows whispered sweet words to each other, and talked of the magnificent dress which a woman, who was standing behind her, she went hastily down the steps, and hailing their dingy lodgings early in the morning, and walking down from a cloudless sky, as they left the little way-side shabby coat.

The world seemed very happy that day. The sun was restrained himself, and then the girl, in all her finery, drove to an hotel, and it was not until she sank down in champagne, and with this they each pledged the health three days later.

And now their last day together had come. They left an easy chair, after having finished a sumptuous lunch, and unstrapping the small luncheon basket that they never love a man like that. How rugged looking he was!" Here she ordered an extravagant outfit. After that she pulled at the rake, while the regular "click" of the station, and went to the fields. They walked on the newly-cut, sun-browned hay. They turned it over with their feet, "but it is not the same man. My boy was tall and pale, and every now and again the tears sprang into the carriage.

Looking up the streamers, she found that there was the sweet-scented meadows. Then, when they grew five years I have yearned for this time. Sleeping and tired, they turned aside into a wooded, green-grassed flush on her cheeks, and tears in her eyes as she gazed down on the worn-out little hat that he loved so well, on the girl packed up. The man stood above her, looking very happy, these two, but now the Great Wheel of Fate beneath.

"MY DARLING LITTLE GIRL,—All is ready, every-story would say to the girl a hundred times. She would remember when we worked together in that dingy ware-shining so brightly, the birds sang so merrily, and gently stroke and fondle them.

Afterwards they washed the plates in the stream, and nestle closer to him, and he would take her in his arms, and a sweet scent came up from the fresh, green grass had turned its ugly side towards them, and they must look bright and new. The girl knew that his loving, paper, and, going to the door, called loudly for her land-side, she stooped hastily down to collect them. She of the other, for joy, and happiness, and good luck.

They did not say much; only the man's face was very sinking at his heart, and presently saw her enter a machine, as the hay dropped down in bundles from it, and the love would shine from her eyes. They had been very happy. But we shall be a thousand times happier waking I have thought of nothing but you. And now swept past him. He followed slowly, with a strange Black City, down into the green country. It was a figure. It was absurd of him to have supposed that she came floating over the hedge.

P.S.—Notes inclosed.

"Hasty boy," she said, "how eager he his."

So the man went away.

When the packing was finished they sat down over the page, and settled to take a boat which went home for his love. She was to stay behind and wait for one which left for America the next day. She turned to the station, they took a train away from the Great thing is prepared for you, come out to me at once. At lovely day early in July; the sun was shining brightly soft soil, and where rocks were to be found, and where a earnest glance was resting upon her, and there was a back, and called to the driver to proceed.

Thus they wandered about the live-long morning in the shabby coat and the faded skirt, and on the little girl's eyes. Occasionally their hands would seek each clean shaven and straight as an arrow. Bah! I could met his but she did not appear to notice him. The man would have come out in the little worn hat, and the girl's soft fingers in his own great, strong ones and flew about in graceful curves, twittering playfully. In the water, there to earn fame and wealth, and to make a little valley. Here they found a shady resting place, that she thought of her lover's letter. She read it the splashing stream, they made their vows. They fluttered down on the floor. Putting the letter on one glen, where the tall pines grew straight out from the last I shall meet you again. Every moment of the past counted them up, and then she kissed the thin pieces of the time has come. I only want you—I would to heaven that she might keep the few belongings that she left him.

"It is something like him," she was saying to herself, together again, and there, beneath the waving trees, by her this letter. She opened it eagerly, and the notes was starving—I had not a penny in the world. But the next field a carter was calling to his horses as they sprang out at the door of a fashionable costumiers.

At that moment the girl turned round. Her eyes and stood before her.

He motioned the driver to stop, and then with renewed pretence of eating. They uncorked a small bottle of own Boy."

Five years later he wrote this letter:

"I must enjoy myself here, now that I have the part. The man was to go away to the great land across other in sympathy, and then the man would take the future. But these things are not for other ears.

The girl was sitting alone in a little room at the top house. How sad it all was, and yet, even then, we were up at the sad, handsome face above her.

Her lover on the other side of the Atlantic watched me, and then, as they say out here, 'I struck it rich.' So that I could have written before. Three weeks ago I was at his post as usual, his eye was attracted by the lady. She paid her bill, and, telling the good woman had brought, they spread out their feast, and made a forward—how well he knew every line of that face and this is a wonderful land, and my old luck came back to when I see you. I cannot write much now. Do you chance," she said to herself.

The girl looked at him for a moment, and then drew near, was wearing. Suddenly he started eagerly impatiently every liner that came in. One day, when he come out to me, at once, my darling, I will tell you all now, after these five long years of weary waiting.—Your hope, and with a smile on his face, he sprang on the step of a big tenement building when the postman brought a cab, drove rapidly away from the slums, and presently through, and then put it lightly on one side.

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HIGH PLAY.

A COMEDY OFF THE STAGE.

By George Manville Fenn.

SUMMARY.

The story opens with an interview between Lady Braetoun and her son Roderick, in which she endeavours to induce him to give up fast living and marry Olive, Isaac Emsworth's heiress. After the interview he goes to see his racehorse in the country with Lucy Lee, a chorus girl, familiarly known as "Baby." Emsworth takes Olive to consult Dr. Murray, who advises a voyage to South Africa in the *Greyberg*, in which he also is going. Roderick, who is friendly with Murray, comes for advice on the terribly bad condition of his health, and the Doctor recommends a trip in the same boat.

CHAPTER VI.

Lady Braetoun Believes in Fate.

"Oh, Roderick, my darling, what have you been doing?"

"Doing, mother? Nothing. I don't know what you mean."

"I mean, why, of course, about Miss Emsworth. You have ruined everything. You foolish, rakish young fellow, you think that you understand women, and so you do, perhaps, those of a certain set; but when some sweet, genuine, innocent girl is in the question, you are perfect babies."

"Oh, I dare say," said Braetoun sarcastically, "but don't bother me with conundrums, please; I'm too unwell to be trying to guess them."

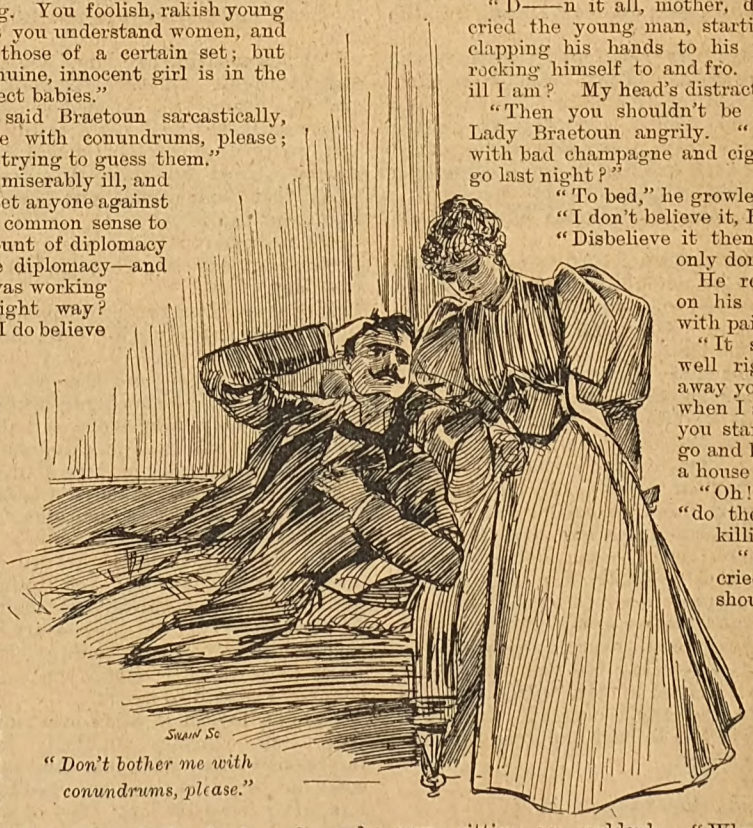
"Yes, you do look miserably ill, and it would be enough to set anyone against you. Hadn't you the common sense to see that a certain amount of diplomacy was needed—feminine diplomacy—and that I, your mother, was working everything in the right way? Oh, you foolish boy! I do believe you have thrown a million away."

"Have I?" he said coolly; "well, I am very sorry. I want it badly enough."

"And might have had it for the asking—at the proper time, when I told you."

"Dear me!" said Braetoun contemptuously, as he turned his head impatiently on the couch, and made a gesture suggestive of weariness.

"Everything was working so well. He was asking my advice, and she was quite looking up to me as a mother full of wisdom who would guide her safely through the shoals, rocks, and quicksands of society."



"Don't bother me with conundrums, please."

"D——n society!" muttered the young man impatiently.

"Your foolish rashness, or some knowledge he must have picked up about you, has spoiled all. What have you been doing?"

"Nothing—nothing new."

"Then it must be something of the old. Or did you go and speak to her?"

"No."

"Or to him?"

"No."

"Then he must have heard about that wretched theatre woman and——"

"D——n it all, mother, don't drive me mad," cried the young man, starting up on the couch, clapping his hands to his throbbing head, and rocking himself to and fro. "Can't you see how ill I am? My head's distracting."

"Then you shouldn't be so dissipated," cried Lady Braetoun angrily. "You poison yourself with bad champagne and cigars. Where did you go last night?"

"To bed," he growled.

"I don't believe it, Rod."

"Disbelieve it then: do what you like, only don't worry me."

He rested his head lower on his hands, and moaned with pain.

"It serves you perfectly well right. You've thrown away your fortune, and now, when I saw a chance to make you start afresh in life, you go and knock it all down like a house of cards."

"Oh!" groaned Braetoun, "do they hang a man for killing his mother?"

"I don't know," she cried bitterly; "try. I should be almost glad if you did kill me, Rod, for you broke my heart years ago."

"Bah!"

"How could you do it! You should have left it to me."

"Here, what the dickens are you talking about?" he cried now, sitting up suddenly. "What million—what him—what her? Are you telling me all this, or am I mad and is it some confused dream? My head's jigging, and my brain reeling: that cursed stuff has half poisoned me."

"Then you shouldn't have taken it, you miserable boy."

"I was obliged to," he groaned. "Go and get the bottle

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and give me some more. Perhaps I shall be better then. It must be right."

"It isn't right, Rod, and before I'd get the wretched stuff and give you any more, I'd see my poor arm drop off."

"Drop—drop," he said drowsily, and looking at her with a vacant stare. "Yes, another drop."

"I will not, Roderick, not a drop!"

"Must—must take it. Go and fetch the bottle—in my bedroom."

"Brandy, I suppose," said Lady Braetoun angrily. "Never! Oh, how could I ever have given birth to such a monster! Roderick, you are killing yourself."

"Eh? Kill myself?" he said, staring as if making an effort to grasp his mother's words.

"Yes, killing yourself."

"No: my last chance, old lady. Must have another try. Think better now. I suppose it's right. Must have some more, go and get it. On the dressing-table."

"No," cried Lady Braetoun passionately; "not a drop do you have if I can prevent it. You're drifting into a lunatic asylum."

"I wish I was in one, for I'm nearly mad now. Fetch it. Does dull the pain a bit. Must be right."

"Roderick, you have got to the worst stage in which a man can be. You went yesterday and overset all my plans; and now in your foolish despair you are intoxicating yourself with brandy."

"Brandy?"

"Yes, sir, brandy, and in your bedroom, too."

"Brandy—brandy——" he said, passing his hands over his forehead, and staring vacantly about the carpet. "Head's gone—can't think. Ah, there it comes back! It's agony. Quick, fetch it before I go off. Little bottle—on dressing-table—teaspoonful?"

"Roderick! what do you mean?" cried Lady Braetoun, looking at him excitedly. "Where did you go yesterday?"

"Eh?" he said vacantly, as he struggled up once more, and as if striving to follow what was said to him. "Go—yes'day? Dunno."

"You went to Mr. Emsworth's did you not? Look here."

She tapped a letter which she held in her hand. "It's all an excuse. Thanks me for my kindness to his child, and he is going to take her over to Africa."

"Is he?" said Braetoun.

"Yes: all an excuse. He has grown suspicious, and has set us down for fortune hunters. Just like a man of his class. When did you go?"

"Yes'day," said Braetoun vacantly. "Said he'd give me one more chance."

"Oh! Then there is hope yet," cried Lady Braetoun eagerly.

"Yes: s'pose so. Just a little. That stuff pulls me together for a bit, and then it comes on again."

"But what madness to fly to brandy now!"

"No, no; drops."

"Well, drops. Just when he has told you he would give you another chance."

"Yes—said, take them. Going to turn over new leaf."

"Well, well, then do. Oh, my boy, don't, don't, pray, throw away your prospects like this."

"D'y'ear? Get it," he said thickly. "Teaspoon—in glass o' water, be quick!"

"Rod, what does this mean?—drops—what drops?"

"Murray—gave me—yes'day," he groaned. "Sends me—sleep."

"Murray? Doctor Murray?"

"Umps! Give's hold."

"You went to Doctor Murray yesterday?"

He sat up and stared.

His mother caught him by the shoulders excitedly. "Was this before or after you went to Mr. Emsworth's?"

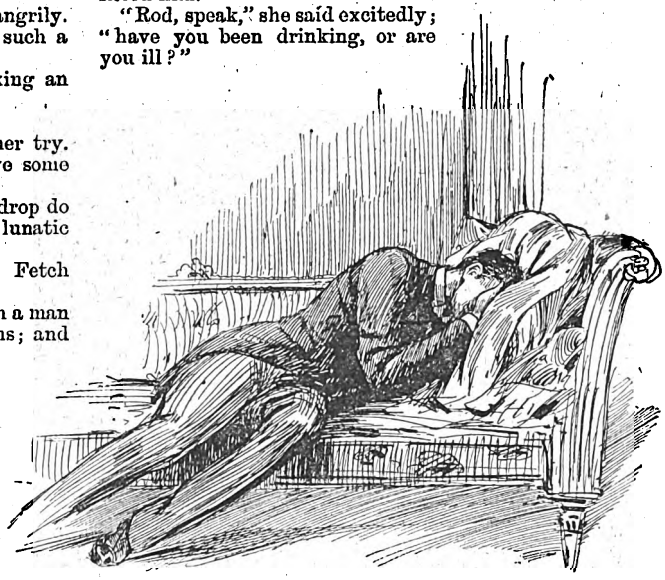
"Emsworth's? Dunno. Yes. Didn't go to Emsworth's. Saw him at Wimpole Street. Be quick 'fore pain comes back."

"Then you did not go to Mr. Emsworth's and propose to Olive?"

"Eh? No."

He held out his hand as if for a glass, and Lady Braetoun shook him.

"Rod, speak," she said excitedly; "have you been drinking, or are you ill?"



He sank sideways until his head touched the cushions.

"D——d bad—ill," he said. "Murray—says—killing myself."

"Yes, yes, quite right. Go on."

"No, no," he said in a dull, stupid way, as he struggled to grasp his mother's meaning; "not quite right—quite wrong. Going to South Africa."

"It's drink, and he's utterly intoxicated," cried Lady Braetoun wildly.

"Off directly—South Africa, with Doctor—old Bourne. Pull me round."

"You are going to South Africa—with the Doctor?"

"Yes. Last chance. Pull me round. Get the bottle?"

Lady Braetoun backed from him, looking bewildered, and stood wringing her hands till the diamonds upon her fingers gritted together and crackled. Then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, she rushed out of the room, leaving her son rocking himself to and fro upon the couch.

In two minutes she was back, with a bottle and glass in her trembling hands. Then, reading the directions, she shook the phial, poured out a portion, and pressed it in her son's hands.

"There," she said; "take it. Quick!"

He mechanically took the glass, swallowed the little dose at a gulp, and uttered a sign of contentment, while his mother stood watching him for a few minutes.

"Tell me, Rod, dear," she said, in a low, agitated voice, "did you go and propose to Miss Emsworth yesterday?"

"Eh?"

She repeated her question, and he grasped it this time.

"No," he said, "too bad. 'Bliged to go to Murray. Sea voyage. Set me up. Head buzzes. Yes, sea voyage with old—Cape."

"Oh!" ejaculated Lady Braetoun softly, as she gazed

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wonderingly at her son, who was staring vacantly about the floor, and then she hurriedly read the letter once more. "Then it is true. No, he must have heard something to set him against us." Then aloud:

"Rod, dear."

"Eh?" said the young man, starting. "Was I asleep?"

"No, dear. Is your head better?"

"Eh? Just a little. Going off now."

"When are you going?"

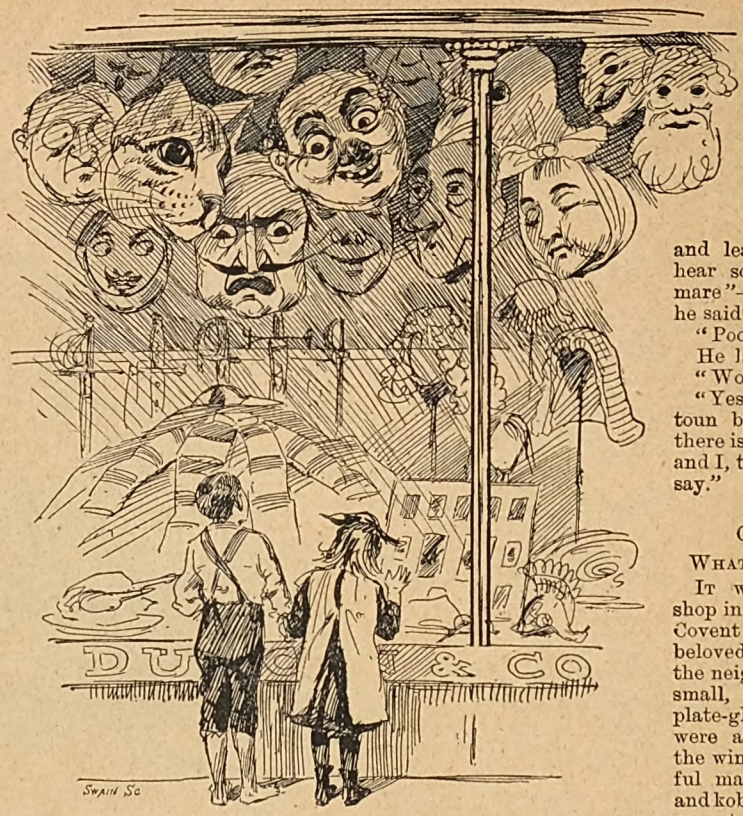
"To-morrow—next day."

"In what vessel, dear?" said Lady Braetoun, after another glance at the letter.

"Same as old Bourne and the Doctor. Greybourne—Grey—Grey—Grey——"

"Berg? Greyberg, dear?"

"Yes, Greyberg. Pull me together. Get better. Come back and ask old Emsworth. Get married, and be a good boy, eh?"



A showy-looking shop in Great Russell Street.

He sank sideways until his head touched the cushions, and, uttering a low sigh, he seemed to drop off directly into a deep sleep, while his mother drew a chair to the side of the couch, sat down and read the letter again, and then uttered a long deep sigh as she tightened her lips and nodded her head softly.

After a time she rang the bell, and a footman appeared.

"Order the carriage to come round at once, Robert."

"Yes, my lady," said the man, with a glance at the couch.

"His lordship is very unwell, Robert."

"Yes, my lady, been quite off his head two or three times, but he went to the doctor yesterday."

"Indeed, how do you know?"

"Sent me to Bell's to get a prescription made up, my lady, and I gave him a dose when I got back. Out of that bottle, my lady. Beg pardon, my lady."

"Yes: what is it?"

"I've been packing his things, my lady, three portmanteaus. But will he be well enough to go on Friday?"

"Oh yes, Robert. It is only a temporary indisposition. That will do."

The man left the room, and Lady Braetoun sat musing for a few minutes.

"I'll go on and bid him good-bye," she thought. "No, I'll write. Perhaps better. I should talk about the voyage, and they might not know. How delightful it is," she said to herself bitterly, "this tender affection between mother and son. Drawn tightly together in such loving bonds. Going to South Africa on Friday, and the mother has to learn it all from one of the servants. I am sorry," she said half aloud, "very sorry, that I did not have three or four more sons."

She carefully folded the letter and placed it in a writing-case, before ringing again and countermanding the carriage.

"A false alarm. My heart throbs even yet. How strange! Is there really such an influence as Fate?"

She started, for Braetoun began muttering, and she went and leant over his couch to hear something about "the mare"—"the odds," and then he said quite distinctly:

"Poor little Luce."

He laughed softly.

"Wonder what she'll say."

"Yes," sighed Lady Braetoun bitterly. "I'm afraid there is such a thing as Fate; and I, too, wonder what she'll say."

CHAPTER VII.

What Came to Lucy Lee.

It was a showy-looking shop in Great Russell Street, Covent Garden, one dearly beloved by the children of the neighbourhood, great and small, for, behind the tall plate-glass windows there were attractions galore. In the winter there were wonderful masks: demons, gnomes, and kobolds, and gauzy fabrics appertaining to fairyland—stage—diaphanous creations, spangled with silver, great dragonfly-like wings, wands tipped with stars, and golden tresses and curls hung so abundantly that they suggested that one of the horned demons with fiery eyes had been on a scalping expedition in fairyland and had great luck.

At other times of the year there would be operatic knightly armour suitable for fair limbs, helmets and plumes; brilliant swords which might fail in cutting the leaves of a book, but, deftly used, certainly good enough of edge to divide a ripe pear. Fleshings of silk or tinted thread, velvet, spangles, and lace *bottines* with satin or kid heels, and gloves and gauntlets glittering with metal of wondrous sheen.

"Duncan and Co," was to be read in gold letters on plate glass with a chocolate ground, and a merry trade had been carried on there for years, in supplying costumes for opera, ballet, pantomime, and burlesque. In fact, it might have been supposed that in a small way, Duncan would have made a large fortune; and so he would if success had attended all the productions for which costumes had been supplied, but as, at a moderate computation, about nineteen out of every score were blighted by what in theatrical parlance is called "a frost," the fortune was not made.

In fact, it would not have been of much advantage to Duncan if there had only been an average of one frost to the score of new pieces, for that worthy gentleman took matters very easily, and strong drinks with the same facility. So many good-hearted theatrical friends insisted upon his "taking a drink," with them, that his works, which were made by Nature more especially for the consumption of solids, refused at last to go. Then he did an enormous amount of winding up with stronger and stronger draughts: in fact at last it was rumoured that when he called for "Brandy hot" he meant brandy hot, and not an infusion of Sp. 1. Aqua 3

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Finally the works stopped, and the business went on.

Mrs. Duncan, a rather florid lady, had always looked upon herself as "Co," and while her lord took the orders, had done all the work, personally or by deputy, so that there was no check in the business.

A new burlesque was in preparation at the Thespis, and specimens of the work being done by hand and machine by Mrs. Duncan and the young ladies lay about on the back room tables and chairs, in the shape of amber satin jockey shirts, and amber and black caps, drawers, breeches, and black and cream satin top boots. For there was to be a jockey ballet in the second act, and Lucy had suggested that they should wear Lord Braetoun's racing colours.

"And so," Mrs. Duncan said, "the corpse will be in hamber," without for a moment recalling the position of the geological fly.

Duncan and Co. had been very busy with her scissors, and one of the completed costumes was on view, to the great satisfaction of a knot of dirty children, whose proceedings in their excitement became so demonstrative, displayed as it was in holding up "Little Sally," or "Betsy Hann," to see, that at last Mrs. Duncan could bear it no longer, but sallied out to scatter her enemies—to put the objectionable audience to rout.

"Here, what's the use o' my having that there window cleaned for you to come putting your nasty 'ands-an' noses all over it again? Be off or I'll send for the perlice. They're close by, you know."

The children were aware of the fact, for it is not a long cry from Great Russell Street to that of Bow, so they took flight in the direction of Drury Lane, darted down a court, and the most daring of them shouted "Yah!"

"I dunno what we pay rates for," grumbled Mrs. Duncan. "The place swarms with the brats, an' it oughter be stopped, and—well, now, on'y to think of it, and me not in my best cap! Bless her! She don't forget her old aunt, even if she have got her brome and her dymons."

The lady drew back inside the shop door, and directly after the particularly neat brougham with high stepping horse, driven by a severe-looking servant in livery, drew up at the kerb, the door was opened, and Lucy Lee, otherwise "Baby" stepped out, "looking like a Dooshess," Mrs. Duncan afterwards said, the door was closed, and the little lady turned to the servant.

"Wait," she said shortly.

The man touched his hat, and sat staring straight before him, while Lucy swept with rustling skirts into the shop, whose door was immediately closed by its owner, as if it were a trap, and she had just taken an unwary bird, one which she folded immediately in her arms.

"My own precious!" she cried, after bestowing a couple of sounding kisses upon her visitor's lips. "My! you do look lovely this morning, Baby."

"Lovely?" said the girl bitterly. "After crying my eyes nearly out of my head. Oh, auntie!"

"What is it, my precious? Here, stop a moment, and I'll send the gals upstairs."

Mrs. Duncan passed through a glass door, closing it after her, and voices were heard. A minute later, she reappeared, to stand waving one arm to her visitor in the fashion always adopted by legitimate Hamlet's ghosts, and Baby stepped into the back room, dropped into a chair, and laid her hands upon the work-encumbered table, her head sank upon them, and she began to sob hysterically.

"Oh, my precious lamb! Don't, don't take on like that. What is the matter? Tell its Auntie, then. Why, Lu, my girl, you don't mean it? He arn't come back from the voyage? He ain't dead, is he?"

The girl started up with her face convulsed, and her eyes flashing with indignant rage.

"No," she cried, "he isn't dead. He has come back quite well."

"And that's a comfort, my dear."

"Comfort!" cried the girl contemptuously. "Not it. I wish he was dead."

"Nonsense, my dear; I see you've been having a tiff."

"Tiff!" cried Lucy scornfully.

"Why, he 'aven't dared to 'it you, 'ave he?"

Lucy shook her head, and tried to speak, but for a time no words would come; and at last as her Aunt bent over her, she uttered a bitter cry, flung her arms about the ordinary looking woman's neck, buried her face in her breast, and sobbed passionately.

"My own precious, then! There, there, there, there; let it come, and you'll be better soon. There, try and tell its Auntie what it's all about. Mind, pet; this is such a pretty bonnet; and take care, too, of your lace. Oh, come, come, come, you mustn't spoil those bright eyes. Where's its ankychy then? Let me wipe 'em. Ah, that's better."

"Oh, oh, oh," sobbed Lucy wearily, as she turned her pitiful face slowly upward, and joined her little red petal-like lips to those reaching down to kiss her lovingly. "Oh, Auntie, Auntie, I'm the most unhappy, miserable girl in the world."

"No, no, no; don't say that, precious. You're the most beautiful; and look at you with your carriage and jools and dresses, and all real, my darling. No property dymons and rubbish. Tell me, then, what it's all been about? I know, you've been spending too much money, you naughty puss, and he don't like it, of course."

"No, no, it isn't that," said the girl piteously; "it's far, far worse."

"Nonsense, my dear, don't be absurd. I know; it's only a bit of a quarrel."

"Quarrel! no," moaned Lucy. "I never could quarrel with him. Auntie, it's all over now. I couldn't believe it of him."

"Over? Why, you don't mean to say as he's chucked you?"

The girl gave a quick, short nod.

"Well, of all!" exclaimed Mrs. Duncan. "But there, I'm not surprised. It was sure to come about some time. I always knew it."

"Oh, Auntie," cried the girl indignantly; "how can you talk like that! You always said I was a lucky girl, for he loved me very dearly, and would never leave me."

"Did I, my precious?"

"Yes, you know you did."

"Ah, well, perhaps I did. It was to please you, I suppose. But there, don't take on, it'll all come right in the end."

"Come right! How can it? He's going to be married!"

"Is he, now, my dear? You don't say so? Who's he going to marry?"

"A Miss Emsworth."

"Money?"

"Oh, yes, rich as rich."

"That's it, my dear. I was right then. He'd never have chucked you over if it hadn't been for that. They say he has lost a deal lately over horses. They nearly all do."

"Lost?" said Lucy naïvely; "has he?"

"Heaps they say. Why you ought to know."

"No," said the girl, wiping her eyes; "I don't know anything about it. How should I? I only had what I wanted. I never troubled about money."

"Of course not, my precious; why should you? No theaytre lidy as respected herself would ever trouble about money—but there, there, there, wipe your precious, pretty eyes, and don't fret about it. Men's all alike, and there isn't one on 'em now your uncle's dead worth a second thought."

"But I can't help it, Auntie, I love him ever so, I never knew how much I loved him till now."

"Stuff, little goose! There, you'll think different to-morrow. You're faint with fretting, and low-spirited now. You want a snack, my pretty, that's what you want. There, wipe your eyes, and I'll send one of the gals to order a couple of dozen oysters and a bottle of stout."

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"No, no, no, Auntie. I don't want anything of the kind."

"Oh yes you do, and so do I."

"Yes, you're always wanting stout and oysters, Auntie," said the girl bitterly.

"Well, my precious, one must have some support to make up for the wear and tear. You don't know what I suffer over the business, and the losses and worries. Always somebody going wrong and can't pay. If your poor dear uncle had only been ruled by me, he'd have put everything in a pub with a good luncheon bar. There's no sending in your bill ten times there, and then only getting something on account. It's all pay down cash over the counter, and no book-keeping to put straight. Now, do let me send for a snack."

"No, no, no, Auntie!"

"All cash, my dear, and the profits are grand. Is she very good-looking?"

"Eh? Oh, she! Yes, Auntie, I suppose so."

Mrs. Duncan gave the table a loud slap with her open hand, and drew herself up very stiffly—that is, as stiffly as such a plump-looking woman could.

"Don't tell me," she cried angrily, "she can't be one half so pretty as you are, my precious, and so I'd tell her, to her face, as soon as look at her."

Lucy's forehead wrinkled all over, and she looked half piteously, half lovingly, at the flushed, coarse woman before her.

"Poor, dear, silly old Aunt," she said; and she reached forward and kissed her.

"That I'm not, my precious," cried the woman returning the kiss with interest. "There isn't a prettier, nor nicer, nor more loveable little pet in London, and I'll be bound to say, if the truth's known, it nips him ever so, to part with you. What did he say?"

"Not much," said the girl sadly. "Said he was ruined and couldn't afford it any longer, and that I must go."

"Did he tell you hisself that he was going to be married?"

"Yes, he told me all very nicely, Auntie. He said his mother wished it, and he was obliged, for the sake of the family name."

"Then you didn't quarrel?"

"Oh, no, Auntie. I said some nasty things, but he was very nice and kind."

"Pore boy. He's very sorry, and no wonder. And is it quite all over? Bailiffs in?"

"Bailiffs, Auntie?"

"Yes, at Brompton. Have they seized, and going to be a sale?"

"Wait," she said shortly.

"Oh, no, Auntie. Rod told me the house and furniture and the brougham and horse were mine; and he has put five hundred pounds in the bank for me, he says."

"Pore dear boy. Well, I always liked him. I call it very nice and handsome of him, my dear, and I don't think you've got anything whatever to fret about, for of course you keep your jools."

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie!" cried the girl desperately, "you don't know—you don't know;" and she let her face fall in her hands, and sobbed convulsively.

"Yes, I do, my darling, and so will you, some day. I've had plenty of experience, and know what's what. I call it very handsome of him. But five 'underd ain't much. You ought to have screwed him up to a thou, somehows."

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie, how can you—how can you?"

"There, there, there, my pet, you leave it all to me. Wipe your pretty eyes. I'll settle it all for you. The sooner you come home the better, and I'll have the furniture and horse and carriage sold at once, and pay off the servants. I can soon get that pretty little house let, and you'd better put the money in the business. It will be safe."

"Not a penny of it, Auntie," cried the girl, snatching off her veil. "Do you think I'd take the house or a penny of his money? I'd sooner starve!"

"Now, Louy, my own precious one," cried her aunt, "don't go on like that. You're not on the stage now, and this is real life, not drammer."

"Yes it is, Aunt, drama of life," cried the girl passionately.

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"I thought all men were alike once, just as you said they were—fools with money to waste; but I know differently now. He made me love him, and I'm not ashamed to own it. I do love him, dearly, and I'll show him I do. Take his money or his presents and house? No, not so much as a ring. I'll come home and work with the girls here, and be no expense to you; but take anything of his? No, I'd sooner go off the bridge."

"Lucy!"

"Yes, but not yet," cried the girl, with a fierce look coming into her eyes. "If Rod thinks I'm going to sit down and suffer this, he's mistaken."

"Why, Lucy, my precious, what do you mean?"

"Mean, Auntie? Why to behave as a jealous woman would."

"But this ain't acting, my dear—it ain't a play."

"Isn't it, Aunt? Oh, yes it is, to me. Handsome and rich and to be his idol?" she cried bitterly. "No, it shall never be."

"Why, Lucy. What has come to you?" whispered the old woman.

"The Devil, I think, Auntie," cried the girl passionately. "I told Rod I would if anyone came between us, and I will."

"Now, now, now, Lucy, none of that," cried Mrs. Duncan, catching the girl in her arms; "no temper now. Don't you go talking and thinking of that sort of thing, or you may work yourself up in your passion and be going and doing it. But, there, you're only acting, and I don't want you to take the stage."

"No, Auntie, I hate the idea of the stage now. Let me stop with you."

"Of course, and lucky am I to 'ave you again, pet. But I meant about those things. You see, this isn't one of poor dear Tom Robertson's plays, my precious. You ain't a Hester Heccles, with a tipsy old father—and, oh! how true it all was, and how I have cried over it all!—but it's real life with your old Auntie."

"Yes, Aunt, dear."

"Then I wouldn't chuck all those things and that money out of spite, my darling, because it's a deal."

"You're always wanting stout and oysters, Auntie."

The blood flushed to the girl's pale face, and she sprang to her feet, with her eyes flashing.

"It isn't spite, Auntie," she cried. "I can't, I won't bring away a thing. I feel that I can't stoop to do it. I gave him all. I love him still, but I can't be paid and sent away like this. He mustn't think that of me."

"Very well, then, my precious, you shan't bring back nothing. I don't care. I don't want 'em; I was only thinking of you. Let him keep 'em and give 'em to his wife."

"Yes, let him give them to his wife," cried Lucy passionately; "and—to his wife—to his wife—his wife!"

(To be continued.)

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THE BLEEDING ROSE

"*Parbleu!* The lady was in Paris three winters ago and broke several hearts, both French and English. I give you my word."

So said the Baron de la Sameraye in answer to a remark which fell from my lips in the smoking-room of the International Club, Boulevard Malesherbes, where the young bloods were discussing, far too freely, the beauties of the English colony in Paris.

I must confess that I was more than deeply interested in a certain Miss Alba Van Amster, whose quiet beauty heightened the cultivated talents and brilliant education that study had given her.

Having hazarded the belief that this was the young lady's first season in Paris, in answer to a question from Count Bodega, who did me the honour, as he fancied, by being jealous of my intimacy with the Van Amsters, the Baron had chimed in with the above assertion — an assertion which chilled not a little the reverence which had accompanied my worship of the beautiful Alba.

"If your intimacy admits of the question," added the loquacious Baron, "ask *la belle demoiselle* if she remembers New Year's Eve three years ago."

A hundred years ago a man with my pretensions to gallantry would take every opportunity to advertise his admiration for a woman; and it would have been my peremptory duty to put my hand on my sword hilt, and in no measured terms to force my critical friend to drink to the health of the immaculate and faultless beauty to whose affection I aspired.

Now, in this prosaic end of the century, the Baron's light chatter only gave me food for reflection, as I put on my astrachan and sauntered homeward.

Alba, with all her honest, outspoken ways, had a secret which she had not yet thought fit to share with me.

After all, knowing her sterling qualities as I did, and, though not an affianced suitor, still admitted by herself and mother into almost domestic relations, had I any right to question her on the past which could never, I was sure, have implicated her purity or trust?

I had only known Alba Van Amster for sixteen months, and the episode referred to had taken place, if there was no mistaken identity, just three years ago.

Anyhow, to-morrow, New Year's day, the Van Amsters gave a dance in their lovely hotel in the Avenue d'Eylau, and I certainly did not intend to refer to any past New Year's Eve without some very good reasons.

Three years to-night; and I wondered with a curious interest that only my intense devotion licensed, what could have made Alba so reticent about any former visit to Paris.

And, as my reflections grew more absorbing and the night grew colder, I found suddenly that instead of turning to the right and going back to my hotel in the Chaussée d'Antin I had wandered to the left, crossed the Elysian Fields, and was treading the crisp white snow not far from Alba's own house.

With the infatuation that holds a lover, I determined to see the window, if not the lights behind it, of

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the room where Alba slept. It was scarcely midnight. The stars were frostily brilliant, and a belated *fiacre*, coming from Passy, gave the only sound, and that but a faint tinkle of buckles and harness.

There was a light in Alba's window as I passed. Suddenly a wailing moan distinctly heard swept with a palpable breeze around my ears, and the white horse of the passing *fiacre* started like a two-year-old, and for an instant seemed terrified into a runaway.

A gruff objurgation from the coachman accompanied by a thump from the butt end of his broken whip brought the old hack to his senses, and dispelled by its matter-of-fact realism the sensation of uncanniness which the moaning sound had sent with a shiver through me.

As I turned again to look at Alba's window I saw that the light had been extinguished.

At that moment the window, opening like most French windows doorwise on to the balcony, flew ajar for an instant, but an icy breeze coming round the house banged it to, and swept the crisp snow off the sills in a wreath that looked almost like a human form as it flew past the railings.

Then the same wailing sound sent a second shiver through me, and I pulled up the collar of my coat, trying to close my ears with the fur.

At the next *carrefour* I found a *fiacre* which soon deposited me at the door of my hotel. On entering my room I sat down and piled up logs on the glowing embers, without a thought of going to bed. Sleep was impossible.

So Alba had some romance, but three years old, which she could not or would not tell me.

After all, her past did not belong to me, any more than mine to her. What? Was I to swear to love and cherish without a right to bare her heart? Could I see into her soul as far as this screen allowed and no farther?

And my thoughts would revert to the Baron's words at the club, and then my astral body travelled over the wrong road again to my Alba's window, and I heard again the mournful wail outside mine.

I don't know when I fell asleep. But I awoke chilly and shivering. The embers, choked with ashes, gave a feeble blush to the grate, and I crept into bed with that moaning sound in my ears, only to wake again when François brought my morning coffee to my bedside.

I knew the Baron always breakfasted about noon at the club, and, determined to worm some facts out of him I took a constitutional in the Champs Elysées before tackling the noble foreigner.

"Baron," said I, as we sat to a pilaff and some scrambled eggs, *à l'Espagnole*, "was there a duel in the case of Miss Van Amster when she was last seen in Paris?"

At this moment there came into the dining-room a tall, handsome man, of Spanish type, with flashing dark eyes and pale complexion, dressed to perfection, and with all the style of a military chief about him.

"*Comment, mon cher Colonel?*" cried the little Baron, jumping up and shaking the new-comer's hand affectionately. "What good wind blew you this way? It is three years since you gave Paris the pleasure of your presence."

Then, introducing me, the Baron forced the Colonel to sit down at our breakfast table. Colonel d'Espartello was a Basque, with all the *fougue* and Southern enthusiasm of his race. He had just returned from Africa, where he had lately received his rank.

"*Apropos*," said the chattering Baron, "you left Paris shortly after that unfortunate affair of Prévelle's. I suppose you know the lovely Mees Van Amster is again in Paris?"

"Not really!" replied the handsome Colonel, with a tinge of colour passing over his pale cheeks. "But I have overcome that infatuation long ago. Poor Prévelle! It was, indeed, an unfortunate affair. He was far more deeply in love than I was; that is quite certain."

I pulled up the collar of my coat.

The subject seemed unpleasant, and soon the young Colonel was entertaining us with his accounts of a new French acquisition in Africa, and how his gallant men behaved in the sanguinary skirmishes they had with the natives. And then he suddenly remembered an appointment. When he had left us, my friend, the Baron, rolling a cigarette in his fingers, said to me as he lighted his smoke:

"That is almost the answer to your question. *Le beau colonel*, just gone, was also one of the fair Alba's admirers. He was the Prince's second in his duel with Armand Prévelle. But you know nothing about the duel? Is it possible? Come for a stroll outside and I will tell you all about it.

"When the Van Amsters, mother and daughter, were last in Paris—there is a father living, I am creditably informed, wrapt up in stocks and buried in your Capel Court, for the better gilding of Miss Alba's dowry—Miss Van Amster was no less lovely than now, but without to-day's experience.

"Not only is Alba far the prettiest in the English colony, but speaking our language perfectly, and having the best Holland blood in her veins, she has been much sought after by Parisians of the highest standing.

"There was no doubt that she was as fond of Prévelle, the handsomest man in Paris, as he was devoted to her, until the arrival of Prince Kracovieff from Nice, where the girl had met the Russian the winter previous. The Muscovite needed funds and had a real title for sale, so that Prévelle soon found himself second favourite.

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"Two or three nights before the new year Prévelle had given a superb bouquet to Miss Alba, who took the finest orchid in the bunch to adorn the Prince, and though the coquette tried to pacify the Parisian, he felt it badly.

"It was scarcely to be supposed that a Frenchman would take the affront coolly; and it was not long before an opportunity occurred at the club for a quarrel.

"*Bref*—Prévelle slapped the Prince's face, and a duel took place the day before *le jour de l'an*, just three years ago.

"You wonder, perhaps, how I know all these details. I was the other's *témoin*, and Prévelle died in my arms.

"They fought in the Bois de Boulogne with pistols.

"The first fire passed without injury to one or the other; but the second from the Russian would have gone through poor Prévelle's heart had it not been checked by an obstacle. Curiously enough when we looked to the wound we found a large rosebud had choked up the hole in his chest carried inward by the bullet.

"Prévelle never breathed again. All the hemorrhage was within: but the petals of the flower were stained with his life blood.

"Poor boy! He was buried with the flower in his heart.

"There was a great row about the affair. Kracovieff returned to Moscow, and the Van Amsters went back to England.

"Now you know why I told you to ask Miss Alba if she recalled the *réveillon* of three years ago. I confess I always feel bitter when I think of my poor friend's death. But after all, why should I try to give the girl he loved pain? I have no right to be the young lady's judge."

The story was true, no doubt, and yet I had found nothing coquettish about Alba Van Amster. She had been true and sincere in everything but the fact that she never spoke of a former stay in Paris.

That evening there was a dance at the Van Amsters', and naturally I was one of the first to arrive.

Alba was not by any means looking radiant. She was terribly pale, and her eyes were red at the edges of the lids, as if she had suffered from tears of illness.

I brought with me the choicest bouquet I could find at Delaunoy's and she was on the point of removing a yellow rose and giving it to me when the memory of that duel seemed to traverse both our brains. My gesture must have been treacherous, for her face grew hard and she said, as a tear came in each lovely eye:

"Then you have heard the story too?"

I could not reply for the moment, and with a deep sigh Alba took the rose, whose pale lemon-coloured petals were like wax, and placed it in the *échancrure* of her dress.

At the same instant a waltz struck up, and almost automatically we glided into the ballroom among the dozen couples already assembled.

Only once in the dance did my partner speak. She whispered:

"You won't think unkindly of me, will you? Oh! why—why did they let you know!"

After the waltz we went into a small conservatory near the mother's boudoir, and sat down on a Persian settee surrounded by ferns and smilax. She turned her face pleadingly to me and was about to speak, when she noticed my eyes riveted on the rose in her *corsage*.

The yellow petals had turned red.

She saw it, too; and, clutching spasmodically at the chiffon round her bosom, she suddenly gave a cry of mingled pain and fear, and fell in a faint upon the couch.

Fell in a faint upon the couch.

At the same time her grasp on the gauzy material, tearing it away, added to her sudden fall backwards, revealed just over her heart a mark like a splash of blood.

This was the reason then for her high dress.

But it must have been an eruption of late date, for a natal wine mark would have been visible with the *décolletage* she used to allow herself. Her cry brought her mother to my aid, and she was carried by her maids to her room still unconscious.

I stood still, staring at the rose which I held in my hand; but the blood stain seemed to fade from the petals, and when I reached home, without knowing how I left the ballroom, the flower was again yellow, though drooping. Strange, very strange!

On calling to inquire after Miss Van Amster's condition the next day, the butler, in the low pathetic voice which well trained servants use when there is dangerous illness or a death in the family, told me Miss Alba was not allowed to see anyone, but that the young lady had sent down a letter to be delivered to me personally if I called.

The letter was from Alba, and is reproduced:

"Dearest,—If I have never told you of the sad affair which three years ago changed me from a flighty coquette to a reasoning woman, it was for fear you, whose affections I cherish, should think me still the heartlessly selfish creature I was at that time.

"Now, when I know that my life is fast ebbing away—for my fainting spell of last night was only the precursor to an attack which is killing me faster than even

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my doctors imagine—I can tell you what no other must know while I live.

"And God knows, dear, I wanted to live for you and you only.

"Mother, who had put me in a convent for my education, always brought me up with the intention of selling

In the middle of the room stood Armand Prévelle.

my beauty for a title. I was allowed my own way in everything, and utter selfishness was the result, so that when I made my *début* in Paris, less than four years since, I expected as a right that every man should be at my feet who had any pretensions to taste or position.

"My girlish inclinations picked from out my circle of beaux a bright and cultured Frenchman, known on the Boulevard as the best-looking man in Paris. I don't think I knew what love meant; but Armand Prévelle danced well, played beautifully, and was generally attractive.

"At the same time Prince Kracovieff was encouraged by my mother, who little knew what a Russian prince was worth, but had strange hankerings after what she fancied a royal connection.

'How thoughtless I was, and how little accustomed to thinking of others, was well shown in the little incident which gave rise to a fatal duel. I had just given Armand the prettiest rose I could find in our conservatory when I took from his bouquet the blossom offered to the Prince, careless of the pain the act might give. I have never forgotten the broken-hearted look Armand gave me when he turned away and left the ballroom.

"I never saw him again alive.

"I say 'alive' for I saw him only two nights ago; and that is what you must know now.

"I have never had any belief in spirits revisiting the earth.

"I had in my fondness for you almost forgotten the past, except inasmuch as that sad experience had made me serious and introspective. You know, dear, I am no flirt.

"It was on New Year's Eve, and fatigued with our preparations for the dance of to-night—I am writing in bed, against orders, and it is not yet midnight—I had gone to my room rather earlier than I am accustomed.

"I was half undressed, and, having sent Fanchette to bed, I was examining my new ball dress, when I heard a sigh behind me.

"I turned, in doubt as to my senses, and there in the middle of the room stood Armand Prévelle, dressed in black, as he must no doubt have been the day of the duel.

"Though an icy shudder passed through me, I still had presence of mind sufficient to assure myself my senses were playing me false when, with the same look that I remembered, the phantom of Armand put his hand into his breast and drawing forth the yellow rose all dabbled with blood, he threw the blossom at my bosom. Then the lights went out, the window opened and shut with violence, and I remember no more. Finding myself, with daylight, lying on my bed, I imagined I had fallen asleep and dreamt the terrible dream.

"But, on looking at myself in the glass, what was my horror when I saw just over my heart the splash of crimson which nothing has removed.

"I shall go down to my grave with it still there. Of that there shall be no doubt.

"If that dream should come again, dearest, I shall surely die.

"And yet I had hoped for a beautiful, bright existence in your love. Oh! what have I done? Why did my mother make me lie to myself and all around me?

"It is close on midnight. Ah! If you were only near me to defend me. Icy, icy! As cold as death——"

When I called a second time the shutters were up. Alba Van Amster had dreamed again.

HONOR LUCELLE.

RESULT OF JUMBLE STORY COMPETITION.—NO. 3.

UNFORTUNATELY, the story in this instance appears to have been too simple for the majority of competitors, over four hundred of whom were absolutely correct. If the prizes were divided up among them, each would receive about sixpence. To select the neatest is impossible, for, as no mention was made of neat attempts in the conditions, no effort was made by competitors, and all the attempts sent in were equally moderately well put together, and there is nothing to choose between the best fifty. It has been decided, therefore, to send a silver-plated pencil-case to each of the successful competitors.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.—NO. 4.

THE guinea goes this week, for London, to Mrs. R. W. Bland, 29, Bridge Road, Hammersmith; and for the provinces to Mr. R. Lythgot, Broad Street, Bilston, S. Staffs. The letter turned upside down was "s," in the word *this*, line 50, col. 1.

POST-CARD COMPETITION.—No. 6.

IMPORTANT TO PROVINCIAL READERS.

A FEW words in this number have been purposely mis-spelt. A guinea is offered to the reader living within 100 miles of London who first points them out on the back of a post-card in the following order: Number of words (in large figures); the words themselves, with line, column, and page where each is found; name and address of sender. *Do not include cover or serial stories* in making your search. A guinea is also offered to readers living further than 100 miles from London.

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Pauper Blue Blood.

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

Georgina Pluff is a governess in the employ of the Ravenscrofts. Her charge is Eva, daughter of Sir Reginald and Lady Ravenscroft. Sefton, the only son, is engaged to Lady Norah Cannington, whose father, hearing on good authority of Sir Reginald's impending ruin, compels his daughter to write a letter to Sefton, saying that the engagement must be broken off. Before the financial crash arrives, Sir Reginald commits suicide in his own grounds, and Sefton's cup of bitterness is filled by the arrival of Lady Norah's letter. Georgina Pluff is aware of the late Sir Reginald's past, and threatens to expose his misdeeds unless she is married to Sefton. After the wedding Georgina visits her wealthy cousin, John Pluff, a retired grocer, and impresses him with her social position. Lady Norah receives a visit from a friend of Sefton, Douglas Shirling, who gives expression to his opinion concerning her treatment of Sefton. Georgina goes to stop with Pluff at Queen's Gate House. Lady Norah becomes engaged to the Duke of Malvern, but at the cost of her own happiness. Sefton's mother and sister go to stop at Ermyn Way, and he joins them, where he discovers, through Sarah Shirling, that his wife has advertised for a paying guest. He returns home to demand an explanation.

CHAPTER XII.

The Fascinating Widow.

"I suppose it's something disagreeable?" said Lady Ravenscroft.

"Yes, extremely disagreeable for *me*. What on earth induced you to put that infernal advertisement in the *Times*? How *dared* you, Georgina?"

"Dared, indeed! A pretty word to use to your wife. What was the harm, pray? And how did you discover it related to Ravenscroft Park?"

She spoke in short, sharp, hissing accents.

"Never mind. I know that you had the audacity to contemplate such a step without consulting me."

"Certainly, and I contemplate it still. What objection have you to raise? If you consider the addition of a guest, on stated terms, *infra dig*, give me sufficient money to live in the style that I require, and have grown accustomed to at my cousin's house. You can't do this—so the best plan is to hold your tongue, and let me earn a few paltry hundreds as best I can."

There was a long silence.

"I suppose it is utterly futile to instil into your brain how lowering and impossible this suggestion is. But of one thing be sure, if you harbour any such person under my roof, I will sell Ravenscroft Park, and the whole estate over our heads, and have you and your boarders out of it the very same day. This is no idle threat, for once I am in earnest. You have tried me too far."

He stood looking at her with those terrible eyes of cold disdain, his face white and his lips set.

"You are behaving like a tyrant and a brute," replied Georgina. "You want to cow and frighten me."

"Oh, no," and a gentle look came into his drawn face; "I only intend to stop you from further destroying my home. You would have brought disgrace on it once; I married you to save that. We Ravenscrofts would die, and have died in generations past at the stake, for our family honour! I sometimes think their fate was happier than the one you allotted me. I often envy those martyred ancestors."

"Oh, hang the ancestors!" muttered Georgina; "I'm talking about 'paying guests.' Your remonstrance is a little late; I have already interviewed one lady who is dying to come, and have yet to hear from the President of the Sportswoman's Club."

"You will wait a long time for *her* answer," cried Sefton, with a low, sarcastic laugh.

"What do you know of it?"

Georgina advanced a step and listened while he told her curtly the story of Sarah Shirling.

"It was beastly of her," muttered Lady Ravenscroft, using a word she knew that Sefton particularly disliked.

"That was the reason I returned at once," continued Sefton, "to put a check on your folly."

"Which is not the sort of check I am accustomed to," she retorted, drawing John Pluff's from her pocket, and holding it out for her husband's inspection.

"Your pay," he said sneeringly, "for consorting with snobs."

"Why have you returned in such a vile temper? One would think I had committed an atrocious crime. I suppose it's that impoverished blue blood again that is rebelling against practical money making. I'm sick of it, Sefton; it has stood in my light too long."

"Yet you cared enough for it to marry me. You demanded my paupered name as your price, though you knew that by so doing you would mar my life. It is long since we have had some plain speaking. You may feign contempt, and try to trample on my pride, but in reality you know that for all the money which has fallen to John Pluff's share, you would not have me barter my birthright."

"Don't make too sure! I have tasted the luxury of wealth at Queen's Gate House, and though I should be sorry to have married anyone but a *gentleman*, what is your vaunted blue blood, after all?"

Sir Sefton answered without a moment's hesitation.

"One of those precious possessions which no man, no power on earth can rob me of."

There was a long silence, in which Georgina sank on the sofa and bit her nails.

Sefton crossed to the window, and stood moodily looking out at the gradually clouding sky.

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"I suppose I must write to Mrs. Rathbone by to-night's post. I did not mean *her* to come, at any rate."

"Have you quite decided to drop the idea?" asked Sefton coldly. "Or is Ravenscroft Park to be sold?"

He certainly looked as if he meant it. Georgina thought she had never seen a face so like a demon's.

Her own grew sinister and dark.

"The place only brings bad luck, and yet I don't want to let it go. If—if—we were ever rich, it would be hard to find its equal again."

"We are not likely to be, unless you are expecting a legacy from John Pluff, who will more than probably outlive us both. I should not imagine you or I will 'enjoy' long lives! Perpetual friction is not conducive to very boisterous health."

He moved wearily towards the door. Georgina spoke:

"It is not worth fighting about, and I would rather starve here than be shut away in some pokey little place where the Ravenscrofts might as well be Smiths or Jones. At least, we can keep up a certain appearance."

As Sefton vanished from her sight an agonised spasm passed over Georgina's face.

"Leave Ravenscroft," she muttered, "God! it would be like tearing Reginald from my heart. The red flowers I planted over the spot where he fell, are they blooming now, waving their heads, the colour of his blood?"

She stretched out her hands wildly and beat the air.

"Reginald, dear Reginald, I will stay by you always!"

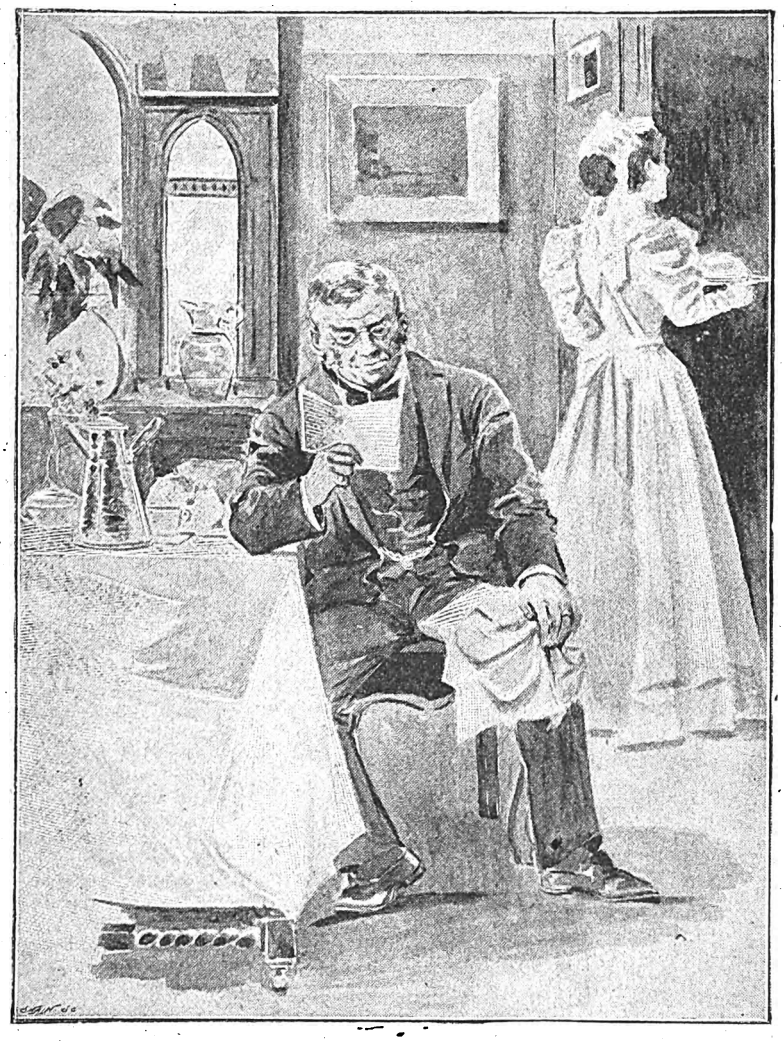
A strange contradiction, an erring mixture of love and hate, she paced her room battling with intense and varying passions.

It was nearly an hour later when she grew calm enough to write.

* * * * *

John Pluff was somewhat surprised a few mornings later to find a delicate note on his breakfast table, addressed in an unknown feminine hand. His heart beat high as he glanced at the signature: "Stella Rathbone."

It was a plaintive little letter, informing him that faithless Lady Ravenscroft had played her false, and would not let her go to Ravenscroft Park. It was a great blow, as she had considered the matter settled. It appeared so difficult to find an aristocratic family willing to accommodate her. Being a lonely widow she should be deeply grateful for Mr. Pluff's advice. Could he suggest anything, and would it be wise for her to advertise, if so, in what paper? She had lived so long abroad that she seemed quite to have lost touch with the old country since the decease of the Bottlemeads. Perhaps, if Mr. Pluff should happen to be driving in her direction that afternoon, he would look in for a chat at afternoon tea.



His heart beat high as he glanced at the signature.

"Nice woman, Mrs. Rathbone," he said, folding the scented paper and placing it in his waistcoat pocket. "Guess I'll find it convenient to drift in the direction of South Kensington this afternoon. She might like a turn in the Park. It is something to drive behind the best pair of chestnuts in London, and Mrs. Rathbone's stunning figure will draw attention to my turn-out, to say nothing of her hair. Poor Georgina! Those beautiful coils fairly upset her. But I need not tell her I've kept up with Mrs. R——. Ladies are so jealous of one another!"

He found the widow adorned for the occasion in a most fascinating costume of palest mauve. She clapped her hands playfully when he suggested a drive, and flew for a handful of violets she called a bonnet.

"This is so far nicer than my little hired Victoria," she vouchsafed as they rolled away.

"I'm happy to hear you say so," murmured Mr. Pluff, "and it's a treat to be seen alongside of *you*, Mrs. Rathbone," with a would-be attractive leer.

He kept his eyes well on the alert for friends or acquaintances. He wished to show the widow that he was a well-known figure in the Park, at the same time noticing that she bowed to no one.

Mrs. Humphery passed and smiled effusively, then to his joy he espied the Pynes seated *en famille* under the trees. The "dear boys" were staring vacantly before them, Nesta was talking to the young man from Gibraltar, while "Mr.

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and Mrs. P." rose and hastened to the rails to get a word with Mr. Pluff.

"*Have* you heard the news?" exclaimed Nesta's doting mother, waving her sunshade in the direction of the young couple. "Our dear daughter is to be married this autumn from our country house, 'Livonia.' I *hope* you will come and stay with us for the festivities."

Mr. Pluff replied brusquely he should be abroad, and pretended not to see Miss Pyne bowing somewhat shyly.

He felt relieved when the carriage moved on, and he could once more seek consolation in his close proximity to

"HAVE *you heard the news?*" *exclaimed Nesta's doting mother.*

the violet bonnet and heliotrope drapery of Mrs. Rathbone's chiffons.

"I think, after all," sighed the widow contentedly, "I shall not bother about leaving town just yet. It seems a pity at the height of the season, though one can be as lonely in a crowd as anywhere. An afternoon such as this, in congenial society, tempts me to linger among the butterflies of fashion. You know, Mr. Pluff, I am a very simple little woman, and easily satisfied. I do not pant for wild excitement. Just a turn with you in the fresh air, a sight of pretty faces and gay attire, is enough to make my heart light, to set my pulses beating."

Her sweet, innocent words amazed Mr. Pluff.

"Well, then, you are very different to the run of people Mrs. R."

He invariably substituted the initial for the name. It was a sign of friendship and familiarity. Already John Pluff felt on excellent terms with his red-haired divinity.

She unfolded for his benefit some thrilling stories of her past, tales of adventure that occurred while she was travelling with the "dear General" through countless foreign lands.

What with shipwrecks, scenes of fire, burglaries, and battles, Mr. Pluff's hair stood on end.

"And yet," she murmured in conclusion, "I am the most domesticated, home-loving creature imaginable. That is my present sorrow—I have no home!"

Her eyes grew moistly pathetic, she really *was* thinking of the General.

"Poor dear!—poor soul!" muttered Mr. Pluff, gulping back his emotion. "It's hard to be left, and 'im such a gallant man, such a noble warrior!"

"But not so hard now that I have found a sympathetic friend," said Mrs. Rathbone, smiling through her tears—becoming dew-drops, since she had shown her wisdom by retaining them in the meshes of her eyelashes, not allowing them to fall and make rivulets through her *poudre d'amour*.

"She brings out all that is chivalrous in a man," thought John Pluff, marvelling at the tiny dimensions of Mrs. Rathbone's waist. "Nothin' advanced about her, by George! Just tender, womanly instincts, blended with almost unnatural courage."

As this mental verdict passed through his mind, Mrs. Rathbone gave a sharp scream and clutched his arm. A horse beside them had shied and struck against the carriage.

Reassured that no harm was done to herself or the animal, she laughed softly, and relaxed her grip of Mr. Pluff's coat sleeve.

"I was not very frightened, but a great number of vehicles always unnerve me."

When they parted, Mr. Pluff arranged when to call on the following day, and asked her if she were fond of French chocolates.

Mrs. Rathbone replied that "she could live on them."

John Pluff ordered a floral basket of exquisite bon-bons on his way home, to be sent immediately to her hotel, and stopped at a photographer's to arrange an hour for a sitting on the following day.

"And remember," he said to the man, "it's for a *lady* so don't you leave any pimples or nothink on the surface!"

That same evening Mrs. Humphery wrote a long effusion to Lady Ravenscroft, the point of which she reserved for her postscript: "By-the-way I forgot to tell you I saw Mr. Pluff to-day, driving in the Park with a most eccentric looking person. Can you imagine who she is? Wears a bright red wig to be seen a mile off, has rather fine eyes, and a figure that makes you positively ache to think of. They were talking animatedly, and your cousin appeared radiant."

The penning of these lines gave Mrs. Humphery infinite satisfaction.

She hoped she had scented a scandal, and was burning with curiosity to learn the name of "that Jezebel in mauve!"

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EXPLANATION.

MRS. HUMPHERY'S letter, with its alarming intelligence concerning John Pluff, so thoroughly upset Georgina that she was obliged to take to her bed.

The news had utterly prostrated her. She lay planning

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John Pluff ordered a floral basket of exquisite bon-bons.

schemes for his rescue from the widow's clutches, occasionally dropping into a feverish sleep only to indulge terrible dreams of her cousin's courtship and marriage with Mrs. Rathbone.

But the chief sting lay in the thought that she, Georgina, had introduced them.

When her failing strength returned sufficiently to write, she penned two lengthy epistles, one to John Pluff and another to her new friend, Mrs. Humphery.

She thanked the latter sincerely for her "hint" about the lady with the red wig, and begged Mrs. Humphery to further acquaint her should she see that obtrusive person again in her cousin's society. "Dear John," she said, "is so easily led and has no one to watch over him but me. I fear he is getting entangled with a woman of doubtful character, and he is too precious a jewel to be wasted on one so utterly unworthy. She would only make his declining days a burden to him, and probably hasten his end by her neglect and frivolity."

The subject of the awful fate awaiting John Pluff, should he marry Mrs. Rathbone, opened a wide field for Georgina's imagination. She continued to describe her overwhelming feelings in forcible language, then congratulating herself on having written a wonderfully dramatic and touching letter; she addressed it to Mrs. Humphery, who she guessed would be no means loth to act as moral policeman in regard to this trying affair.

Like many of her sisters she loved a finger in other people's pies.

Then Georgina carefully worded a diplomatic appeal, begging cousin John to come and make a long stay at Ravenscroft Park.

"I feel I need your companionship," she wrote. "I am in the lowest spirits and the worst of health. A sight of your ever bright face, a spell of your effervescing and delightful society, will do me all the good in the world. The country is looking more beautiful than ever, and there are some especially attractive drives I have planned we shall take together, or should I be unable through failing strength to get about, Sefton will do his very best to entertain you. When we parted I thought you looked pale and in need of a change. London is stuffy, hot, and depressing. Come to Ravenscroft Park where flowers are blooming and breezes blowing. Here you will grow young again.—Yours (longing to be re-united), GEORGY."

It was the first time she had ever signed herself in a more familiar manner than Georgina Ravenscroft.

"The short name will please him," she murmured, folding the sheet.

Her stratagem however was destined to fail.

John answered by return that he was far too well employed in town to bother about breezes and blossoms just yet. He was sorry to hear she was ill, and would be glad to pay the expenses of a first-rate London doctor, if she cared to have one down.

Georgina gnashed her teeth, but replied she should be thankful to accept his offer, and would wire at once to Dr. Playford, whose fee was a hundred guineas.

Needless to say the money never reached the doctor, but as John Pluff didn't know, Georgina argued, her deception mattered not.

Sefton's spirits still flagged, perhaps because the news of Lady Norah's approaching wedding greeted him at every turn.

The papers were full of it, and the preparations commented on everywhere. Her picture, beside the Duke of Malvern, appeared in all the ladies' journals, which (either from spite or carelessness) Georgina left about for her husband to see. He read descriptions of Norah's beauty, comments on her daily life, anecdotes of her childhood, and articles upon her attire. He seemed saturated with the details, and as the fateful day grew nearer, her image haunted him unceasingly. He was torn with jealousy, distracted by the recollection of the love she had once bestowed on him, craving for past hours, while cursing those false kisses.

He grudged the brilliant future in store for her. She would sail gaily through life, with those laughing eyes and scornful lips, while he lay writhing on the shores of despair, too maimed and wounded to reach the glistening sea where her craft had drifted. He could only watch it from the distance, she happily resting on calm waters, while the quicksands of poverty sucked him down.

Congratulating herself.

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Would she think to glance back as she basked in the sunny rays?

Perhaps, to pass an idle hour the Duchess of Malvern might pick her way carefully over the stony beach of time, and feel the last clutch of a convulsive hand, as his lost soul sank lower—lower—into the realms of death and darkness.

Wildly he yearned for one final sight of Norah Cannington before she changed her name. To hold her hand again, though it had dealt him so hard a blow, led him to a precipice, and then pushed his weak, frail spirit over the edge. His sensibilities were numbed. He had no anxiety for Georgina, though now that she was ill he would inquire after her from the nurse (who had come from London), and occasionally take flowers to her room.

He gathered a handful of red blossoms mechanically from the shrubbery, and carried them to her bedside.

She looked at the offering with horrified eyes as he laid it beside her.

"No, no; take those flowers away," she pleaded. "I can't bear to see them, and their sickly smell is like death."

She shuddered, hiding her face on the pillow.

Sefton picked up the nosegay and turned to the door, when a low cry recalled him. Georgina had raised herself on one elbow, and was holding out a thin hand eagerly.

"Bring them back," she murmured, pointing to the flowers.

He gave them to her in some surprise, watching her weak fingers close tenderly round their green stalks, while she pressed the petals to her lips.

"Bring them back," she murmured.

Then closing her eyes, she lay passively, holding the drooping bouquet to her heart, a smile upon her lips.

Sefton roamed about the garden restlessly. He felt as if a long walk would calm his thoughts and do him good.

He crossed the park, and went out into the country roads. On, on he strode, his feet unconsciously taking him in the direction of Rosemont.

He skirted Lord Cannington's woods, looking neither to the right nor to the left, till he woke, as it seemed, from a somnambulistic ramble, with a rude shock, to find himself facing the tall familiar iron gates.

He stared at them blankly a moment, before hurrying on. He had never passed through the Rosemont portals since Lady Norah wrote that fatal letter.

A step behind, a little hand pressed on his arm—a voice that thrilled the very fibres of his being—and oh! heavens—did his eyes deceive him?—Norah gazing into his face with parted lips, and tears upon her cheek!

He stood dazed and breathless, staring in mute wonder at the bewitching beauty of the woman he loved.

"Sefton," she whispered reproachfully, "you passed me without a word—a look!"

He glanced round, and saw that she was alone. Then, just as in old days, he clasped the little hand in both his, and pressed it to his lips. But even as he did so, he remembered the gulf between them, the bridge of her own making, and let the hand fall with a smothered groan.

The action had sent the blood into Norah's pale cheeks, her heart beat fearfully, she swayed as if she would fall.

The intervening space of time seemed to roll away. Surely they must be the same Norah, the same Sefton, that stood by the lake, watching their reflections in the water.

What of the governess in dull yellow, who dragged her skirt like a serpent's trail across the grass? What of Lady Ravenscroft? The remembrance of her brought Norah sharply to her senses. The pangs of jealousy revived.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Why do you look so sad?"

"A needless question from your lips," he replied, still hungrily devouring her with his eyes.

"I don't see that," with a wistful puckering of her brow. "I am nothing to you now, you have your wife——"

The sudden change that rushed over Sefton's features withered Lady Norah's sentence.

"My *wife!*"

The words were muttered between his teeth, with a short laugh that was not pleasant to hear.

"Yes, you were not faithful long to the memory of our love!"

The rebuke was wrung from the girl against her will; she spoke almost involuntarily.

"You say *our* love. You played at caring for me till you tired of the game, and now you call your jest by that sacred name. Ah! Norah. Be true at least to yourself if you could not be loyal to me. You have made my life what it is—slain the good and left the wormwood—but, at least, spare me your mock reproaches."

Lady Norah breathed hard. The crimson died from her cheeks, the tears started afresh to her eyes.

"I ask one question only," she gasped. "If you had known that I still loved you, if you had known I loved you all along, would you have married Georgina Pluff?"

Swiftly the governess's terms and the threats they were to silence, passed through Sefton's mind. The family honour! What was it compared to Norah's love? His answer vibrated on the still air: "God knows I would sooner have died!"

A look of infinite relief stole over the girl's youthful face, the beauty of which even mental care could not mar.

"You have said enough. Now listen to my justification, for I *must* speak. You thought me false, fickle to the core, and small wonder. How could you tell that my heart was

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breaking, yearning for the love my father forced me to resign? I had not the strength to stand against him. I was weak and yielded under protest, not realising that when I wrote my final letter to you I was signing my own death warrant—the end of all my hope, my joy my life. Can't you pity me, Sefton, such a poor unstable creature, without nerve enough to fight either for myself or you? And then while I waited with faint fluttering hope, believing vaguely that in time it would 'come all right,' resolving to marry no one, and firmly convinced that while I was single, *you* would remain so too. A rumour of the new Lady Ravenscroft came like a thunderbolt. I had heard nothing of the wedding. Some people say you were married in a registry office. All I cared for and knew was that I must thrust you out of my heart for ever. But to separate you and your resting place was impossible. In my endeavour so to do I lost both. You went together and left me heartless—loveless—desolate!"

The words rose like a wail. She clasped her hands frantically.

"How can I believe this when you are to be married next week?"

"Oh, yes," shaking her head sadly. "I lay that at your door as well. Do you think it was nothing to me, the sight of your wife's triumphant eyes, when I passed her in the road with Victor, before our engagement. The look she gave me spurred me on, the thought that you had forgotten the past goaded me to accept him. Then there were my father's comments: 'Sefton did not care—*he* has not mourned you long!' They all told—each was a fresh grain, that grew and developed, planted on the waste ground that had once been my heart.

"Take care what you're saying, Norah. Is that true?"

He was close beside her, bending over the drooping head.

"Yes, on my word of honour, I swear it."

"Yet still you *are* going to marry the Duke?"

"How can I believe this when you are to be married next week."

"No," she replied. "I am *not!*"

So little had he expected this answer that words failed him. He only waited in silent surprise for her to continue.

"I have been weak and yielding long enough, at last I will be strong. You cannot comprehend what this resolve will cost me—I do not wish you to; but when you hear that the marriage between Lady Norah Cannington and the Duke of Malvern has been suddenly broken off within a week of the ceremony, then you can say: 'It was for the sake of our old love. Norah did that to clear herself in my eyes.'"

"No, no. I would not have you sacrifice yourself for me. You cannot live on the ashes of a dead passion. You will faint and starve existing on remembrance."

"My passion will not be dead," said Norah softly; "only hidden in my soul. After to-day, Sefton, we must never meet; but the recollection of this hour will salve the pain. To marry Victor now would be grossest sin. I did not know how strong and lasting love could be. Your presence has saved me just in time. Once, years ago, with childish curiosity, I asked an old French governess to inquire of 'Planchette' whom I should marry. The answer came, written in large letters across the page: '*Elle est virginale!*'"

"Life is stranger than fiction," murmured Sefton. "To think that this chance meeting has altered the whole of your future."

"And yet to-day I am happier than I have been for a single hour since that terrible night."

"Then you never loved the Duke of Malvern?"

"No."

"God bless you, Norah, and thank Heaven for your deliverance! No torments of the accursed can be worse than the fate that befalls a man or woman walking with open eyes into loveless matrimony."

(*To be continued.*)

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THE CYPHER.

During my sojourn in Dijon, I was on intimate terms with an eccentric individual named Eustache Loriot, a man of some forty years of age, fresh, ruddy, fair complexioned, rather stout, of medium height, a large head, with forehead unduly prominent, Socratic nose, and china-blue eyes.

He was deputy judge of the tribunal, but his duties leaving him considerable leisure, and being possessed of an independent fortune, he had early abandoned himself to a passion for *bric-à-brac*. His collection comprised a little of everything—rare books, medals, old china.

Although married, Eustache Loriot was childless. His wife was a pretty brunette of twenty-eight years, well made, lively, with a pair of dangerous dark eyes, and a light down on the upper lip.

Elegant, pleasure-loving, she found life extremely dull in the silent house in the Quartier des Grangettes, where her husband accumulated his treasure, and where no visitors were received excepting a few old antiquarians and a young lawyer, a friend of Loriot's, and, like him, an amateur in rare books. This celebrated advocate, Frederick Simonnet by name, was no more than thirty years of age, and passed for the head of the Dijon Bar.

He often came to borrow from Loriot's library, and the evening on which I had the pleasure of making his acquaintance, he had just brought back a fine copy of "Daphnis and Chloe," bound in red morocco.

"See," said Loriot proudly, handing the book to me, "here is a rare book that came from the library of M. des Armoises, a gentleman of Lorraine, who was imprisoned during the Terror, condemned to death, and whose mistress aided him to escape on the morning of the day fixed for his execution. I secured this book for almost nothing at the sale of the effects of the daughter of the very woman who saved Des Armoises."

I took the book and while turning the leaves, remarked a singular circumstance. Here and there, from page to page, whole lines were underscored with minute dots or hyphens, some in red ink, others in yellow ink, and having the appearance of age.

"Ah, this is curious," I murmured; "have you noticed this peculiarity in your copy?" I asked of Loriot, showing him the marked pages. At the same time, I raised my head and was struck by the uneasy, troubled expression of the lawyer's countenance. I turned towards Mme. Loriot and was astonished to see her pretty face reflect, as in a mirror, the confusion in Frederic Simonnet's.

"I attached no importance to it," responded the lawyer, reddening slightly.

"No importance?" cried Loriot, firing up; "for my part, I think there is an historical enigma there, a mysterious language to which I shall discover the key—you shall see, you shall see!"

Some eight days after I met Loriot, and, with characteristic impetuosity he seized me by the arm.

"My friend," he said. "I am on the track, and before long I shall discover the key! Here is what I have found so far" (at the same time drawing the copy of "Daphnis and Chloe" from his pocket). "In the first place," he continued, in opening the volume, "notice that the dots are always in yellow ink and the hyphens always in red ink. They seem to answer each other. Now, it is evident to me that Des Armoises kept this book in his prison, and his mistress visiting him there, sometimes took away, and sometimes returned the volume, so that with the aid of a cypher the two lovers used it as a means of correspondence. Ha! is not that an ingenious explanation? Only I have not yet discovered the key to the cypher, but with patience, I shall find it!"

"Will you lend me the book for a couple of days," I responded; "I have studied cypher language a little, and might be able to help you."

He consented, and I took the book home with me. It did not require any long study to discover the key, for the cypher used by the two correspondents was of the simplest. They had made use of the characters in the text, retaining their ordinary value, and it sufficed to place the marked letters side by side to reconstruct the sentences.

The first I deciphered was this:

"He goes to the tribunal to-morrow at two o'clock. Come, we shall not be disturbed"

To which the hyphens in red ink responded:

"It is understood, darling. At two o'clock. A thousand kisses."

I was highly edified, and if my hypothesis did not exactly coincide with Loriot's it was none the less most interesting.

The next day I called at the judge's at an hour when I felt certain of meeting his wife. I found her alone, before a blazing fire, and Eustache Loriot was at work in his library.

"I have discovered," I said in a low voice to Madame Loriot, "the key to the famous cypher correspondence."

"Ah," she murmured, glancing sharply at me, "let me see this book!"

I handed it to her, and immediately with a rapid movement she threw it into the fire.

And while I, stupefied, watched "Daphnis and Chloe" smoulder, she stirred the fire with the tongs.

When the hapless book was reduced to an incandescent mass, she gave a cry:

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, what a misfortune! What will Eustache say?"

At this exclamation Loriot came running out.

"What has happened?"

"Such a misfortune, my dear. Monsieur inadvertently placed the 'Daphnis and Chloe' on the arm of my chair and I must have made a false movement, and the volume fell into the grate. As we were conversing with our backs to the fire, we did not perceive it until too late."

Eustache seized the tongs in consternation, pulled out the burning book, and rushed to plunge it into a basin of water. But it was of no use. When taken out of its bath, nothing remained of "Daphnis and Chloe" but a heap of charred cinders.

"What a disaster!" lamented Loriot; "it is not so much a rare book that I regret, but there are the documentary materials that the fire has devoured—I repeat it, there was an enigma there of the highest interest—and just as I was about to discover the key!"

Pierrot.

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SUMMER HEAT AND OBESITY.

"Summer heat, with the out-door enjoyments which come in its train, is a source of unmixed delight to all whose physical condition is sound. The full feast of pleasure to which hospitable Nature at this season invites mankind is not, however, for those whose infirmities forbid them to undergo, without serious discomfort, a considerable amount of bodily fatigue. To those in particular who are the victims of excessive corpulence, the arrival of the genial summer warmth serves chiefly as a painful reminder that, for them, the delights of long woodland rambles, the climbing of mountain tops, and all the adventurous ways of flood and field are prohibited joys. The palpitating heart, the reeling brain, and the possible deadly sunstroke, which are the concomitants of obesity, banish all the pleasant anticipations which once came with the advent of the glad summer tide. How much of this deprivation of enjoyment and positive misery is absolutely and easily avoidable may be learned by consulting Mr. F. Cecil Russell's 'Corpulency, and the Cure' (256 pages), a little work whose popularity is proved by the fact that its eighteenth edition has just been issued. This fact, too, indicates, in some degree, the wide area now covered by Mr. Russell's wonderful success as an expert in the reduction of excessive fat. His process, which is absolutely safe and pleasant, is so rapid in its operation, that any over-corpulent lady or gentlemen can easily get rid of all unnecessary weight in a very few weeks, so as to be able, before the autumn is with us, to enjoy the delightful feeling (and the appearance too) of renewed youth and energy. Mr. Russell makes no mystery of the nature of his curative preparation—apparently miraculous as are its effects in simultaneously reducing weight and increasing appetite—the consequently larger amount of food being consumed with impunity. He prints, therefore, his recipe in his singularly suggestive book, which may be obtained post free, by sending two penny stamps to his offices, Woburn House, 27, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C."—*Gloucester Standard.*

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"Our corpulent readers will be glad to learn how to positively lose two stone in about a month with the greatest possible benefit in health, strength and muscle by a comparatively new system. It is a singular paradox that the patient, returning quickly to a healthy state, with increased activity of brain, digestive and other organs, naturally requires more food than hitherto, yet, notwithstanding this, he absolutely loses in weight 1lb. or 2lb. daily, as the weighing-machine will prove. Thus there is no suggestion of starvation. It is an absolute success, and the author, who has devoted years of study to the subject, absolutely guarantees a noticeable reduction within twenty-four hours of commencing the treatment. This is different with other diseases, for the patient in some cases may go for weeks without being able to test whether the Physician has rightly treated him, and may have derived no real or apparent improvement in health. Here, we repeat, the author guarantees it in twenty-four hours, the scale to be the unerring judge. The treatment aims at the actual root of the disease, so that the superfluous fat does not return when discontinuing the treatment. It is perfectly harmless. We advise our readers to call the attention of stout friends to this, because, sincerely, we think they ought to know. For this information, we may say that on sending two penny stamps a book 'Corpulency, and the Cure' (256 pages), containing a reprint of press notices from some hundreds of Medical and other journals (British and Foreign), and other interesting particulars, including the 'recipe,' can be had from a Mr. F. C. Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C."—Extract from *The Belfast News Letter.*

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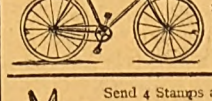

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If you require a reliable remedy for the relief of superfluous fat, send for a box of my **"H.D." Pills.** No starvation required; you may eat and drink what you like, yet I guarantee to either sex a permanent reduction of 5lb. to 7lb. weekly. They are a harmless vegetable preparation; successful in the most stubborn cases, and improve health and figure. Their action is rapid, certain, safe, tasteless, and highly recommended. Prices, 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d., and 11s., post free, plain wrapper. PROFESSOR F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 398. FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 15TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

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REMARKS.—A lady customer writes complaining that we send out too large a Carpet for the money. Be it so or not, we send out no Carpet measuring less than 6ft. by 9ft.—even for 2s. 11d. **TEST THEM. THEY WILL SURPRISE YOU.**

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Reversible, with a different pattern on both sides, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 10 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine on one side the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian with on the reverse the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

	Each.		Each.
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. ,, ,, ,,	5/11	12ft. by 12ft. ,, ,, ,,	12/9
9ft. by 9ft. ,, ,, ,,	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft. ,, ,, ,,	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft. ,, ,, ,,	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. ,, ,, ,,	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. ,, ,, ,,	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. ,, ,, ,,	19/6
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When ordering please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

"Neal Lodge, Upper Norwood, S.E., January 18th, 1896.
"The Dowr. Lady Abercromby is pleased with the 'Prudential' Carpets ordered."

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Lady Hunter Blair writes: "Will Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son send her another 'Prudential' Carpet, same as before, crimson and gold, dimensions, 9ft. by 10½ft. Cheque inclosed."

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100,000 "ALARM" CARPETS

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Sale Price 2/11 EACH.

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Suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Bordered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any Middle Profits. Remember these are Woven, not printed, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool. Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double above prices. A Rug sent with Carpet, 10d. extra.

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Value unequalled in the Annals of Advertising. As a favour, kindly Examine and Compare these Carpets.

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If unable to obtain it in your neighbourhood, send 9 stamps for sample bottle; or samples of both Wine Essence and Extract of Herbs, post free for 15 stamps.

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In Patent Air-tight Tins, ½lb., **1s. 4d.**; 1lb., **2s. 4d.**; 2lb., **4s. 4d.**, including Tin and Postage.

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Are an extraordinary revelation of low-priced excellence in an age where nothing ordinary will suffice.

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Model 469, as illustrated, is a new Coat and Skirt Costume. Latest Shape, Open Coat, square corners, neat revers. Full wide Skirt. Only **10/6.** Carriage 9d. extra.

MODEL 458 is a charming Mode, consisting of very smart Bodice, prettily trimmed fine Military braid, Fancy Buttons Full Wide Skirt. Price **10/6** only. Carriage paid 9d. extra. **10/6**

COLOURS.—All Costumes can be supplied in either **Black, Navy, Brown, Myrtle, Bronze-Green, Electric Blue, Ruby, Petunia, Cinnamon, Fawn, or Grey.**

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SEE THIS LITTLE LASSIE? Well, she may **RUN, ROMP, or RAMBLE** on the sands, in the fields, or in the playground, and yet never look untidy, because she is wearing one of those ideal children's garments,

1/6 The JOHN NOBLE KNOCKABOUT FROCKS 1/6

Made in The John Noble Cheviot Serge, with long full sleeves, saddle top, and pocket.

Sizes	21	24	27	30	33	36	39	42	45 in.
Prices	1/6	2/-	2/6	3/-	3/6	4/-	4/6	5/-	5/6

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ANNUAL SALE SIX MILLION BOXES.

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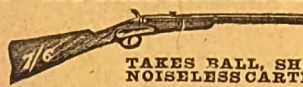

TAKES BALL, SHOT, AND NOISELESS CARTRIDGES.

This gun is the cheapest in the world. It is not a toy, but a practical well-made **Saloon Gun,** 37½in. long, weight about 4½lb. **100 Birds or Rabbits** can be killed with it at cost of **1/6** only with shot cartridges, or **6/-** per 500. Will penetrate a deal board 1in. at 50 yards. Can also be used in the house as a **Target Rifle,** with NOISELESS Cartridges at **1/-** per 100, or **5/-** per 1,000. This gun is fitted with a beautifully finished stock, nickel-plated fittings, etc., etc. **Price 7/6 with 100 Ball Cartridges.** Each gun is tested, regulated, and proved before sent to customer. **The "Union Jack" Pistol** (Registered), with 100 Ball Cartridges, price **4/6,** or pair for **8/-. Block Action Saloon or Garden Guns** (very superior manufacture) with 100 ball cartridges. No. 1 Bore, **12/6;** No. 2 Bore, **13/6;** No. 3 Bore, **15/6.** No. 3 Bore at 15/6 will kill a bird on the wing at 35 to 45 yards. Send for Price Lists of Air Guns, Saloon Guns, sporting novelties and ammunition. If you cannot send to-day, cut this advertisement out, and write some other time. ADDRESS—**W. R. JACKSON,** Wholesale Arms and Ammunition Dealer, **Tottenham, MIDDLESEX.**

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Harmless Arsenic Complexion Wafers

will produce the most lovely complexion that the imagination could desire; clear, fresh, free from blotch, blemish, coarseness, redness, freckles, or pimples. Post free for 4/6.—**S. HARVEY,** 5, Denman St., London Bridge, S.E. Half boxes 2/9. Use **Dr. MACKENZIE'S ARSENICAL TOILET SOAP.** 1s. per Tablet; No. 2 unscented, 6d. per Tablet. **Made from Purest Ingredients and Absolutely Harmless.**

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Aug. 15, 1896,
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No. 398.] For the Week ending August 15th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

AN INTERMINABLE FIVE MINUTES.

IT was agreed amongst us that to become famous it was necessary to get oneself prominently before the public.

"An occasional interview with the presiding magistrate of a metropolitan police court, for instance," remarked Charlie Dempster.

His remark was treated with the silent contempt it deserved.

"It seems to me," quietly said young Owen, a medical student of frivolous proclivities, "it is only fellows who do something outrageous that really become well known to the great B.P. What lasting fame or distinction is to be derived from having one's portrait exhibited at the Academy, for instance. A few thousand people go there, it is true, but it is only to a very small section of them that one's individuality appeals. Now what I should like," he went on in a meditative tone of voice, "would be to have my exact face and figure, my *alter ego*, in fact, exhibited at Madame Tussaud's; there one does get a chance of being really known."

"You are quite right, my boy," put in an elder man of our little group, Major Ryder; "there is nothing like wax, so long as it doesn't melt, to stamp one's identity on the public mind. Were any of you fellows ever in Russia, I wonder?"

We one and all admitted we had not been so far, whereupon the speaker continued:

"Well, I was once, a good many years ago now, and what is more my identity, or at any rate a remarkably good likeness of me in wax, still remains there for all I know."

"How on earth did it come about, old man?"

"Well, it's a curious story, and I have never told it before, but it can't do any harm repeating it now; but mind you, I shall not mention time, place, or proper names."

"Let X be an unknown quantity, and as A is to B, so is C+D to E," was the laughing rejoinder, "by all means preserve the lady's *incognito*—I suppose there was a lady in it? or were you a political suspect, or something worse?"

"No it wasn't quite so bad as that; nothing more than a little harmless flirtation, on my honour, but she was a very charming woman, I admit, and the worst of it was she was married, and to a wretch who did not properly appreciate her. Posssibly that was what made me pity her so. Without making a boast of it, I may mention that she was a lady of rank, and her husband, who also owned a title, was fabulously rich and unreasonably jealous of her—absolutely, I assure you, without a shadow of an excuse so far as I was concerned—was in a position to employ a small army of detectives to keep a watch on her movements: not that I should have minded these, but there was one who was far more difficult to contend with—the lady's aunt, a duenna of the severest description, whose astuteness was almost incomprehensible.

"You can easily imagine therefore that under these circumstances, although my intentions to the lady were strictly honourable, and our friendship purely platonic, it was not by any means an easy matter for me to see much of her and do my best to make her life a little pleasanter than it otherwise would have been.

"In a country like Russia, where the liberty of the subject, even although he be an Englishman, is lightly regarded by persons in high authority, it can be easily understood that I ran no small risk of passing the remainder of my existence immured in a foreign fortress. Such things have happened before now, as you are all doubtless aware, but I was ever noted for my gallantry to the fair sex, and for the sake of her I braved the risk.

"I would wish you to understand, please, that our intimacy was not entirely clandestine. At regular periods I was wont to call at the lady's house in an orthodox way, and on these occasions the manner in which the female dragon used to glare at me is a thing I shall never forget. Our conversation at such times

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used to be of the most ordinary kind, not a word being said at which the most jealous of husbands could possibly take exception; but need I say it, there were other occasions on which we managed to meet. The lady was a great admirer of art, and I, too, was not adverse to spending an hour or two occasionally in one or other of the big picture galleries in the town, and by a strange concidence our tastes were so much in common that we often found ourselves in the same place. Ah, the bliss of those stolen interviews! The memory of them will never forsake me.

"Perhaps, however, the place of all others where we felt ourselves to be more than ordinarily safe from observation or interruption, was a certain waxwork exhibition, almost as important in its way as the world renowned establishment in Baker Street. At the picture galleries there was always the danger of meeting someone moving in the same high social circle as my companion, but at the waxworks no such danger existed, it not being considered the fashion to go there. Not that it was absolutely without a drawback inasmuch as it was the favourite resort of the upper class of servants, and as my companion moved in the very highest society in the town, and visited a great deal, her face was everywhere more or less well known. Still there was a means of getting out of the difficulty, and we were not long in discovering it. One part of the exhibition was set apart for *fac-simile* representations of notabilities, individuals who had never done anything notorious, and were consequently not likely to attract the ordinary class of visitors to whom the local chamber of horrors presented a far greater attraction; and this particular part of the building we often had entirely to ourselves.

"One day we were sitting there in one of the comfortable nooks thoughtfully provided by the management, and I was narrating one of my many experiences with a view to enlivening my companion, who seemed to be unusually *distraite*, when suddenly, and just as I was at a most exciting part of the story, she gave a startled little cry of affright.

"'What is it, dearest?'

"For answer she convulsively clutched my arm and uttered the one word, 'look,' which I did, and saw to my dismay the She Dragon approaching us from the other end of the room. She wore glasses, being near-sighted, and I felt instinctively she would to a certainty recognise us. And then what was to become of her!

"I confess I felt a cold shiver go down my back; not, mind you, that I had done anything to be ashamed of, but in Russia you know things are different to what they are in England, and the vista of incarceration for an undefined period loomed uncomfortably before me. Worse than all I had not the slighest idea of what to do to get out of the very awkward predicament I found myself in. It was only my companion's quick wit that saved me, I may say us.

"'Quick,' she whispered, 'step up on that platform and stand sideways by the side of that old man. There is just room. Fold your arms; look fierce; that's right; and above all don't move. Didn't you tell me once you belonged to some learned society—F.R.—— What was it?'

"'F.R.G.S.,' I hastily replied.

"'Yes, yes; and what is G.S.?'

"'Fellow of the Royal Geological Society.'

"'Of course, how stupid of me, and that accounts for your wonderful hairbreadth escapes, of course,' with a smile. 'Now don't move or we are ruined,' and with a last look to make sure her instructions were understood, she attentively regarded one of the figures close by, and then suddenly catching sight of that terrible female—her aunt—she advanced to meet her.

"'So you have come to see it, too, then? My child, what are you doing here? Are you by yourself?'

"'Quite, Aunt. I came came out of curiosity to see the model. Hadn't you heard about it?'

"'Heard what?'

"'Why, about our friend, Mr. Ryder!'

"'And what of him, pray?'

"'Why, he is a most noted *savant*, a member of the—what is it now?' making a pretence of looking for the usual label attached to each of the figures. 'How stupid of them; they haven't given him his title. Oh, I know the Royal Geological Society.' And then, going on without giving the old lady time to answer, she continued, looking at me critically: 'I don't call it a very good likeness, do you know? He looks so severe, not at all like what he really is, is it now?'

"The old lady's answer was a contemptuous 'humph! Well I declare,' at the same moment advancing her parasol as if to prod me.

"Quick as thought my Guardian Angel divined her intention, and in an awed tone said:

"'You mustn't touch the figures. Look at the notice.'

"The parasol remained poised midway, and I breathed again—at least, I tried to—inwardly hoping that in so doing I had not what you would say given myself away, but just at that moment an individual in a grey uniform, one of the police officers employed to keep order in the building, effectually arrested the further progress of the upraised parasol by pushing it gently downwards, at the same time saying deferentially but decisively: 'Visitors are on no account to touch the figures, Madame.'

"I could have hugged him on the spot.

"The old lady said never a word, but if a look could have melted a wax figure, I should assuredly have been dissolved instanter. Turning angrily away she strode off, the attendant following in her wake and after him my deliverer.

"I remained immovable, anticipating that she would shortly return, which she did, and clapping her hands with delight, said: 'Capital! You could not have done it better—but—' pursing up her lips, 'we are not by any means out of the wood yet. I got rid of her, but she suspects, I know she does, and the only thing to be done is there must be a *real* model of you here by the time this place opens to-morrow morning.'

"'But——' I expostulated.

"'It must, and it shall. See here,' opening her purse—a well filled one—'money will do anything in this country, take it, and do as I bid you.'

"I demurred, as who would not? but she was accustomed to have her own way, and after a time I consented to do as I was told. Having escorted her to a cab I lost no time in making my way to the proprietor, or rather proprietress, of the exhibition, and made known my desire to have a portrait model of my humble self prepared that very evening, and, what was more, promised that if it were placed in position by the side of the learned Professor, whose name I mentioned, before the hour of opening on the following morning, I was prepared to pay down a certain sum, the amount of which made the good lady open her eyes in amazement.

"'But, monsieur was unknown,' she urged.

"Then in my grandest manner I gave her to understand that if for personal and private reasons of my own it had been my desire up to the present to remain *incog*, she

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would speedily find that once my model occupied a position in her exhibition my name was a household word in learned circles all over the world.

"This seemed to impress her and, added to the influence of the promised payment which I was I stated prepared to make even before the operator commenced to make the necessary cast of my features, any scruples she might have had were effectually dispelled.

"Later on found me seated in an armchair in the modelling room, my face covered with plaster of Paris, in which the necessary holes had been left for sight and breathing. Presently I saw to my consternation the police officer enter the room who had been the means of saving me from detection but a few hours previously.

"In his hand he held an official looking document, and he delivered himself as follows: 'An order has been issued by the municipal authorities that all exhibitions are to remain closed to-morrow, the day having been set apart for special intercession for the safety of the Tsar.'

"Here was an unexpected respite.

"'Who have you got in the chair—a new subject, I suppose?'

"'Yes, perhaps you noticed a new model in the professor division to-day?—well, that was Mr. Ryder, the noted geologist, who has been in this town for months, and his identity only becoame discovered yesterday, when, naturally anxious to be first in the field, I waited on him and obtained permission to take a cast.'

"'That's the one the old lady wanted to prod,' and he laughed as he remembered it.

"I felt inclined to do the same, but I realised that to do so would ruin the reproduction of my features which was fast approaching completion.

"'But if you took one cast, what on earth do you want with another?' he asked suspiciously.

"'Well, you see the Professor wasn't altogether satisfied with himself; it is wonderful how particular some of 'em are, even when they have nothing much to be proud of in the way of looks.'

"'Well, this new Professor, as you call him, wasn't what you might call handsome, and he had a scowl on him enough to terrify any ordinary being—by-the-bye, have you got him in the catalogue?'

"'No. You see it was only exhibited yesterday for the first time.'

"'Ah, quite so. Well, don't forget; no opening to-morrow,' and, with a stare at me, and a good-night to the operator, he was gone.

"At last the horrible ordeal of being plastered up, like the luckless individuals one reads of, who were entombed in walls, and left to die a lingering death, was over, and I was once more free of speech and sight.

"My first question was: 'When will this model be ready?'

"'By to-morrow night,' was the reply.

"'Now about your catalogue of the exhibits, how often do you publish one?'

"'Once a year as a rule.'

"'But if you have any additions in the meanwhile?'

"'Oh, I just insert a leaflet.'

"'When is your next catalogue due?' I asked, ignoring his last remark.

"'As a matter of fact it is in the printer's hands now, and was to be delivered to-day!'

"'Good! Now can you guarantee that by to-morrow night—I am prepared to pay handsomely for my whim,' I remarked; 'my name, with the number of the exhibit and a short sketch of my career, can appear in the new catalogue and that copies will be in the exhibition on the opening morning, the day after to-morrow.'

"'It might be done, but the expense would be enormous.'

"'Never mind the expense,' I replied loftily, 'let it be done, that's all; and now I will hasten home, remove these clothes, and let you have them again in less than an hour.'

"For the first time since my adventure I felt somewhat at ease. The clothes, the appearance of my name in the new catalogue, would together form a chain of evidence it would be impossible to disbelieve. My next move was to get a notice inserted in one or two of the leading daily papers announcing my identity, and that the celebrated Professor Ryder, F.R.G.S., and the humble individual who had hitherto been content to pose as plain Mr. Ryder were one and the same.

"Further than this I determined to put a bold front on the matter. I paid a formal call the next day at my divinity's house, made myself as agreeable as possible to her brute of a husband, and the She Dragon accepted the congratulations of the former, and effectually parried the searching remarks of the latter, finally winding up by laughingly remarking that it would be a good joke to go and see myself the next day.

"The proposition was at once cordially agreed to by Dr. Hunt, and I fancied I could detect a malicious gleam in her eyes.

"We went; and, needless to say, made direct for the group of learned men. Myself amongst others.

* * * * *

"Shortly afterwards, the setting out of an important expedition, bent on geographical research, afforded a reasonable excuse for my sudden return to England; and I felt that it was wise to avail myself of it. But you see it is quite possible to get oneself exhibited in a public place without committing any great atrocity."

"Yes, and by indulging in a very pleasant occupation, too."

"Gentlemen, I give you my word of honour, our friendship was purely platonic, and the Major sighed heavily as he thought of the days that had been."

S. J. F. NEWBERY.

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

NO. 4.

WE regret to announce that the result of this compe- must take the form of that published last week. Eight hundred odd competitors entered for this competition, and three hundred and eighty of them succeeded in putting the story together absolutely correctly, and were the prizes divided among them each would receive about sixpence. Instead, however, of forwarding this amount, we are sending to each winner a penknife.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

NO. 5.

THE London guinea goes this week to Mr. W. Nicholson, 29, Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, W.C.; and the provincial guinea to Mr. J. C. Parsons, 22, Devon Street, Glasgow.

The longest word in which the same letter occurred only once was *considerably*, page 160, col. 1, line 21.

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I COMPLAINED one afternoon to Doctor Marcy, who besides being my physician was also my very intimate friend, that I found twelve hours of daylight, during which I was not allowed, owing to the condition of my eyes, to read or write, longer than the same number of weeks of the congenially occupied.

"Sweet are the uses of industry," I said; "heretofore, I have been wont to give myself credit for the labours I have accomplished. Now that I am compelled to pass my time in idleness, suddenly am I made aware of the fact that I have been all along merely following a natural human instinct of avoiding *ennui*."

"Providence," said the Doctor, "wisely supplies us with an abundance of playthings that we may not keep asking, like children at the *matinée*, 'when is it going to begin,' as well as various other questions the answers whereof are not easily found."

"But my toys have all been taken away," I remarked, "and I can find nothing to do except to keep asking myself these very questions of which you speak."

"You should get new toys," answered my friend, stroking his beard; "go out and study nature."

"In a city park with custom-made flower-beds and a lake run in a mould?"

"I intend that you shall go out into the country as soon as I have finished with this treatment. In the meantime you can interest yourself a little more in human nature. Mingle with the crowd whenever you can and study its characteristics."

"*Odi profanum vulgus!*" I exclaimed, and I rose from my chair and walked to the window. I looked out through the dusky goggles, which the Doctor compelled me to wear, across the yard into the street and to the city beyond. All the world seemed to be in a miserable limbo of twilight.

"You grow peevish," said my friend presently; "you must make occupation for yourself of some kind, else I shall be called on ere long to minister to a mind diseased. If you are forbidden great things, then do the best you can with trivial. Become an apostle of the commonplace. For mental employment, recite the poetry you learnt when you were young; for diversion, play games with the children; if you want conversation, go and get your hair cut; if there is need of exercise, take a long walk."

I laughed, but did not turn away from the window or make any reply.

The Doctor continued: "A long stroll, say two hours or more, ought to form a part of each day's programme. Don't wander about aimlessly, but visit some particular place, or walk by some established rule. It is not a bad plan to imagine yourself a shadow-detective and follow up different pedestrians. You might, perhaps, get a more varied route by pursuing some stray dog."

"These be rare pastimes," said I.

"Then there is a penny walk," my friend began to say.

"A penny walk?" I exclaimed.

"Yes; that is a perfectly simple device to produce an exciting variety in a stroll. Stockton describes it in one of his stories. You stand at a corner and flip a penny; if it comes heads, go to the right; tails, to the left. When you come to the next corner, repeat the process."

"It has the advantage of being a very economical form of amusement," I remarked.

"Precisely. If you prefer it in a more extravagant form you might flip a sovereign."

"Apropos of stray dogs, which you mentioned a moment ago," said I, still at the window, "here is one coming up the path in your front garden."

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The Doctor approached the window and looked out. The dog, which was a big, shaggy Russian terrier had stopped with his forefeet on the bottom step, and was looking eagerly up at the window. When he saw Marcy, he ran up the steps and stood in front of the door, wagging his blunt tail vigorously.

"Hallo," said the Doctor; "it is you, is it? Want to come in? There is a mystery of some kind about that dog," he continued to me, as he stepped out into the entry to open the door, "which I should like to have you explain, if you can. Come in, Towser, or whatever your name may be."

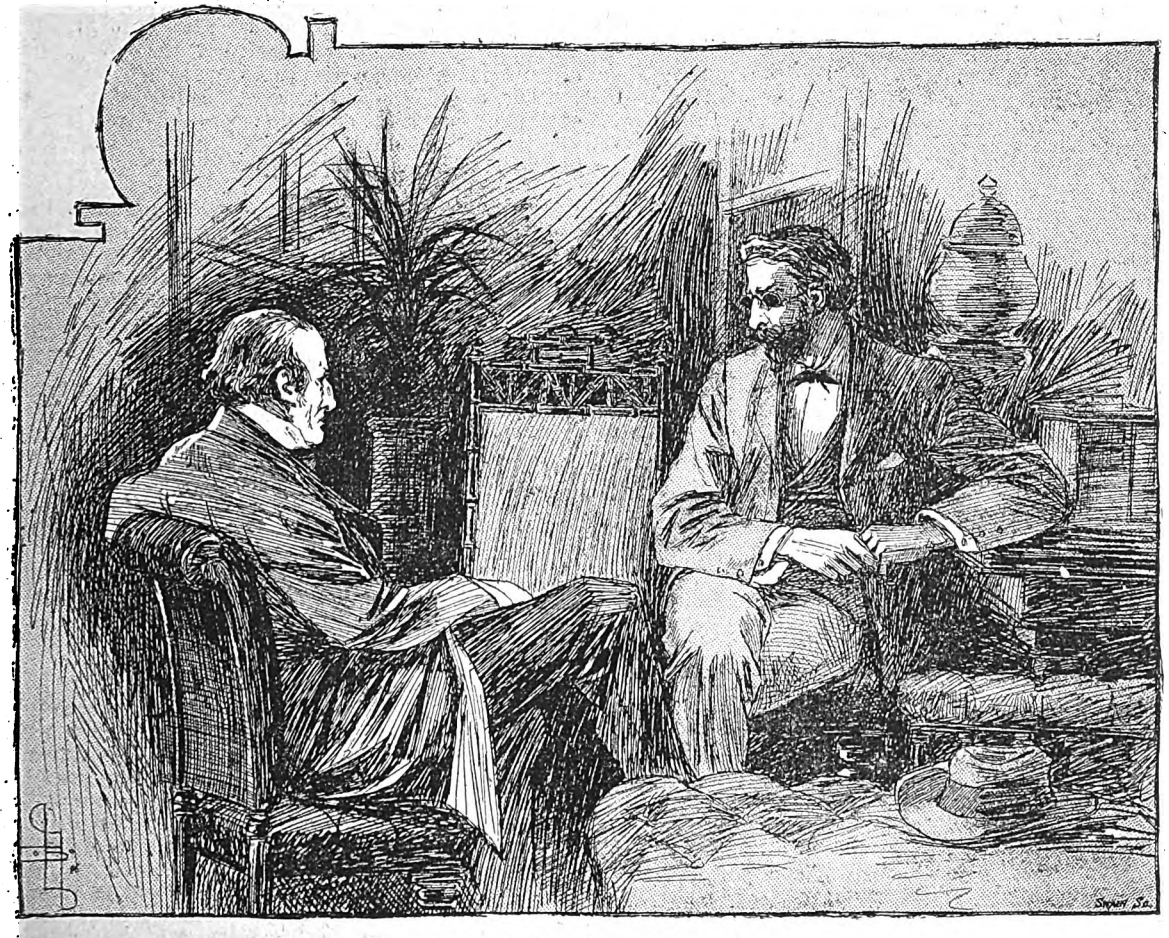
The moment the door opened the dog bolted through the hall into the consultation room, where we had been sitting. There he stood still for a few seconds in the attitude of a setter, head erect, ears pricked, legs spread apart, with the right forefoot raised in the air. With one quick glance he took in the entire room, letting his eyes rest for a moment on me. Then crouching down upon the floor, he put his head between his paws and lay perfectly quiet.

"He always goes through that same performance," said the Doctor; "half-a-dozen times I have found him at the door, waiting to be admitted. As soon as it is opened, he rushes into the room, and lies down in the position he has now. Presently he will ask to be let out."

"Belong to some neighbour?" I asked, taking off my coloured glasses that I might get a better look at this mysterious animal. He was exceptionally large for a terrier, but his alert, saucy physiognomy showed that he was of pure breed. His hair was of a wolfish grey and as curly as moss. It had the effect of making his whole figure, including the stubby neck and the snort, thick legs looked gnarled and tough.

"He is not a beauty by any means," said I; "but I think he would be a good dog to bet on."

"That is a comprehensive way of putting it," said the Doctor; "his appearance suggests, to my mind, infinite faithfulness; and I conceive that his presence here illustrates it. Some time ago—about six months, I should think—this dog's master came here to consult me as to how long he could hope to live. He was a man of only about thirty-five years of age, but he was an absolute wreck. At the first glance, I saw that he had been through the white heat of dissipation, and without much soliciting on my part, he told me something of his story. I remember the dog lay there exactly as he is lying now, and he kept his eyes fixed on his master. In an unconcerned way, very much as though he were speaking of some third person, the man explained how he had been killing himself by degrees with whisky, absinthe, opium, and cocaine. He did not thing that he



Here the Doctor's eyes brightened.

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could last much longer, and would like to know what my professional verdict would be on that point. I studied his eyes while he talked, and made up my mind that he was on the verge of madness. It was useless to try to do anything for him, unless he should himself make a powerful effort towards reform, and I started to tell him so; but he interrupted me. 'I am not going to ask you about remedies,' said he; 'what I desire to know is how much longer am I likely to live.' I did not discuss the matter further, but proceeded at once to a searching examination, with some very interesting results."

Here the Doctor's eyes brightened, and he began to describe, in technical language slightly modified for my understanding, the demoralised condition of heart and lungs revealed by the stethoscope. There was, it appeared, an astonishing disarrangement of every function of the body, betokening a climax of dissolution not far removed.

The Doctor presently emerged from the professional mist in which he had enveloped himself and continued the story. "When he pushed the question again of how long he might expect to live, I assured him that, if he made no change in his present habits, a horrible death of some kind was only a few months away. Some of the symptoms he described were those of approaching deliria. My advice to him was that he apply without delay for admission to the House for Inebriates, and I offered to give him a letter to the examining physician. He had cross-examined me narrowly with regard to the diagnosis, but as soon as I began to suggest a course of action for him to follow, he made a gesture of impatience and rose from his chair. He asked my fee, and when I told him the amount, he paid it into my hand. Then he took up his hat and, thanking me in a stern, almost savage fashion, went towards the door. The dog followed at his heels; but as the pair crossed the threshold, the animal turned and gave me such an intensely human look of sorrowful appeal that I give you my word, Firmin, it has haunted me ever since."

"He probably understood in a vague way," I remarked, "that something was wrong with his master."

"About a week later," said the Doctor, "the dog returned alone, and I admitted him. He acted just as he does now. I brought him food and drink, but he would not accept either. Since then he has called a great many times, and whenever he is let into this room he always goes through with this same performance."

The dog now rose to his feet, and, after again looking all about the room, started towards the door. I took up my hat and stick, and followed him.

"And you never saw the master again?" I inquired.

"No, nor heard of him."

I opened the front door, and the dog ran out into the street. He seemed to understand that I was planning to accompany him, for he stopped on the pavement and looked back at me, while I explained to the Doctor that I was about to carry out his suggestion and follow a stray dog. He assured me that I had selected a good subject—one which was decidedly out of the commonplace.

"Now, see here, my friend," I said to the dog, as soon as I caught up with him, "you seem a very intelligent fellow, and I believe you will understand most of what I say. I am going to follow you, do you see? I shall go wherever you go. Now don't run along too fast, for I cannot keep up. Slowly, slowly, understand!"

The terrier wagged his short tail vigorously, and started off at a moderate trot a few feet in advance of me. Every now and again he stopped and looked back to see if I were still following him. There was an air of sturdy earnestness about all his actions which reminded me of a child made prematurely old by care and responsibility.

"Evidently," said I, to my guide, "you have led your master, as you are now leading me, perhaps when the night was dark and stormy, and he was very drunk. If he fell in the gutter, I suppose you shook his arm until you woke him up. When the police took him in charge, you went in search of bail among his dissolute friends, if he had any."

We emerged from the quiet, respectable street in which my friend resided into a main thoroughfare of the city. Presently the dog dodged into a doorway, and stood looking expectantly at me when I came up. In the window, at one side, was a large display of bottles artistically arranged. The doors were hung with light curtains, impenetrable to the vision. Above there was painted, in large gilt letters, "Harry and Jack."

"So this is one of the places," said I to the dog; "and you are waiting for me to go in and follow the example of your former master." I pushed open the door, and my companion ran in. A large man, with a florid countenance and expansive shirt front, was vigorously polishing the counter of the bar with a towel. The other proprietor sat in an armchair at the opposite side of the room, reading a newspaper and smoking.

"Hey, Jack," the latter called out, as soon as we entered; "here is that fellow's dog again."

"Give him some meat, poor devil," said "Jack." Then he stopped his work of polishing and asked me what I would have.

I explained that I was merely looking for a friend, and then said: "That is a bright-looking dog. Is he yours?"

"No, he isn't," said the mixer of drinks, resting his elbows on the bar; "he used to belong to a fellow that came here to get a drink, now and then. Don't know where he has gone to."

"What was his name?"

"Well, those who were with him generally called him Tom, but I never heard no other name. Used to get full pretty often. Never seemed to know when he had had enough. When a man gets to drinking like that——"

Here a customer entered and called for whisky, checking the barman's incipient temperance homily. "Harry," in the meantime, had come forward, his hand full of small pieces of cold meat, which he tossed to the dog. They were caught in the air and eagerly devoured.

"Here, Ban!" he said as he threw him a piece.

"Is his name Ban?" I asked.

"That is what they used to call him," answered "Harry," looking up at me; "mighty intelligent dog, he is, too. He would take his master home when he was too far gone. Now he comes here sometimes to get something to eat, and, you bet, I always give it to him. Don't I, Ban?"

The dog, with his mouth full of meat, wagged his short tail enthusiastically. Then we went out into the street again and threaded our way through the crowd for a few squares. Whenever we passed a drinking place, my guide would slacken his pace a little and look about; but as I showed no disposition to enter, he would hurry along. Presently we turned into a quiet street leading off the main thoroughfare, and I began to talk out loud to my companion.

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"So your name is Ban, is it?" said I; "it is an odd title. Are you so ugly that Tom, whoever he may be, regarded you as a sort of a Japanese curio?"

I repeated the name several times, and as I did so, the words of a catch in *The Tempest* suddenly occurred to me, and I spoke them aloud:

"No more dams I'll make for fish;
Nor fetch in firing
At requiring;
Nor scrape trenchering, nor wash dish,
'Ban, 'Ban, Ca—Caliban
Has a new master—get a new man."

When I came to the name Caliban, I spoke it with special emphasis. The effect upon the dog, who stood attentively listening, was quite unexpected. With a sudden yelp he sprang up in the air towards my face, and ran round me, leaping and barking. Then he seemed to regain control of himself and to remember, for he came and crouched down at my feet, whining softly.

"Caliban, Caliban," I repeated, and each time I spoke the name the dog whined again and crouched closer to my feet. "That is evidently what Tom called you when you were alone together, and I am, perhaps, the first to have uttered that name since your master disappeared. Now that we are thoroughly introduced, you will trust me, won't you?" Caliban wagged his tail affirmatively. "Very well, then, you may lead on."

I motioned with my stick and Caliban bounded along in front, turning back every few yards to make sure that I had not disappeared. A short distance down the street, I marked the imposing façade of the building from which the *Great Daily* was issued. Caliban made directly towards it, passing the business offices and entering at a side doorway which led to the editorial rooms. As we ascended the stairs, I said to myself that I had probably discovered the means whereby the dog's master had been wont to earn a living.

Caliban brought me through the outer offices, which at this time in the day, were unoccupied, to the desk of the assistant-editor, a gentleman with whom I was very well acquainted.

"How did you happen to get possession of that dog, Firmin?" he asked, looking up from his work.

I answered that I had followed the animal up the stairs, and then inquired as to who was his owner.

"I do not think he has any owner," replied the assistant-editor; "I believe he's a genuine 'vagrom' animal, and I marvel that some pound-keeping Dogberry does not order that he be 'comprehended.'"

"He must some time have had a master," I suggested.

"He used to follow in the rather irregular wake of a man by the name of Gower—Tom Gower, if I remember rightly. You never knew him, did you?" I shook my head. "He did specials for a while, and occasionally I gave him a chance in the editoral columns. Good writer, but villainously dissipated; unreliable on that account."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"I have no idea; indeed, I wish I knew, for I could give him plenty of work just at present, and the poor fellow always looked as though he needed it. I imagine that he must be dead or have left the city, otherwise the dog would not be wandering about in this fashion."

Caliban had, by this time, begun to show signs of impatience, and, after I had answered some inquiries from the assistant-editor about the condition of my eyes, we took our departure. I felt that I was now in possession of a much clearer idea as to the personality of the man in whose footsteps I was following. A sense of fraternity with him had sprung up with the knowledge that he had earned his living by my own craft. A dissipated and reckless Bohemian, with no friend in the world save his ugly-looking dog—a character well worth running down and investigating. For this there could be no better guide than the very one which I had happened upon by chance.

Started off at a trot a few feet in advance of me.

"After all, Caliban," I said, to my companion, "it is quite as well that you cannot talk. As we progressed in this itinerary, you would have explained everything, and not allowed me the flattering unction of drawing a successful inference. Long before this I should have been bored with your well-meaning chatter, and the career of Tom Gower would have been bereft of all possible interest for me. Hereafter, whenever I want a guide, I shall try to secure one that has no power of speech."

Caliban was trotting along a few paces in front of

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me, and I noticed in his carriage a jaunty swagger which had not appeared before. Every now and again he would look back at me and then execute a caper and bark.

"Aha!" said I, "we have been to the office and we have money in our pocket. Now we are going to spend it. Is that the idea, Caliban?" Every time that I spoke the dog's full name he started and turned round, evidently mindful of his lost master.

We turned several corners, and were presently in a locality with which I was not very familiar. Caliban, on the contrary, seemed perfectly at home. The streets were narrow and very dirty; they swarmed with people instead of vehicles. Here and there they shaded off into alleys, which were so like the streets that they could not be distinguished from them. Everything looked dingy and spattered. The sun, which had elsewhere shone almost offensively bright, seemed to be radiating through a haze. I slipped off the dark glasses which I had been wearing and called to my guide not to run so far in advance. At the word, he stopped in front of a small chemist's and looked inquiringly at me. I nodded my head, and he walked over to the doorway.

He looked first at me.

It was a shabby, disreputable-looking place, several steps below the level of the pavement. When I pushed open the door, a bell, which was hung over it, jangled fiercely, and a hoarse voice from behind a partition at the end of the room, cried: "Be out in a minute!" I stared around at the fly-speckled "Patent medicine" advertisements and the long rows of bottles on the dusty, paintless shelves, and said to Caliban: "What do we want here?"

This inquiry was repeated a moment later by an individual with a pale face and red eyes, who came forward behind the counter. He looked first at me and then at the dog. I fancied that I noticed in his eye, as he caught sight of Caliban, a flash of uneasiness.

"Has Mr. Gower been here recently?" I asked, in a bland tone.

"I don't know anybody by that name," answered the apothecary, glancing again at my companion.

"But you will recognise his dog, I think," said I.

"The man you mean has not been in here for six months or longer. The dog comes sometimes."

"He told me once," said I, mendaciously, "that this was the place where he used to get his opium and cocaine."

The man folded his arms and stared coldly at me.

"And so," I added, "I thought you might possibly know something about him."

The apothecary turned and began to move back towards the roost from which I had disturbed him. "I know nothing whatever about the man," said he; "he often tried to buy opium of me, but I let him have only a small amount at a time."

"Caliban," said I, when we were again out on the pavement, "our friend within is a liar, is he not?" It was quite evident, from the anxiety the dog had displayed to get out of the shop, that his opinion of the pale-faced man was as unfavourable as my own, although perhaps based on a different process of reasoning.

Farther on, the street widened somewhat, and the houses appeared to make some effort to assume the virtue of respectability, even though they had it not. I began to meet well-dressed men here and there, and an occasional cab rattled over the stony road.

We went too fast and made too many turnings for me to retain any knowledge of the streets through which we passed. I was presently conscious that we were again back in the disreputable portion of the town. It was still too early for the night workers to swarm out, but the evening twilight gave to the houses a sinister appearance, like that on the faces of ruffians who sleep. At intervals, Caliban would stop before some villainous-looking grog-shop and wait until I came up.

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"See here, Caliban, now why do we go up this alley? It is a ghostly place for either men or dogs—especially just now when there is only enough light to see our way, and not enough to make these very harmless objects around us—boxes, barrels, and cans—show for what they are. Am I to climb over that pile of timber and into this low, dirty-looking shed? Do you want to get me arrested for a maurauding vagrant? Now, what are you searching for? There is nothing on that pile of dirty straw. Heavens! Do people live in such quarters as these? There are lights through the cracks in the partition. Hark! A woman's voice!"

"Somebody is movin' in the next room, Jim!"

"It's that dog. I'll get in there and stick a knife through his pelt, some time. Comes here every night since that feller crawled in there that time and——"

"Yes, yes; the police took him away. Don't talk about it. It scares me now to remember how horrible his face looked."

"Hold on, Caliban! Wait till I ask—you will go, eh? And the police took him away, did they? Then the next thing is the station."

But the next place was not the station. It was a small stone building over whose arched doorway appeared the words "City Hospital." It stood in a small side-street, abutting a number of large buildings which fronted upon the main street. A burly policeman was pacing up and down the pavement outside. He touched his hat to me as I came up, and I recognised him as an old member of the force.

"Good-evening to you, Mr. Firmin. How does it happen that you have my dog with you?"

"Your dog? Why do you call him yours?"

The man stopped to pat Caliban, who was rubbing against his legs. "Because," said he, "he comes every night just about this time to see me. He makes up to me, like he is doing now, until he is sure I am good-natured, then he runs up to the door and begs to be let into the hospital."

"Why does he do that?"

"I think, sir," replied the man in a half-whisper, evidently fearful lest the dog should overhear what he said, "he is looking for his master. I'll show you. When I open the door, see, he runs along the hall to that room there. Well, *that's* where we put his master when we got him to the hospital. He had shot himself in the head over near Riley's Alley. The dog followed into the room, and beating wouldn't get him out. So they let him stay. There is no one in the room now. He just goes in and looks about a little and then comes out—just like he has done now."

"What was the man's name; did you find out?" I asked as Caliban returned to us.

"He had a note in his hand addressed to the person who should find him. He said that his name was Edward Thompson, and that he had come from some town up North. He said he was a civil engineer, but could not get any work, so he was going to shoot himself. I read the note myself, so I remembered it. 'I have no friends,' that is what it said in ending."

"And what finally became of him?" I asked; but just as I spoke, I caught a glimpse of Caliban disappearing round the corner. I could not wait for the answer to my question without losing my guide, and I hastily broke away, almost upon a run. I called to the dog, but he refused to look round. He was not going very fast, and I succeeded in overtaking him as he turned into the main road, which ran parallel to the street upon which the hospital was situated.

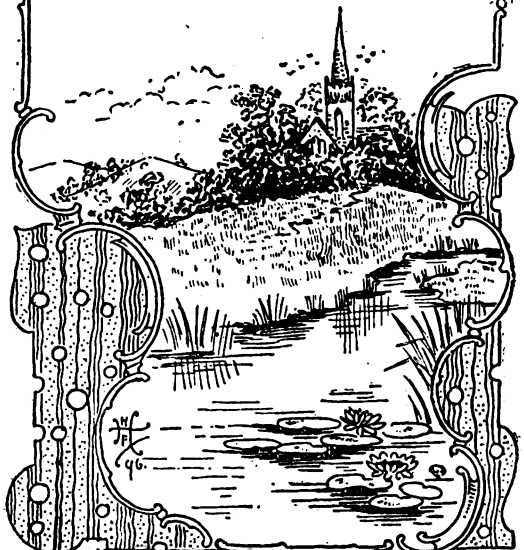
"Now then, my friend Caliban, surely we have not much further to go. It grows late, the streets are deserted, and the sunlight, under which we started upon this little journey, has given way to the blackest of night. Here you stop in front of this magnificent pile of stone and marble, and look up at its classic columns. Do you want me to push open this iron gate? Very well, now you are in the yard, where do you propose to go? To the back of the building, through this narrow passage, where the echo of my heels upon the stone pavement sounds like the rattle of bones? And now you crouch in front of that window, which opens into the basement below. There appears to be some kind of a shoot down which boxes are slid. I will tell you what it is, Caliban, I can see through the dusty pane. What! The dissecting-room of a medical college! And now I know, by this long, sad howl, that your itinerary is ended."

CHARLES DWIGHT WILLARD.

POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 7.

THERE is a discrepancy somewhere in this number between the text and one of the illustrations. A guinea is offered to the first person living within a hundred miles of London who points this out, and another guinea is offered to the first person living beyond this distance. *Post-cards only, please.* Other forms of communication disqualified.



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THE BOOK OF ALISTAIR KENNEDY.

It was on a Sunday evening early last winter that I saw the book of Alistair Kennedy. Months before, in talking of the work and ambitions common to us, he had mentioned that he had grown bold and was writing at length. Then, and several times since, I had asked him to tell me more than the mere fact, to describe his motive and characters; but always he had laughingly refused. Friendship was constant in everything save in the affairs of authorship; he could only say that he had found a vein of life as yet unworked by the novelist. When the book was finished I should see it and praise; until then my curiosity must be unsatisfied.

A day or two before the evening he had written to me that his work was done, and that the book would be brought out at Christmas. The publishers had returned the manuscript with some suggested alterations, and if I liked I might see it before it finally left him. My answer to the letter was a visit to his rooms on the evening, and of this visit and of what followed I write. As faithfully as I can I will tell the incidents of the two or three hours from the time Kennedy replied to my congratulations.

"Yes," he said, "Brown and Bowyer have accepted it, and expect a big sale. I don't think the book is badly done; but then I am prejudiced. You shall judge for yourself. Here it is; do you read, and I will smoke and watch if you approve. But of course you will approve."

I took the bundle he passed across the table, and turned over the typewritten sheets, and learnt what was his book. The unworked vein of life was the Salvation Army. On a grey background of barrack-room and shelter he had shown grey pictures of men and women. With the circumstance that gives air of truth he had told the loves and hates of captain and lieutenant, bandsman and tambourinist. It was an unkind book; blame was sounded often and clearly, praise seldom and in falsetto of cynicism; the writing was the writing of a scoffer. Unfair though the book was, it was cleverly made, and would find a public willing to buy. Chapter after chapter I quickly read; all were written with skill, and all had a certain power. The book would have the success that was hoped for; but it was bad, bad as it was clever. At the end of a bitter impeachment entitled 'Blood Royal,' I tired of the reading; pushing back my chair I looked to Kennedy in remonstrance.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of it? Will it go?"

"The book is not good," I said. "It is very easy to abuse people and parties of people, to bring forward the bad and hold back the good. It is——"

"That is not what I mean," he interrupted, "Is the book well written? Will it sell?"

"Yes," I said, "the writing has strength, and will be read. But the whole thing is unfair. I cannot understand how you, Kennedy, an emotional man, could have written it. Where is the morality?"

"If the book takes," he said, somewhat angrily, "I shall be content. The morality is clear to me. You think I am showing up the Army; well perhaps I am and perhaps I am right to do so. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever been to a Salvationist meeting, or slept in a shelter, or talked to a soldier?"

"No," I said, "but——"

"You confess," he interrupted, "you know nothing of the people or their methods, and yet say I am unfair. Why, my dear fellow, I have lived the life for months, and have written from facts; it is you who are unfair. But it is not too late to begin to study. I am not quite satisfied with the colouring of the third, the conversion chapter, and should like to watch another meeting. There is a hall but a few yards away, and presently we will go to it. You shall listen to the bandsmen as with music they charm the world; you shall see the sisters as with flourish of tambourines they charm the bandsmen. You will come?"

"You talk as you write, Kennedy," I said. "Yes, I will come. When do we start?"

"Now," he said, gathering together the typewritten sheets, "I will put these away—no, I will bring them with me; you may want to refer to them—and we will go. The show begins at seven, and we will lose as little as possible."

His anger had gone at the thought of guiding me to the life he had found, and he laughed as he gave me my hat and led the way to the street. Arm in arm we walked to the corner, and across to the low-roofed building which was the hall.

"It is late and we have commenced; but I think there is standing room. Come in; God bless you," said the soldier at the entrance; as we passed in to the meeting.

"Yes, the seats are all taken; we will wait here," said Kennedy, placing his book on the floor; and near the beginning of the middle aisle we stood and looked about the room.

Across the far end was raised a platform, on one side of which sat men who played on this and that instrument, and were the band, and on the other women who shook tambourines, and sang in high shrill voices, and were now the followers, and now the leaders of the men. Below the platform, and with face sometimes towards and sometimes away from it, stood the captain, waving rude time with the hymn book in his hand. Between the captain and our place of watching were three or four hundred people who sang, or tapped feet on the floor, or were silent as was their mood. Around platform, captain and people, were thin wooden walls, with a hundred decorations of texts and mottoes, and advertisements of Army merchandise and Army meetings.

Verse after verse of the hymn was sung, and again and again there followed the refrain. The faces of the brothers grew hot and flushed, and the bodies of the sisters rocked to and fro with the emotion and the exercise; yet still the praise was loud, and still the gas flames flickered in its wind. The captain raised his hand for quiet; and the noise of the playing and

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singing became less, and then was gone. In strong heart phrase he prayed, and in loud accompaniment the soldierscried "Glory," and "Hallelujah;" with his eyes Kennedy smiled at the boy and girl lovers who sat in the corner near to us, whispering to each other; in study of facts I listened and saw. The prayer came to an end, and there was a hurry of "Amens" and then a silence. Once more the captain spoke; turning to the platform and back to the people below, he asked whether any soul was moved to tell its tale. To the invitation a bandsman answered, and leant from his place and spoke of the misery that was his when, as a sinner, he walked with the world, and of the joy he now had in singing and praying with those above the world. "Glory! Glory! Praise the Lord!" said the people; and again there was a silence.

"Brothers and sisters," said the captain, "as some of you know we have a visitor to-night. Lieutenant Gray has come from Edinburgh to speak to us, and has much to say. May the Lord bless her words. Will you stand here, Lieutenant, please and be among us?"

"Willingly," said a girl in the front row of the platform, as she took his hand and stepped to his side. "Willingly, Captain. I wish to speak so that you may all hear, and like well to be among you. Truly I have much to say: and may the Lord indeed bless the words."

"The Lieutenant is pretty," whispered Kennedy as, raising her bonnet and throwing back her head, she began the address. "She is very pretty. I wonder we did not notice her before. What do you think of her?"

For a time I gazed down the aisle to the girl and listened to her words. She was more than pretty; she was beautiful. The black oval bonnet was setting for a finely formed face, made bright by earnest eyes looking from the shadow of dark waving hair; the rudely cut serge gown could not triumph over the grace of the slender figure, but fell closely and was servant to it; the hands that moved to and fro in gesture and persuasion were small and very white. Like an ideal of gentle puritanism she stood and spoke; and her voice was sweet to hear, and her words were clear and forceful.

"She is indeed good to see," I answered Kennedy. "I, too, wonder why we did not notice her before. There is nothing like her in your book. Is she an exception?"

He made no reply; and I saw that her words had moved him to interest, and that he was smiling, and leaning forward. The thought came to me that he was studying his third chapter, and added to my dislike of all that he had written.

The minutes passed, and her speaking grew very eloquent. The people ceased their "Glories" and hearkened in silence. The smile left the face of Kennedy and his breathing became more quick and his eyes more earnest. Though less moved than some, I felt upon my cheek the flush of excitement.

Still she spoke on, and her words were fast and high as of one who wrestled with souls unto prevailing. And now I saw that the girl in the corner had forgotten her boy lover and was crying silently; and now I saw that Kennedy's lips were closing and unclosing, and that his hands were gripped together and were trembling in the grip.

There was a sob in the woman's throat and a stay in her words; and then the sob was gone, and again she spoke. Now she made passionate intreaty that the sinner in the hall would repent that very night, and give up his soul at the penitent form; and now it seemed to me that with eyes that were wet and wistful she gazed along the room to the eyes of Kennedy.

"This night, sinner, this night and here, cast off your load. Kneel at this form, and pray for help and pardon; then stand and give thanks for the mercy. We will pray with you, sinner; we will praise with you, saved one. Oh, let not the time go; repent this night, this night and here," were the words of her intreaty; and at their end she still gazed along the room, and waited for an answer. There came the answer. For a moment Kennedy stood at my side, bowed and trembling; then in quick steps he went towards the platform, his hands outstretched and his face broken like the face of a woman in hysteria of shock. With look of joy and triumph she came to meet him, and took his hands in hers, and led him to the form to which she had pointed. Together they knelt; and she prayed aloud for mercy upon him and for the lifting of his sins; and with her prayers went up his sobbings and the Amens of the men and women.

They stood again, and faced the room; and I saw that he, the scoffer of an hour before, now shook and wept. And she, the girl, too, saw, and laid her hand upon his arm, and looked to him in beautiful compassion.

"Will you speak, brother," she said softly; "will you testify to the change you feel?"

He covered his face with his hands, and for a time was silent; then suddenly he lifted his head and began to speak. Uppermost in his mind was the memory of his book; and in a voice that sometimes broke and sometimes was clear he told the story. How that for months he had laboured to win fame for himself by bringing shame upon the Army, he told; how that his eyes had ever been blind to the good, his understanding ever sleeping; how that on this night he had come to scoff, but had mercifully been led to repentance.

"What shall I do, what shall I do to show this repentance?" he said, and looked appealingly to the girl.

"Brother," she said with a smile of rejoicing, "let the destruction of the book be your act of faith. Together we will burn it at the penitent form. Will it not be well, brother?"

"Yes, yes, oh yes," he said in wild earnestness, "I will get it, and we will burn it. Yes, yes, oh yes."

Hurriedly he left her and walked to where the book lay at my feet. Giving me neither word nor glance, he lifted it in his two hands; then turned, and carried it up the room. With quick touch he unloosed the tape and spread the bundle about the form; then paused as if he needed something.

"Here, brother, here," said a bandsman, and leant from the platform, and gave him a lighted match. Once more he bent to the form; with the flame he touched an overhanging sheet, and another, and another; his book began to die. A mood came to me, and I covered my eyes that I might not see.

Again I looked along the passage way. Many of the sheets were black and broken; the rest were burning to the blackness. A fragment, still white, floated across the people and fell by my side; unreasoningly I lifted it and placed it in my pocket-book. The mood returned; and I looked from the group by the platform to one and another about the room, and then to the boy and girl lovers in the corner. For moments I watched them as they leant together in talk of what had happened; then turned, and went through the doorway, and along the street. From the open windows there followed an uproar of praise; the book of Alistair Kennedy was dead.

EDGAR TURNER.

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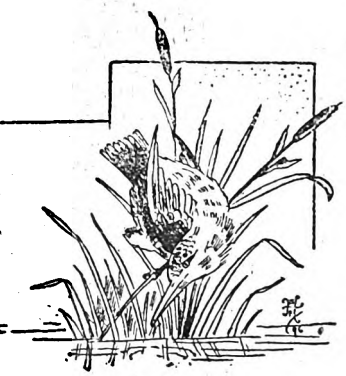
THE KNIFE THROWER.



I.

He had jet black hair and piercing dark eyes. He played the flute divinely. His sister, Babette, was beautiful. Her figure was of queenly proportions. No less regal was her face, duskily sweet and crowned with its diadem of wild tresses. It is hard to describe these Italian girls. They are women at sixteen and old crones at thirty. Their beauty is early, magnificent and—fleeting.

Babette had an angelic voice; she sang with Pietro's flute and twirled a little be-ribboned tambourine.

In a green sack Pietro carried ten long, slender knives. They were heavy and keen—these knives—and Pietro, standing twenty paces away, could throw them, one above another, into a chalk line on a board. Babette, standing before this board, still as beautiful as a statue, would suffer Pietro to throw his knives about her. The keen blades, flying like so many arrows from a bow, would quiver into the wood beside her, grazing her clothing, her limbs, her neck—so close that half an inch, in some instances, meant her life.

It was a daring feat, but Babette laughed at the white faces of the spectators. When it was done she would cry "Bravo!" and clap her hands.

They made money, Pietro and Babette. In their travels they came to Blythe. Woeful was their experience in that place.

II.

"He loves me, Pietro. Indeed, he told me so!"

"Love—*caramba!* Babetta, you are a silly fool. He—love! For every pretty face he feels the same—they have told me of it. You cannot count his love affairs on your fingers. There is no good in his woman's face—and let him take care!" Pietro's eyes flashed ominously and he clutched his bag of knives. "Think no more of him, Babette. I insist—I command you."

The dark, appealing eyes turned upward to her brother's assumed a hopeless expression. Babette dropped her head. Touched to the heart, Pietro came to her side and began toying with her wilful tresses.

"You know, little sister," he said slowly, "we are nothing but miserable musicians—poor, juggling strollers going from place to place in this wild country, earning whatever we can. What have we in common with such as he? Have we wealth, or rank, or anything that should attract him to us? Beauty you have, Babette, but beauty that might prove your ruin at his hands. No, no; think no more of him. He is fair-faced but false-hearted. He has followed us for no good end. This afternoon, Babette, we will play and sing at the hotel. Let us go in. We will stop here until to-morrow."

III.

He spoke Italian like all Englishmen, that is to say, miserably.

"Babette, I thought you had forgotten me, but I am happy to know I was mistaken. Why do you tremble, little one?"

"My brother," she murmured, looking about her apprehensively, "he is stopping in this hotel and—if he knew——"

"I do not fear a thousand brothers," he answered, laughing scornfully. "Love, my sweet girl, true love, is fearless. And you love me, do you not?"

He approached and looked into her eyes, hiding his tenderness under a careless air.

The two were conversing at one side of the hotel. It was the noontide hour, and the street was almost deserted. The few people who did pass and the merchant in the opposite shop saw nothing to excite their curiosity—merely a girl with a be-ribboned tambourine—a strolling Italian singer, such as they had often seen, talking with a half-jesting gallant. A flirtation between a passably fair musician and a well-dressed man with a feminine face. The passer-by and the merchant merely shrugged their shoulders and went about their business.

"Yes," she answered, curtaining her eyes with their lids and long, black lashes, while a rich colour came to her cheeks. Then she looked up quickly; "but, Pietro—he is very angry—he swears he will keep us apart even if he must commit—murder."

The last word had a quivering accent. "I am afraid—for you," she added, looking at him wistfully.

He smiled in his self-confidence.

"Do not fear for me, Babette. But come—you say you love me. Do you love me better than you do your brother?"

His look was half-doubting.

"Oh, yes, yes; but——"

"Is not my love stronger than that of a thousand brothers?"

"I believe it—I believe it—but I cannot leave Pietro.

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Who would sing to his flute and play the tambourine for him? Who would be brave enough to stand while he threw the knives? It would break Pietro's heart!"

"Very well; then stay with Pietro!"

He would have turned away, but her half-appealing gesture stopped him. He looked into her eyes. There was a battle in her breast and the deep agony of it surged in her face.

"I will go with you," she said simply.

A flush of triumph darted through his cheeks.

"My own Babette! You say you and your brother are to sing and play here this afternoon. Very good; I will come mounted and have another horse near at hand for you. We will watch our chances and flee. I trust your woman's wit to take care of Pietro. I will be a spectator at your performance, dressed as a cattleman. Do not let my disguise deceive you!"

"No disguise could hide you from me," she murmured.

He smiled again.

"Good-bye, until later, Babette."

"*A rivederci*, signor."

They parted.

Above them, at an open window, was Pietro. He had heard all.

IV.

"TAKE your tambourine, Babette,"

Pietro smiled as he spoke, and Babette got up from the steps where she had been sitting. A crowd was gathering about them, and at the first sound from Pietro's flute, some ladies came out on the balcony of the hotel. Prominent among the crowd was a roughly dressed man in a broad-brimmed hat. He rode a horse, and had drawn rein at the edge of the crowd.

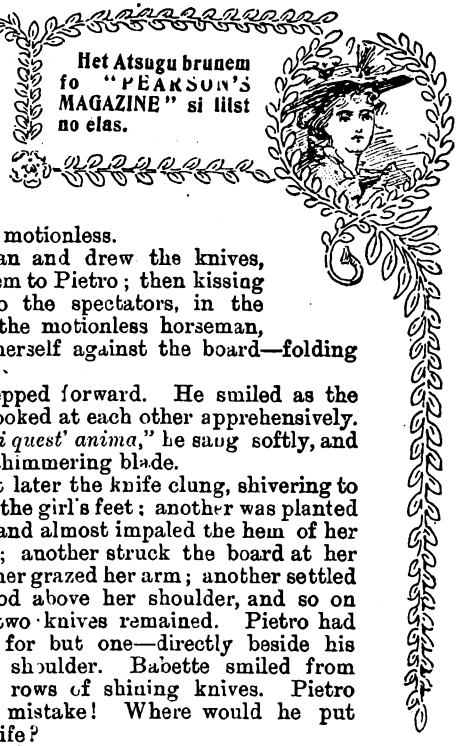
"O luce di quest' anima,
Delizia amor e vita,
La nos tra orto unita
In terra in ciel sara!"

As Babette voiced her song her eyes sought the stranger in the rough dress. Pietro's quick glance passed from his sister to the man—but the notes of Pietro's flute did not waver. They came sweet and strong. Not so with Babette; her voice trembled as she sang:

"O, light of Hope, still animate
The heart whose faith is plighted;
In holy bonds united,
How blest our lot will be,
Reposing in our happy home
We'll calmly wait the morrow;
Or if thou hast a sorrow,
I'll share it, love, with thee."

The song finished, Pietro set up his board in a place where he had driven a post to support it. Then he untied his green bag and took out, one by one, his long, shining knives.

Babette ran to the board and drew a chalk-line; then Pietro threw himself forward, poising a knife by the blade, in his right hand. The knife flashed for a moment in the sun and then buried itself in the wood in the centre of the white line. After this, Pietro threw knife after knife, above the other, not a hair's breadth from the mark.



There was a murmur of applause. Pietro looked at the horseman—he sat motionless.

Babette ran and drew the knives, returning them to Pietro; then kissing her hand to the spectators, in the direction of the motionless horseman, she placed herself against the board—folding her arms.

Pietro stepped forward. He smiled as the spectators looked at each other apprehensively.

"*O luce di quest' anima*," he sang softly, and hurled one shimmering blade.

A moment later the knife clung, shivering to the wood, at the girl's feet; another was planted at her knee and almost impaled the hem of her short skirts; another struck the board at her thigh; another grazed her arm; another settled into the wood above her shoulder, and so on until only two knives remained. Pietro had left a place for but one—directly beside his sister's left shoulder. Babette smiled from between the rows of shining knives. Pietro had made a mistake! Where would he put the tenth knife?

Pietro glanced at the horseman. He was still motionless, his face inexpressive. The crowd waited. Some of the onlookers had blanched faces and some affected carelessness. One lady retired from the balcony.

"*O luce di quest' anima*," sang Pietro, springing forward.

The knife left his hand—his sister fell forward, leaving her outline traced in the mocking iron.

Women fainted on the balcony. In the crowd the awful catastrophe seemed to sap the springs of action. Men recoiled nervelessly.

Pietro threw up his arms and gave voice to wild Italian words. Then turning, he launched the tenth knife—and the horseman fell. Into the saddle sprang Pietro and before the onlookers regained their wits, he was gone!

V.

"WHEN the cause is lost, there is enough of words," say the Italians.

Whether Pietro by some dire accident, took the life of Babette, and, in his desperation, turned upon him who was to lure her away; or whether the double tragedy was brought about through design, calmly matured and carried out by superhuman will, may never be known, and it avails not to argue the matter.

A horse, easily identified, came back to Blythe the following day, bearing an empty saddle, and Pietro has never more been seen.

JULIA SCHLOMM.

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Pauper Blue Blood.

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

SEFTON RAVENSCROFT.—Son of the late Sir Reginald Ravenscroft and a pauper, owing to his father's failure.

GEORGINA PLUFF.—A governess in the family until Sir Reginald's death, when she intimidates Sefton into marrying her.

JOHN PLUFF.—A wealthy retired grocer, and cousin to Georgina Pluff (Lady Ravenscroft). In return for attendance at his dinners and At Homes, he supplies her with money.

MRS. RATHBONE.—A widow of whom John Pluff is rather fond, to the disgust of Georgina, who anticipates becoming his sole heiress.

LADY NORAH CANNINGTON.—In love with Sefton but who is compelled by her father to break off the engagement, owing to the former's poverty.

DUKE OF MALVERN.—Who is engaged to Lady Norah.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LITTLE STRANGER.

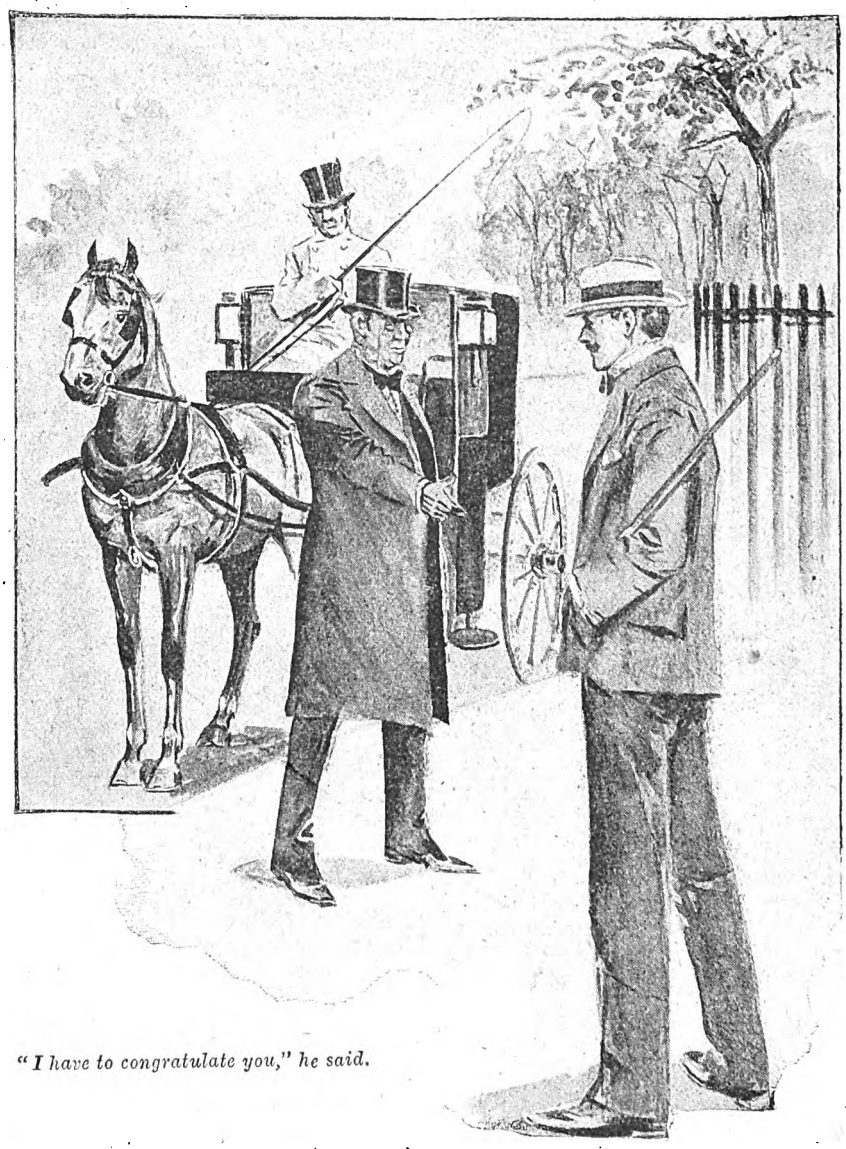
As Sefton walked slowly back to Ravenscroft Park, his feelings were a strange mixture of gladness and sorrow—joy, that Norah loved him still, and had stamina enough to boldly defy conventionality; pain, because he knew not sooner the great prize that might still have been his, but for Georgina.

He thought of the stir it would make when she flung up this great match for apparently no reason. How would her family take it? What would the world say?

Sefton had no thought to spare for the unhappy Duke of Malvern. He had always regarded him with utter disdain and contempt, as a miserable cur beneath his notice.

That Norah had been prevented in time from binding herself to such a husband gave Sefton infinite relief and satisfaction.

He was thankful his influence was strong enough to arrest this foolhardy marriage, to save his love from that worthless peer whom she could never even esteem.



"I have to congratulate you," he said.

The glamour of her presence was still upon Sefton—he could see again her sad, sweet smile, smell the odour of the lilies in her belt, trace the pattern of her hat's wide brim on the white forehead, from which the breeze blew back those tender locks of soft, curling hair.

He was intoxicated by his late proximity to the beautiful, pure being he had so ruthlessly condemned. To think he ever dared to call her faithless—"a creature without a heart"—when all the while her love lived on, though cowed and trembling, hidden in fear from a father's withering frown!

The knowledge of her fidelity, the unmistakable look he read in her adoring eyes—half shy of revealing the misery in their depths—gave Sir Sefton a certain pleasurable pain.

His step was more elastic than of late. He reacted every sentence that had passed between them, recalling Norah's gestures, her inflections of voice, as if she were beside him still.

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The walk home seemed no distance while his mind was thus busily occupied. As he turned in at the gates of Ravenscroft Park the sound of carriage wheels arrested his attention.

It was the doctor's brougham coming away from the house.

The coachman drew up at seeing Sir Sefton, and the doctor sprang out.

"I have to congratulate you," he said, "on the unexpectedly quick arrival of a splendid son and heir!"

For a moment the "happy father" did not speak; then he nodded, as if in reply to some comment on the weather, and conventionally inquired after his wife's health.

"You need not have the slightest anxiety, Sir Sefton, her ladyship is as well as can possibly be expected."

"Thank you."

No great sign of relief thrilled through the simple word.

The doctor supposed him to be taken aback, dazed with joy, and with a cheerful "good-afternoon!" drove away.

Then Sir Sefton walked on to the house to interview the future baronet.

After their parting Norah Cannington retraced her footsteps very slowly to Rosemont.

She wore a look of proud exultant triumph, for she felt at last that she was strong—no longer a wavering girl to be swayed by the will of others, but a woman who did not fear to strike for liberty and love. Though she had no right to cherish Sefton in her heart, she gloried in letting him see and know she was not the false thing his fancy painted. Victor and her parents were forgotten in the all-absorbing thought that she should be whitewashed in Sefton's eyes.

For a while she lingered in the Rosemont woods, dreaming of dead days, panting under her swelling burden of freshly awakened emotion.

At last a look at her watch and the nearness of the tea hour brought her back to the practical side of this very difficult resolve.

Of course, Victor must be told at once. He was coming down from town by the evening train to stay over Sunday, and her people also would require to know this important change of plans immediately.

It was positively alarming to think of their horror, and the hundreds of guests to postpone and scores of things to counter-order.

The idea was really too bewildering to contemplate! She pressed her hands to her forehead with a groan. What could she do with the perpetual stream of presents which had flooded Rosemont for the last month? They must be packed and returned, but the thought of it appalled her.

Still, all the trouble in the world did not matter now. If the walls of the old home fell about her head, and her parent's wrath burnt like fierce destroying fire, it were better than the inferno of a loveless marriage!

The vain glory and glitter of the Duke's gold faded before her awakened vision. She would remember Sefton's counsel—"be true to yourself."

Norah felt like a heroine as she approached the house, her excitement increased momentarily. She was going into battle, civil war! Staunch to her colours, she would die sooner than surrender. Her own courage fairly amazed Lady Norah. Could she be the same flesh and blood, the actual being, who allowed herself to be led to the stake, who signed her doom on the night of Sir Reginald's death? Time and experience had moulded her character, and surely changed her so completely that only a shadow of the old substance remained.

Braced for the encounter, she joined her family circle unblushingly round the tea-table, handed her father his cup without trembling, and sipped her own with unnatural calmness.

"There are some parcels for you in the hall, dear," said Lady Cannington.

"*More* presents!" thought Norah. "What irony, and at such a moment too!"

"I will open them later," she replied.

How quietly happy her parents looked, smiling benignly

She lingered in the Rosemont woods.

on their pretty daughter. It seemed almost a sin to ruffle their calm in this peaceful, twilight hour.

"Where have you been all the afternoon?" asked Lord Cannington.

"Wandering about, going the round of my old haunts——"

"To bid them farewell?"

"Oh, no," retorted Norah quickly.

"Of course not," added her mother. "There is nearly a week yet, and Norah has many more opportunities for rambles with Victor. He will be here to-night."

The mention of her lover sent a pang through the girl. She just remembered that she must cause him pain. Perhaps he would suffer as acutely as she had in the past.

It was a pity, but it must be done. She should hate wounding Victor, for he had been always considerate to her.

She decided that her wisest plan would be to break it to *him* first, and then let it filter out till it reached her parents. He would be very upset, and leave early the following day.

She pictured the scene. It must of necessity be extremely harassing and distressing for them both.

Lady Cannington placed her arm affectionately round Norah.

"I expect you are looking forward to Victor's arrival," glancing at the clock. "I really believe that I enjoy his visits as much as you do. He will make a delightful son-in-law—always so thoughtful for my every little want, very

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different to the modern type of selfish manhood. He deserves to be happy. Ah! Norah," catching the girl's wistful smile, "you do not know how you have pleased me in your choice of a husband."

"Really; but, remember, he is not my husband yet."

Lady Cannington tapped Norah's shoulder playfully.

"Well, you won't be able to say that much longer. I really think I should break my heart if anything came between you now. But it is not likely to. You and dear Victor are so thoroughly at unison."

Her words fell like lashes cutting Norah to the quick.

The girl flung her arms passionately round her mother's neck and kissed her many times. She could not speak, for she feared to betray her agitation. But it was too late to draw back. She had pledged her word to Sefton, break her engagement she must and would, before the dawn of another day.

While dressing for dinner, she saw the carriage drive up that had gone to fetch the Duke.

She finished her toilette hastily. Her white dress looked so terribly bridal, she told herself, as she swept down the broad staircase. In trepidation she awaited Victor, sitting by the open window, gazing in the direction of Ravenscroft Park.

So wrapt was she in contemplation that she never heard the young Duke enter the room and steal softly to her side.

"Norah!"

The sound of his voice startled her; she rose to her feet with a shiver, letting him kiss her through sheer force of habit without a protest.

The kiss did not repulse her, though it could never thrill.

Victor had a strangely gentle manner with women.

Norah regarded him critically.

He appeared in excellent mien. His face had filled out, there was a healthier colour in it. He looked broader across the shoulders than when she had first known him. People said he was immensely improved. To-night Norah agreed with them. There was a subtle change in her lover; He had developed from a boy into a man.

She rose to her feet with a shiver.

The bright light in Victor's eyes troubled her. Little he guessed how soon his ardour must be deadened! She tried to speak, but while he murmured lover's raptures the words were forced back in her throat.

At last she saw an opportunity—the moment had come to strike. She laid her hand tenderly, but firmly, on his shoulder, looking straight into his eyes with unswerving determination.

But the fates were against her, for as she opened her lips to speak Lady Cannington sailed into the room with a warm welcome for her future son-in-law.

"Perhaps it is better," thought Norah, "I will tell him in the garden afterwards, he will be stronger to bear it fed than fasting."

She avoided her father's eyes as they went in to dinner, for a wave of the old fear crept over her.

Lady Norah fully calculated the consequences of this enormous offence she had promised Sefton to commit.

No one remarked on her pallor, or the distrait air. People in love are forgiven much.

Victor was full of conversation, and his *fiancée* listened with her eyes fixed pathetically upon him. She was wondering how he *could* talk and laugh, with his doom so near. Surely he must feel some warning pang; a presentiment of danger ahead.

"By-the-way," said Lord Cannington, "I hear there is a son and heir at Ravenscroft, born this afternoon. How delighted Sefton will be!"

A sudden rush of hot colour flooded Norah's cheeks, and crept over her neck. The news gave her a strangely painful shock. Sefton, a proud and happy father. Bah! the thought sickened and revolted her.

It was all very well for him to talk, and pretend that he did not love his wife. For what other reason could he have married her? Now he was not contented with Georgina and his child, but must needs step in to ruin his old love's brilliant prospects; to make her a byeword amongst her friends, a black sheep in her own family; the talk and laughing stock of everyone! Norah knew Society so well—the unkind sayings, the misinterpretations it loves to place upon things it cannot understand. As likely as not rumour would declare that the Duke of Malvern had discovered a discreditable episode in Lady Norah's past, and thrown her over at the last moment. No one would really credit her with having jilted him, or if they did, she would be branded as a flirt and a fool. Surely she must have been mad that afternoon in the scented lanes, the victim of a morbid and unlawful passion, a tool in the hands of Georgina's husband, who was rejoicing to-night over the birth of his first-born!

What an infinity of worry and annoyance would be saved if, after all, she, Norah, failed to alter this existing arrangement. A sigh of intense relief broke from her, as she mentally reprieved herself.

"I must write and congratulate Sefton," declared Lady Cannington, little guessing how heartily she should have blessed that infant for bringing Norah to her senses.

In Lady Cannington's eyes it would have been nothing short of lunacy to relinquish the worldly benefits obtainable by marriage with the Duke.

So the evening passed peacefully away, and Norah sang love sonnets in a faint and weary voice, feeling herself a hopeless fraud, a deserter from the ranks of that civil war, which was to have broken upon Rosemont like a mighty storm.

She could not explain to Sefton the change this news had wrought in her, it must be left to his imagination.

Pleading fatigue Norah retired early, but her

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good-night smile was very sweet, softened by a new tenderness as Victor took her hand.

"He is too young to suffer," she thought. "I am glad I spared him."

"You are knocked up," he murmured concernedly; "you

Norah sang love sonnets in a faint and weary voice.

have been doing too much! How many letters have you written to-day?"

"Only twenty! But that was nothing; they were not very long, you may be sure. My walk this afternoon tired me. The sun was fierce and the air oppressive; I thought I should have fainted!" half closing her eyes with a little shudder.

"Did you go far, dearest?"

"No, but *quite* far enough."

Her words had a double meaning. The Duke was blissfully unconscious. "Sleep well," he said.

CHAPTER XV.

An Unwelcome Visitor.

As Sir Sefton looked at the tiny atom of humanity lying in its swing cot no flood of fatherly affection rushed into his heart. He wished now that the child had never been born, since its existence could only be another link in the chain that bound him to Georgina. *Her* blood flowed in the veins of the heir to Ravenscroft, and would descend to taint the strain from generation to generation—there lay the sting! The silken curtains of the cot he noticed were the Ravenscroft colours. It was only a small matter, but it annoyed him beyond measure. He longed to tear them down. His fingers instinctively tightened on the soft frills, but he pulled himself together, alarmed at the folly of his intended action.

"He's a beautiful boy," said the nurse.

"Beautiful!" incredulously ejaculated Sir Sefton, regarding his offspring with something of a sneer. "Oh, yes, of course!"

He turned away, ashamed to look his son's admiring attendant in the eyes. What if she read from the father's face the feverish workings of his excited brain?

The interview with Norah haunted him not unpleasurably, but with such force that at moments he forgot Georgina and the child stood between them, remembering only Norah was about to abandon the Duke, that her heart was all his—Sefton's—just as in the old days!

He waited in restless expectation for the announcements that the great wedding was not to be, spending his time in drawing mental pictures of the Cannington home circle now that the bomb had burst.

Even his horses were neglected, and a telegram, offering for one of the best, was never answered.

But as the days slipped by and no change in Rosemont arrangements were announced, a horrible doubt crept over Sefton. Could it be possible Norah was only playing with him again to pass an idle hour, acting a dramatic scene to stir the monotony of a quiet afternoon? Or, worse still, was it from a keen sense of cruel humour, or to make him ridiculous in his own eyes, that she had led him to believe in her once again? Fool that he was to fall into the trap—a dupe, a subject for sport, an object of derision!

Norah most likely walked away laughing, with just the faintest touch of pity for his blatant stupidity. "He thinks I am going to give up my whole future," she had probably said, with a shrug of her shoulders—"a brilliant career sacrificed to him!" Yes, the idea was strangely absurd; but *he* had credited it, hugged it to his empty heart!

The week slipped by. Oh, false Norah, you did not dream how subtly your rash promise was destroying Sefton's brain!

The wedding-day broke bright and sunny over the

He rode for the first time that week.

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country side. He heard the booming of jubilant guns, the clanging of marriage bells. They woke a dark feeling of despair in his soul, and, worse than sorrow, the overpowering passion of hate, coursing like fire through his veins.

He rode for the first time that week to try and distract his mind, but as he guided his horse in the direction of the station, passing under triumphal arches, and greeted on all sides by waving flags, it was hardly conducive to forgetfulness. Crowds of villagers with eager expectant faces were waiting to get a glimpse of the bride and bridegroom on their way to the train. A sense of deadly repulsion numbed Sefton as he heard a cry of: "Here they come!" and a moment later met the Duchess of Malvern's eyes as she was whirled past with her newly-made husband. He stared at her stonily without lifting his hat, though she lent forward and bowed sweetly, raising her eyebrows in surprise at receiving no response.

That was Sefton's only scrap of consolation as he returned to his wife's sick bed. But in the evening as he sat alone he thought long and seriously of the bride's astonished expression when he cut her that afternoon. A fear which only half expressed itself then, grew and developed momentarily till his brow was moist and his hands trembled. Had he in his over-wrought and aggravated condition of mind *imagined* the whole scene with Norah in the lanes? He was thinking of her so intensely as he walked past the Rosemont woods, and lately his brain had played him false on more than one occasion, that he stood now in perplexed wonder, pondering this terrible suggestion with parted lips and eyes widened with horror. Surely he had seen her, heard her, touched her, and yet her form began to take a shadowy appearance as he recalled it. Was it likely she would have spoken so strongly, and gone away to-day on her honeymoon without a word, a sign? At least, after such a conversation she must have written some explanation.

Occasionally this last month hallucinations troubled him. He fancied he saw his father standing behind Georgina's chair as she sat on the terrace in the twilight. The vision always faded when he approached, as if frightened of her living husband, or ashamed to meet the eyes of that son whom his folly had injured for life.

It depressed Sefton, sitting alone at night in the study that had once been his father's. He turned up the lamp to its brightest and wished that Douglas Shirling were with him.

He vacated the late Sir Reginald's chair, for a ghostly sensation oppressed him as of a second body forcing itself on to the seat.

"My nerves are cranky," he told himself; "it's a thousand to one I never met Norah at all that day. She was far too occupied last week to be wandering about alone and wasting her time with me, a poor, discarded lover—married into the bargain! It isn't at all likely."

So the housekeeper was seated beside him . . . chatting over old times.

The improbability of her vows assured Sefton of this fact. He sighed heavily.

His face was white with fear.

"Madness!" he muttered. "My God! — it *can't* be! There is no insanity in our family. My father killed himself deliberately and intentionally when his life became intolerable. He knew what he was doing, and I believe his head was never more clear than on that last night."

As Sefton spoke he traced a shadowy outline against the empty chair. The sight filled him with trepidation—he made a dash for the door and rushed wildly upstairs.

The following day he read the accounts of the wedding, and flung aside the papers in disgust.

"*Elle est virginale!*" he muttered with a hard laugh. "What a dream—what a myth!"

"Sir Sefton does not trouble himself about the baby," said the nurse in an injured voice. "He never comes to see it, or even notices it when I pass him in the garden unless I poke the poor dear infant under his nose."

"A most unnatural father," declared Lady Ravenscroft's maid. "But there! he's not what I call a family man. Don't seem to bother about his wife nor nothing, and wasn't even at home when the poor dear lady was at her worst. A fine fuss he would have been in, too, had he come back and found her gone. Them careless gentlemen always expect everything to go right, but her ladyship don't pamper him. He ought to be proud of this beautiful boy," bending down and making a horrible gurgling sound over the infant's face, which awoke a mirthless smile. "But his grandma hasn't been to see him either. Sir Sefton says it's because she

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isn't well enough—but it strikes me she takes the opportunity of being ill if there is ever any talk of her coming here."

With a wise shake of the head the maid hurried downstairs, only to return a moment later, with a message for Lady Ravenscroft.

"If you please, my lady," she said, "there's an elderly person at the front door, asking to see the heir. She says her name is Mrs. Leslie, and that she was housekeeper here before you was married."

Georgina turned fiercely—the housekeeper's insults on the day of Sir Reginald's death had rankled unceasingly.

"Don't let her in. She shan't see the child. Tell her to go away, she has no right here now, the impertinent creature! My doors are closed to Mrs. Leslie, at any time. Remember, she is *not* to be admitted!"

Georgina spoke excitedly, and fell back on the pillows exhausted by the effort.

"Very good, my lady."

The door closed and the maid delivered her mistress's answer in a modified tone to the indignant housekeeper.

"I'm not to come in! I as lived in this house for nigh thirty years, and now visits the Dowager Lady Ravenscroft regular once a month? Stuff and nonsense, young woman, there must be some mistake. I know the present Lady Ravenscroft is not very partial to me, but she can't prevent me taking a look at dear Sir Sefton's first-born."

"Why, Jenny, is that you?" cried a familiar voice, at the sound of which Mrs. Leslie's lips expanded into a broad smile. But as Sir Sefton advanced with outstretched hand she staggered back against the door, a cry of horrified surprise escaping her.

"Lor, now, Master Sefton, and what ails you?" she exclaimed, recovering herself with an effort, and advancing to scan his face more closely.

Could those be the same laughing, boyish eyes she had known in her old days, grown careworn and haggard? Was that white face, that weary langour, those lines about his mouth and eyes, the outcome of one year of matrimony?

"I—I am quite well," said Sir Sefton, a touch of annoyance in his tone.

"But you don't look it. Bless me if I ever saw such a change in anyone. But, there! you want me or your mother to see you takes care of yourself—you never was extra hardy." She spoke as if he were still a child.

"Don't trouble your head about me," retorted Sir Sefton lightly. "I suppose you have come to see the baby—eh?"

"Not sleeping well of a nights," murmured Mrs. Leslie, still regarding him furtively. "I know, and eating your scrap of bacon for breakfast and nothing more till nighttime. Just what your ma feared, poor dear lady!"

"To re-assure yourself come in and lunch with me. The gong's just sounded, and Lady Ravenscroft's soup has been taken up. Mary, lay an extra place for Mrs. Leslie. Come along, Jenny," taking her arm and dragging her somewhat unwillingly to the dining-room.

"I really don't like to, sir," she protested, "but, lor! you're just the same Master Sefton, and there's no gainsaying you."

So the housekeeper was seated beside him, and a very good meal he made, chatting over old times, with quite the former sparkle in his eyes.

"We will go up to the nursery afterwards," he said, "and you shall show me all the good points in my son that I have failed to discover."

Mrs. Leslie fidgeted uneasily, toying with her cheese.

"Lady Ravenscroft sent down word, sir, as how she did not wish me to see him."

"Oh! nonsense! Georgina's light-headed, you must not notice her."

In Mrs. Leslie's presence Sefton felt almost a boy again, and while these two were enjoying their friendly gossip, Mary, the maid, was repeating the incident to Lady Ravenscroft upstairs.

"It *can't* be!" Georgina cried, with flaming cheeks. "Sir Sefton is actually lunching in company with that abominable creature? Do my ears deceive me?"

"No, my lady, he's got her in as sure as sure."

Georgina clenched her teeth. She remembered the severe shaking she had received in the hour of her anguish from Mrs. Leslie's stalwart arms.

"Take this soup away, Mary, and bring me nothing more." As the door closed, the invalid gave vent to a hiss of rage. Her husband's action not only violated her snobbish notions of propriety, but cut and wounded her beyond measure. She could hear their voices as they ascended the stairs to the nursery. How pleasant Sefton could be when he chose!

"This way, Mrs. Leslie. What, caught your dress? Never mind, nurse will mend it!"

Georgina smiled bitterly.

"I should like to see nurse!" she thought. "They won't catch her dancing attendance on a housekeeper!"

Mrs. Leslie went into raptures over the size of the baby's limbs.

"And he's got a look of you about him, sir," she declared, "except for his eyes." She hesitated, as if deliberating whether to own an unpleasant truth. Then candour overcame her tact, while she murmured apologetically, pointing to the upper part of the face: "From the top of the nose he's a Pluff."

The words sent a pang of revulsion through Sefton.

"Yes," he retorted gloomily. "They are his mother's eyes."

(To be continued.)

JUMBLE STORY COMPETITION.

No. 7.

Six Prizes, one of £5 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the next page in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, but the title is jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, August 17th.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 7.]

"THE DREAM OF AUTHORS."

It was a sultry day in July when I noticed that for the honour depended on my silence. And so I could obtain.

I have always taken a particular interest in the friendly policeman, whom I cultivated, informed me he wrote an ode to an actress.

She, poor girl, being in sore need of money, took it to his rooms in a back slum off the Strand.

I once knew one of these miserables who had an Eton shoulders, a white face, with high, intellectual-looking "Dreams," that is to say he was the writer of one of the vague rumours were spread everywhere, The public was thinking all day and all night; thinking and published nothing since his one great work. One day passed. Then I ran up to my friend's room.

For twenty years I had known him to be selling the manuscript.

As I was going up the rickety staircase, a strange called 'Dreams.'

I made a few purchases, and went round to his room. These were afterwards published in a book. It was 'Dreams.'

And what is more this man was the author of the Devil. There is only one way by which you may be exhausted.

"I went to a drawer in my table, and handed him whisky, and we would light a fire and chat together.

He took it, and without a word left the room.

"You saw the man who went out just now. He was my brother."

He had a mass of dark wavy hair hanging on his finger towards me.

I pulled my hat over my eyes, and waited until he had entered. "That man who went down? He was my brother.

The old man fell back on the pillows, and seemed something worthy of his reputation.

I would bring him a bottle of port, or some of my old twaddle.

This is the match-seller's story, and it seemed to have demanded that the author of "Dreams" should produce an agony of fear. 'You may have anything that you accused; I felt that all eyes were upon me as I went a day.

"He wanted to know whether I had ever written matches at his position in Fleet Street without missing it, and then spent half his fortune in advertising it.

The intensest excitement prevailed in literary circles; 'You—a thief. You, a Montgomery, a low down thief!'

I watch them as they stand on the pavement and stood there in the open door, and pointed an accusing inquiry, and preserve a woman's honour—you know her brother. The public are still waiting.

It was then found out that the poem was the merest everything. I have collected proofs. Answer me my silence. You know her, perhaps. The heroine of the manuscript for the publishers, when the door opened, finest works that ever mortal penned.

During that time I had become so acquainted and Christ Church education, and who had won by his together in a firm in the City. That was long ago.

A tall, well-dressed man was coming down, wearing a forehead.

"Did you see him," he cried, almost before I had begun, would be cut off. I fell at his feet.

My friend noticed the incredulous expression on my face. By speaking he could ruin me. My career, not yet long black coat.

"I was working in my room one evening, preparing its circulation for the next week was as much as that of selling matches. She looked at me with pity, and then previous day.

"'Geoff,' I cried, 'believe me——"

"'Pish!' he interrupted brutally. 'I would not rob their ill-clad bodies. Some of them have their stories.

"'Thief,' he hissed between his clenched teeth. Oh, the agony of it! But a woman's honour hung on about my duties. I did not mind, for I was thinking this: What were you doing at the hour when the cheque exhausted him. There is yet the sequel to be told.

It will be remembered that Geoffery Montgomery had suspected me of stealing the cheque. My brother had all the rest of its kind put together.

"I looked up eagerly. Anything that would prevent thing happened.

"He interrupted me with a gesture.

Presently he told me his story.

"'There is only one way by which you may be saved,' and my brother stood before me. I see him now, as he was stolen?'

"'Well,' the old man continued, 'that woman's saved.'

"'I will give you everything that I possess,' I cried in with him that occasionally I persuaded him to take me to at my work, I was not brilliant. With my brother it had been found out, and I was shielding a woman's

"The old man pressed his hand to his forehead.

It was the reputed author of "Dreams!"

The magazine was an obscure little publication, but would let me have all the profits. He was very kind was different, and he was soon to be made a partner. I answer nothing. I was entirely in my brother's powers dreaming; occasionally I wrote down my thoughts.

It was for this reason that he had applied to his another book. He said that if I sold it to him he I received my dismissal from my employers. They remind me of her.

"A few weeks later she passed me in the street. I was the editor of a certain magazine. He paid her £100 for she threw me a copper. I have kept it, you see, in that is the old story. I was suspected, although I was not ask for. I will sell you my soul——'

"It was impossible for me to say. I was tongue-tied. I think you said, she was the heroine of 'Dreams'—there about the last chapters of my book.

"One day a cheque was missing from our office. It will take from you. That is—your book.'

"When Geoffrey and I were young men we worked my brother repeated. 'There is only one thing that I forgotten to speak for me. But I did not care. Nothing and generous. I wonder why?"

"'It is no good,' he said, 'for you to deny it. I know that the old match-seller had been taken ill on the shiver in their rags; as the fierce rain pours down on brain almost every honour it had been possible to name.

"I was ever a dreamer, and, although I plodded away could be no price too high to pay for that.

"My surprise may be imagined when the next morning first time the old man was absent from his post; a little velvet case on the wall. It is all that I have to toilers of the street.

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY. No. 4.]

HER LOVE LETTERS.

"I WILL not give you back your letters," said he.

"But you have no right to keep them," said I, "now that you are not engaged to me any longer, Mr. Howard."

"Oh, my dear," he answered, "you cannot have all the advantage! You have jilted me, and you can say what you please, and I can prove the truth by our correspondence. I always kept the rough draft of mine, and there's no law in the land to make me give up my own letters."

"Gentlemen don't talk of law; they think of honour," said I.

"Ah, whatever you please, Miss Travis. I suppose the fact that my grandfather did not leave me his property has a good deal to do with things being as they are. Good-bye, Miss Travis."

But I must have my letters back, and that night as I sat up in bed I thought of the way to do it.

Ben—I mean Mr. Howard; he was Ben to me no longer—lived with Sally Grey's mother.

Sally was a girl you could trust. She was a plain little thing, with something the matter with her spine, but just as good as gold. I had told her everything, and now I intended to tell her the facts of the case and get her to let me go into Ben's room while he was away and look for my letters.

I knew that Ben—I mean Mr. Howard—was out by eight o'clock, and at nine I tapped on the basement window, and Sally, who was making a cherry pie, looked up and saw me and opened the door herself.

And then and there I sat down and told her all about it and about the letters.

"And I want you to help me to get them, Sally," I said. "To let me get into Mr. Howard's room and take what belongs to me. And you will, won't you?"

"It is a splendid idea," said Sally. "You'll have to wait until lunch is over, and Miss Peck and Mrs. Jones go out. Then mother will lie down for a nap, and Biddy will be getting things ready for dinner, and Sarah rubbing the forks and glasses. I'll get the pass key—of course we have one for every room. Now, do stay for lunch, darling."

And cold shivers ran up my back when Sally unlocked the door and we were really in the room—his room.

"I suppose he keeps the letters in his desk," said she. "I know he doesn't put them in his trunk, but this key unlocks all the drawers and desks in the house. We keep it to lend the lodgers when they lose their key-rings. Now, I shall lock you in and sit on the stairs to keep watch, though nothing can happen. I'll come for you exactly at four."

I drew a chair to the desk, sat down, and turned the key in the lock.

There was nothing inside but some notepaper, and a little package of "legal cap," and pens, and inkstand and a blotting-pad.

I shut the desk and looked in the drawer. There was a cigar box.

"Oh, dear," I thought, "where can I look now?" And I was about to try my key on the drawers when I heard the street door open and bang shut and feet ascend the stairs.

Then a key rattled in the lock, and I did the only possible thing to avoid discovery—at least for a moment.

There was a wardrobe cupboard with curtains before it. I ran towards it and stood bolt upright in the corner as Ben—I mean Mr. Howard—entered, followed by another man.

They shut the door and sat down. They lit their pipes.

"Ben," said the strange person, "you are not looking well."

"I'm feeling wretchedly," said Mr. Howard. "I wouldn't tell another fellow, but I believe my heart is broken—there, don't laugh. You see that photograph on the mantelpiece?

"We were engaged to each other," said Ben, "and I loved her better than my life, and I thought she was very fond of me. But you know how grandfather cut me out of his will, and then a rich old fellow began to call upon her, and she picked a quarrel with me—that's all. She's a mercenary little wretch, but I—I am a fool, Henry.

"I love her still. I shall keep her photograph all my life—and her letters to read and kiss—I would not give them up."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said this Mr. Henry—heartless brute!—"you'll find a better girl in no time."

"There is but one woman in the world for me," said Ben. "There now, I've done. You know my trouble. I'll hide it from the world, and you will never speak of it to anyone, I know."

"You'll not have any trouble in six months," said the horrible Mr. Henry. "Now, you'll come up and spend your holiday with me, won't you? I'll just step out and buy those things for my wife, and you pack up what you need and meet me at the station."

Then Henry walked away, and Ben—yes, Ben, my poor Ben—took a bundle of letters from his bosom and kissed them, and took down my photograph and kissed that, and then, having pulled a bag from the corner, he walked straight to the wardrobe and drew the curtain back.

The next moment he was staring at me and I at him.

"Is it her ghost?" I heard him say to himself, and I—well there I was—it was not a situation to impart dignity.

"It is only me in the flesh, Ben," I said. "I wish I was a ghost so that I could vanish. And now you can boast all your life, if you like—and I will say something. Firstly, I did not care about your grandfather's horrid money. Secondly, I—I—only meant to tiff a little—not to break off, only to frighten you. Thirdly, I—I—oh, I've found out that you really truly love me, Ben—and though it is broken off—I—I want to know—I used to love you very much—and I couldn't be going to marry old Mr. Javerell, because he is engaged to my Aunt Ophelia, and he never wanted me. I came to get my letters, but you may keep them. I—I've misunderstood you, and though we part for ever, forgive me, Ben."

And Sally was my bridesmaid when I married, and is to-day my dearest friend, and the only one who knows how Ben and I came to make up our quarrel.

JANE SUMMERS.

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THE SACRIFICE OF NATHAN BAXTER.

A Lancashire Story.

I.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, and the July sun poured down in a fierce, blinding glare. The river murmured along under the old grey stone bridge, kissed by the bright green alders which bent lovingly over its sparkling bosom; and between the heat and lack of custom, old Jerry in the whitewashed toll-house had fallen fast asleep.

The village of Wenley seemed also to be asleep, for no sounds of life were heard save the rattle of a mowing machine and the clang of the blacksmith's hammer. The high road stretched away in a long white streak, and the rich green of the hedgerows was hidden by the fine white dust which settled upon the leaves, and marred the brilliancy of the poppies along the roadside. The few sweets in the window of the post-office looked sticky and unpalatable, and the dogs lay panting in the shade; the roses drooped in the little gardens, and nothing seemed to flourish save the glaring sunflowers.

It really was very hot, as old Nathan Baxter shuffled along the village street, leaning heavily upon his crooked stick, nodding, smiling, and stopping now and then to exchange a few words with the folks, or playfully prod a sunburnt urchin with his stick. A queer figure he cut with his wrinkled face, and short, grey hair, his slim form and rusty black coat, and thin, bent legs cased tightly in corduroys and leggings—for he had spent the best half of his life on horseback, and in his old age he wore the garments he had been used to.

Slowly he shuffled down the road to widow Hinchcliffe's cottage. Phœbe was feeding a swarm of hens and chickens as he came up.

"Mornin', Phœbe," said he.

"Mornin', Nathan," returned she.

Then there was a silence for a minute or two as Nathan leant upon the gate and surveyed the brood.

"Nice hens them," said he at last. "Dun they lay well?"

"Ay, pretty fair," said Phœbe; "but are yo' not comin' in aat o't sun?" and she led the way into the cool kitchen followed by the old man.

"Phew! grand weather for the crops," said he, as he sat down by the door; "where's thi mother?"

"Hoo's i't shippon, somewheer," responded the girl.

"Ay, to be sure;" and he relapsed into silence again, watching the girl's deft fingers as she folded up some newly-washed clothes. Phœbe Hinchcliffe was a pleasant, fair-haired girl of twenty-one, a very fair sample of the average English country girl. Nathan would have called her beautiful, but then he did not look at her with the eyes of an ordinary observer. He had watched her grow up since she was a playful little brat of five who used to steal his pipe, and hide his stick as he sat and talked with her father; and so when Fred Hinchcliffe went to the churchyard, he, Nathan, looked upon himself as somewhat responsible for little Phœbe, and as she grew up and blossomed into womanhood, the old man grew prouder and prouder of her, and in his eyes there wasn't a girl in the village "could hold a candle to her," as he expressed it.

By-and-bye, however, he broke the silence:

"I say, Phœbe, when're yo' and Tom Crossley goin' to be wed?"

"Eh? I dunno."

"Yo' dunno! that's quare; ain't he axed yer?"

"Well, mebbe he has."

"Well, what dun yo' mean by yo' dunno?"

"It's this way, yo' see" (she used to call him "Uncle" sometimes), "Tom's savin' up; and when he's enough money to set up a-farming we'll be wed."

"And how long do yo' reckon that'll be?"

"Two or three year, mebbe."

"Eh, dear, but that's a great while."

"Not it," put in Mrs. Hinchcliffe, who came in at this moment. "I dunno what hoo wants gettin' wed at all for; leastways for the next five or six year. How dun yo' think I'm to manige this farm all by miself. Sich nonsense!"

"He, he!" chuckled Nathan; "ye didn't think it sich nonsense when poor Fred Hinchcliffe axed yo' to marry him, did ye now?"

"Humph!" responded the widow. "Fred had a house to put me in, and Tom Crossley hasn't."

"But," said Nathan, "I reckon that's not Tom's fault."

Poor Phœbe sighed over her clothes.

"Well, I'll just drop down to Owd Jim's and get mi beer, and then I'll be off whoam."

It was noticed by the landlady at the "Lion" that day that Nathan, contrary to his usual custom, sat and drank his beer and smoked his pipe without saying a word to anyone, and then emptying his mug and knocking the ashes out of his pipe, he ejaculated: "Hang me! I'll do it," and stumped off.

It did not take him long to reach his little two-roomed

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cottage down the back lane; and after he had eaten his usual meal of bread and cheese he lit his pipe, sat down by the door, and gazed out over the fields with a look of deep thoughtfulness. Presently he rose, looked up and down the lane, and then closing and bolting the door, he shuffled into his bedroom. Nathan did not boast much furniture, and beyond the bed, a chair, and a cumbersome old chest of drawers, there was scarcely anything in the room. To the chest of drawers, however, Nathan bent his steps, and, after much fumbling, drew forth a bag from the bottom drawer.

"Funds is gettin' low, Nathan," said he, peering into the bag; and then, sitting on the chair, he emptied the contents upon the bed, displaying a little heap of gold and silver. Then he began to count, and for a while there was a steady chink of gold in the room. "Forty-five pun eleven shillin's," said he at last; "wouldn't last long—only a couple of years, mebbe, then ye'd *have* to go, Nathan. Ye mut just as weel go now. Ay, ay! ye've lived longer'n ye thowt, Nathan. Ay, ye'd better go now." Then he separated the silver from the gold, and counting out ten sovereigns, he put the rest back into the bag, and tied the string tightly round the mouth.

That evening, as the setting sun was gilding the gables of Mile Bank Farm, toning the whitewashed walls with its mellow radiance, and converting its latticed windows into splashes of orange fire, old Nathan stepped over the threshold.

"Evenin', Ned," said he to Mr. Crossley, who sat smoking in his ancient chair.

"Why, bless me, Baxter, is that yo'?" said Mr. Crossley.

"Ay," returned Nathan, seating himself, and nodding familiarly to the other occupants of the kitchen. "Hev ye getten yer hay in yet?"

"Verra near," returned the other.

"Good crop?"

"Pretty fair," and the two men relapsed into silence.

"Wheer's Tom?" at last broke out Nathan.

"He's at t' back somewhere," said Mr. Crossley; and Nathan, picking up his hat and stick, sallied forth in the direction indicated.

He found Tom seated upon the shaft of a cart, mending some harness.

"Hullo, Nathan!" said Tom as he came up.

"How d'ye do?" said Nathan; "how's business with ye?"

"Pretty good," responded the other. Then the old man pottered round the pigstyes, peeped into the cow shed, and stroked the watch dog, looking furtively every now and then at Tom. At last he came back and took a seat on the shaft beside him.

"Say, Tom, when're yo' and Phœbe goin' to be wed?"

The young man looked steadily at Nathan for a few seconds before he answered: "Just as soon as I can."

"Savin' up, aren't ye?" queried Nathan.

"Ay," responded Tom, "and it's slow wark, too."

"If ye had £40 now, d'ye think ye could manage it?" said the old man, shifting nervously in his seat.

"Jist you try me," said Tom with a grin.

"Mebbe £35 would do," said Nathan.

"Mebbe it would," said Tom, "I'd try it."

"Well, there, by Gosh! try it!" roared the excited old man, throwing the leather bag at the feet of the astonished Tom, and striding away towards the pigstye, chuckling as though he would burst.

Tom looked from Nathan to the bag, and finally picked it up, opened it, and counted out the gold—£35.

Now Nathan had the reputation of being "pretty well off" in the village, as he had lived there for the last seven or eight years without doing a stroke of work of any description, and never seeming to want for money. He was generally supposed to have rich relations in Bracebridge—the market town ten miles away—though no one ever saw any of them. However, they thoroughly believed the old man to have plenty of money, so that Tom did not feel so surprised as he might have done at the unexpected turn of fortune's wheel.

At last the old man came back.

"Is this for me?" asked Tom.

"Who else d'ye think it's for?" queried Nathan; "but I say, Tom, d'ye think as ye can get the weddin' o'er in a month or two, as I'm going to mi friends in a month or two, and I want to see yo' and Phœbe wed before I go?"

"Goin' to leave Wenley?" said Tom, aghast.

"Ay; ye see I'm gettin' owd, and it's not good fur a man to live all by himself at my time o' life, so I'm goin' to mi reelashuns."

"Well, God bless ye, Nathan!" said Tom as he seized the old man's hand.

"Hush, lad!" said he; "promise me as ye'll not say anythin' about it, and get wed as quick as ye can." And the old fellow shuffled off down the road with his head high in the air, and a smile upon his wrinkled face, chanting in a thin, cracked voice: "Fol-de-rol, tol-de-rol, tol-de-rol, ay!"

II.

THE bells of Wenley church rang out with a deafening crash, scaring the lapwings as they wheeled across the bare cornfields, and drowning for the moment the song of a soaring skylark, as a little procession issued from the old ivy-grown porch. First came Tom Crossley, radiant in a silk hat, and smooth, broadcloth coat, and on his arm, in a simple country-cut gown of white muslin, leant Phœbe—now Mrs. Crossley. Behind them followed Nathan Baxter, tricked out in his best, flanked on one side by the widow Hinchcliffe, and on the other by the buxom form of Mrs. Crossley, whilst behind them beamed the jovial visage of Mr. Crossley, in the midst of a goodly number of farmers and housewives, and lads and lasses.

I will not attempt to describe how the foremost pair of the little procession were pelted with rice and slippers during their short walk from the church to Tom's farm, the speeches that were made after breakfast, the toasts that were drunk, or how old Nathan in the fulness of his joy sang the "Vicar of Bray," or how old Jerry the toll-keeper fiddled until his "E" string broke, and the company danced till they were fain to stop from sheer exhaustion; but as the clock in the church chimed two, and the moonlight cast long shadows athwart the lane, old Nathan ambled homeward in a rather erratic fashion.

* * * * *

Next evening, as the sun was setting down in the west, casting a glamour over field and hedgerow, lending a beauty even to grimy brick tenements, and transfiguring the telegraph wires into threads of burnished gold, Nathan stepped through the gateway of the Bracebridge Union Workhouse. A little parley with the gatekeeper and he was shown up to the governor's room, and as he stumped along the cheerless corridor he chuckled: "He, he, he! By Gosh, I did 'em that time! Gone to me relashuns—he, he, he!"

GEORGE H. ELLIS.

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SWEET RESOURCE.

"And she left him at once, of course," said Bramley, stroking his moustache in slow and meditative fashion.

"Left him?" repeated the little lawyer, with a low chuckle. "Left him? My dear fellow, where did you get your education? Just tell me that. Do you know anything about the kind of women that allow men to throw them down and walk over them, and even dance on them for pastime? Such women have to be thrown out of a fifth-storey window, and to have their heads smashed open before they conclude to give up caring for a man. I don't say that it went that far with Millicent Hastings. She loved that brute, and she'd been brought up with certain old-fashioned ideas about wifely duty."

"What did he marry her for; her money?" asked Bramley.

"Don't ask me," the lawyer laughed.

Both men were silent for a moment. It was a sultry June afternoon, and they sat looking out of the window of their club at a few slow-faring carriages. A victoria passing with a single occupant caught their attention.

"By George!" said the little lawyer emphatically. "By George! Speak of angels and you hear the rustle of their—silk petticoats. Millicent Hastings!"

"In that carriage?" queried Bramley.

"In that carriage, as sure as my name is Lloyd. She looks well, too. You wouldn't think she'd been through so much. Well, well, well!"

"She looks like a good woman," said Bramley. "You think she walked straight in spite of all?"

Lloyd put up his hands in mock despair. "What do I know? She's married again. Got a good fellow for a husband—Western man. Name of Weatherly. I don't suppose she cares so much about him as she did about Hastings; women never go crazy about steady, good husbands."

"Tell me the story you were going to tell. That is if talking isn't too warm work for you just now."

Lloyd fell back in his chair and reflected.

"It's six years ago," he began slowly, "since I first met Millicent Hastings. They'd been married six months, and were rather keeping in quiet because of her relatives. It seems she was an orphan, and she married without the consent of an aunt who was going to leave her some property. However, as Millicent was twenty-two or more that didn't especially matter. Hastings had been speculating and had lost heavily. He was in a shaky condition financially and pretty badly unnerved, and came to my office in that condition one afternoon. I was out, and he left a note asking me for Heaven's sake to call at his house that afternoon if possible. Of course I made it possible, and got there at eight. I'd never been there before, and had only a vague idea that he lived in a fashionable apartment house near the park. It was a nice place, I found, a very nice place—quiet and well arranged. I went up to the sixth floor, and rang the bell. The door opened presently, and showed me a small, queer figure that I took to be that of the maid. 'I—I don't know,' she stammered, when I asked to see Hastings. 'He hasn't come yet. I hope he'll come very, very soon. I—I am so nervous.' Then I knew it wasn't the maid. She had a low, musical voice, peculiarly sweet and cultivated. 'This is Mrs. Hastings?' I inquired. 'Yes, yes; you must excuse my appearance. Pray step into the drawing-room. I sent away the maid yesterday, to economise for the present—while my husband's affairs are uncertain; and—and I've been working so hard to-day—and I don't know how to do anything, unfortunately.'

"By this time she had turned up the gas and I could see a very beautiful young face, flushed scarlet with heat and exertion, and with an accidental streak of coal black on one soft cheek. Her eyes were black and had a strange look of feverish excitement; and she wore a plain little gingham frock and had a towel for an apron. Her head was covered with a handkerchief, and altogether she looked as if she had been having a pretty hard time of it. There was a catch in her voice every time she spoke. 'I don't know,' she said, 'why he hasn't come. He comes home very late nowadays. I suppose he is so worried.'

"I couldn't help feeling a queer sort of pity for her, though for what reason I could not exactly explain. Just then another ring took her to the door again. This time it was a messenger boy. I could hear her ask eagerly for the ticket to be signed, and then the sound of the door closing and the tearing of an envelope. After a few seconds of strange silence she came back. I couldn't tell whether I imagined it, or whether she staggered. At all events, her face had a most pitiful and terrifying expression; I sprang up and caught her arm.

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"'Sit down,' I said. 'Have you heard bad news?'

"It seemed as if she couldn't control her throat. Then after a moment of effort she said faintly and with a ghastly smile—'I—I—it's nothing. Only—only I thought it was a message for me from—from my—from Mr. Hastings. And I—I opened it—and it was not for me—but for him.' 'Nothing serious about that,' I said lightly. 'Oh, no,' she grasped, 'no, nothing so serious.' But I noticed that she clutched at the letter desperately and seemed to want to hide it even from herself. I wouldn't have been human if I hadn't felt curious about that letter."

Bramley cleared his throat and said mildly as the other paused for a moment:

"Letter from another woman, I suppose."

"It didn't occur to me," said Lloyd, with a smile, "and yet this was precisely the case."

"Go on," said Bramley, bridling a little over the fact of greater perspicuity than the lawyer had shown.

"Well," continued Lloyd, "there she sat, clutching the letter and looking—I can't tell you how she looked, but there was something terrifying about it to me. I don't know how long we sat there in silence—an uncomfortable kind of silence too, I must confess. But finally there was the click of a key in the door and the door opened. Hastings came lumbering into the drawing-room a moment later. He was a large man, tall, and well built. His face darkened at the sight of me, strange to say. And this nettled me. 'Look here,' said I, 'I'm in a great hurry. It was out of my time coming here to-night, but your note seemed imperative. Now, if there's anything so very pressing, I'm here; if not I must get away to my own home.' The woman got up and went slowly from the room. I thought she walked unsteadily. Hastings answered me in a thick sort of voice. I guessed at once that he'd been drinking. He wanted me to draw a bill of sale, he said, of a lot of personal property. I saw that he wasn't in a mood for business, and I made him a promise to be at my office at nine the next morning, and took a hasty leave. I was so upset by the curious appearance of his wife that I forgot to take with me the stick I carried, not an inveterate habit of mine, but only an occasional one. It was a stick that had just been presented to me, and when I reached the street entrance I remembered it and went back. Just as I was about to ring a sound startled me—a muffled kind of a scream. Then a heavy sound of something or somebody falling on the floor. I rang violently. Rang and kept my finger on the button, determined if he was beating her to scare him from it. I kept on ringing until the door was opened—by Mrs. Hastings. She had her hand pressed to her side, and there was blood from a small cut on the forehead. 'I left my stick,' I said. 'But what is the matter?' She could hardly speak. 'Nothing—I—just had a fall—tripped up over a—a hassock. It is nothing.' I looked at her with mingled pity and anger. It enraged me to hear her lie about it. Hastings' voice came thickly from the rear of the hall. 'You——' he used an oath and an uncomplimentary name, 'you will rob me of my letters, will you? I'll break your head.' I caught the woman by the arm, and dragged her sharply out into the hall. 'Look here,' I said, 'do you mean to let him kill you? He has struck you. Why deny it? Why allow it?' She began to tremble and shake hard, like an ague sufferer. 'Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do? I didn't know the letter. I didn't suspect. I thought it was a message for me from him—and such a letter! Oh, heavens! She calls him her darling love! What shall I do? Where shall I go?' 'Have you no friends at hand?' I asked. She made no reply to this. We heard his footsteps. 'Yes, yes; certainly,' she began to say aloud, 'yes, I will get your stick. How fortunate that—that you remembered. You might have been worried.' She ran back into the drawing-room to fetch it. 'Yes, yes,' she cried wildly, 'you might have been worried,' she ended with a peal of hysterical laughter, and shut the door sharply upon me.

"I stood irresolute a moment, heard Hastings' voice, loud and threatening, a sound as of a chair overturned, and then I hurried away down the stairs, not waiting for the lift."

"I think," said Bramley, "I'd have wanted to stay and see the fun out."

"Fun! Hastings came late to his appointment with me the next morning. 'My wife is ill,' he said. 'She had a fall, and the doctor says there's a bad internal injury.' He looked at me with the sad expression of a kind and affectionate husband, and I felt like kicking him out of my office. But I didn't. 'What's the paper you want drawn?' I asked. He began to explain that it was some personal property he wished to transfer to a lady. He gave me her name, and I took a memorandum of the items, and promised him the paper at three in the afternoon. About an hour later a messenger brought me a note scrawled feebly in pencil; 'I am very ill—perhaps dying. Wish to make a will. Can you please call. Millicent Hastings.' Of course I went to see her. The poor woman was too badly done up to speak. I made the form of a will for her and she signed it, leaving all she possessed to her husband. A couple of women neighbours witnessed it, and then I had a moment to speak with her. 'Oh, I'm dying,' she said, 'I'm dying. And I'm glad; it's my only resource and it's sweet. Let me die and be at rest. I am glad to think of dying. He will not care. He has another woman, the one that wrote that letter.' 'Tell me one thing,' I said, 'her name.' She hesitated with a queer sort of shame and faltered over it. 'Alicia Gross,' she whispered. It was the name of the woman he had made the bill of sale to. A sudden anger seized me. 'You are doing wrong,' I said, 'to shield him and to make a will for him.' 'Am I?' she smiled faintly. 'Well, let me die and go to rest.' She turned her face away and seemed to swoon. I called the women back and came away. She was dying, I thought."

"But she didn't die," said Bramley musingly.

There was a long silence. Lloyd seemed to have fallen into a dream. "No," he acquiesced finally. "No, she got better, got well, forgave him, helped him in his business by selling some property, was good and patient and loving to him—until the day when she met him arm in arm with Alicia Gross; the two were coming out of a hotel. She stood and looked at him for an instant, then passed on. She never went back to the house—not even to take her clothing. She took the first train to her aunt's. A few weeks later she came back to the city and began a divorce suit. Of course she would have won, only——"

"Only what?"

"Only Hastings was kind enough to die in the meantime. And in due course the widow became Millicent Weatherly."

"All's well that ends well," said Bramley. "But I must be going now."

H. Townsend.

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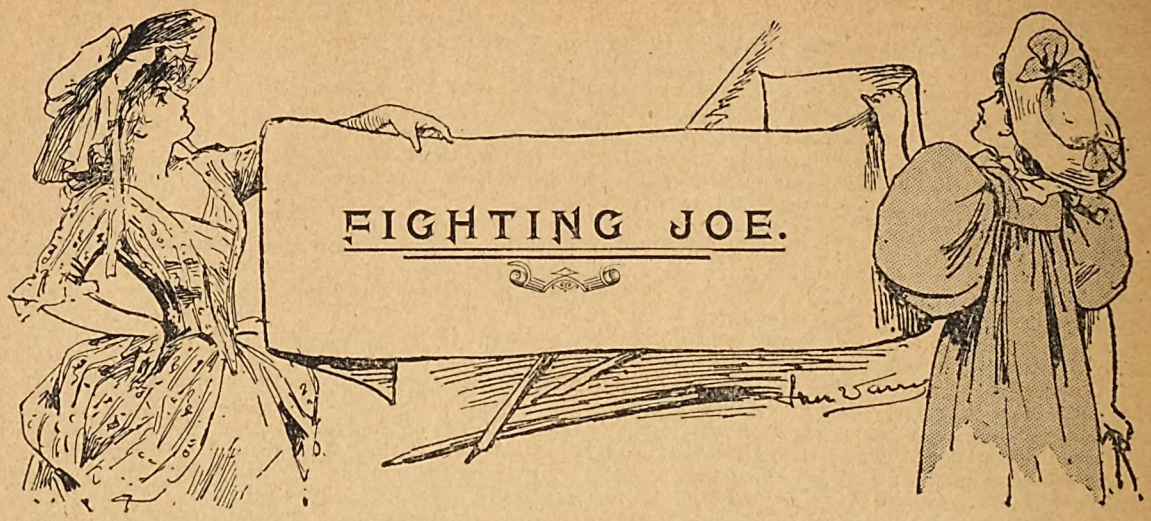

FIGHTING JOE.

"Who and what was he?"

I was standing in the churchyard of a small town on the borders of South Staffordshire one bright Sunday afternoon in April not many years ago.

I was a stranger in that part of the country, and was passing through the place in the course of a long walk from the larger adjacent town to which my business had taken me the day before.

The extensive mining operations of the last twelve or fifteen years had altered the unpretending place materially; and though the quaint old church and some long and low buildings, suggestive of farms and homesteads, still retained an air of rustic simplicity, they were being gradually obscured, and the place itself sophisticated by the formal rows of plain and ugly tenements, built expressly for the mining population, which, every year, was becoming more and more numerous.

I had amused myself by deciphering some of the inscriptions on the gravestones, well-nigh obliterated by the weather-stains and the moss that time had suffered to find root-hold in the hollows of the lettering, when a man, presumably a miner, in the Sunday clothes peculiar to that class, carrying a little child of two or three years, and followed by another, somewhat older, seated himself on a flat stone, and opened a conversation.

A civilly-spoken fellow enough, though with the uncouth accent of the country.

I readily accepted the invitation he offered, and we chatted pleasantly.

He had known the place many years, he told me, ay, long before it had grown into the town it now was—when it was nothing but a humble village, and when the long grass or ripening corn bowed its head to the wind on the spot where the unsightly engine-house and tall, red, chimney now stood, and where the heaps of slag and cinder marked the busy life of the toilers in the earth below.

That handsome marble monument, he told me, denoted the last resting-place of the late rector, and this broad, massive piece of granite was the tomb of a certain local squire, popularly known as "Squire Jack," who, it seemed, was much given to horse-racing, cock-fighting, and such kindred sports, and who, being a sad "ne'er-do-well," a thoughtless, reckless fellow, but withal, good-natured and easy-going, was, as such gentry not unfrequently are, the most popular member of his family.

As my new acquaintance pointed out these objects, and others, which he thought, I suppose, would interest me, he had risen from his seat, and we had strolled through the churchyard.

It was in a corner, and rather in a hollow, that, before a humble mound of green turf, and decked with the pretty spring flowers, carefully placed in the form of a cross, we both, as of one accord, paused. It had not any gravestone, but only a piece of wood, supported by two short uprights. On this was roughly carved, as if with a pocket-knife, these two words: "Fighting Joe."

"That is a strange inscription to put over a man's grave," I said. And then added: "Who and what was he?"

The man seated himself on a stone close by, and was silent for a few seconds.

He had set down the child he had been carrying, and the two little children, attracted by the bright flowers, had found their way to the mound, and were about to gather them.

"Here, you mustn't touch them flowers," he said, and, taking a hand of each, led them away.

"Well, mate," he then went on to say to me, in reply to my question, "I don't rightly know who or what he was. He was a stranger down here, and neither me nor my mates ever heard tell where he came from or who he was.

"When this here pit, Fenton's Pit, we call it, was first worked, we had but few hands hereabouts, and men as could work had no call to wait long for a job, and got good wage as well. Most of the hands were Staffordshire, but we never knowed where Joe came from, and I don't know as we asked, and p'raps he wouldn't have told us if we had.

"He was quiet and lonely-like, and said but little—that is, when he was all right; but when he'd had a drop of drink, as may be of a Sunday night, when he had gotten his wage, of all the hands I ever see to swear, spend his money, or fight, there wasn't one like Fighting Joe."

"And hence his name, I suppose?" I asked. "And of course, it is the old story again—drink, a quarrel, and a violent death; though I cannot understand, in that case, the evident care that is bestowed on the poor fellow's tomb—such as it is."

"No, sir," the man said gravely, after a moment's

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pause; "not quite all that. A violent death, yes; and such a death as I might pray God might ne'er happen to the worst of us; but it wasn't drink, nor a quarrel, nor a fight with another man, that brought him to it. It was more the other way, poor lad—more the other way."

The rough fellow beside me said this with a gentleness of tone and manner that was sufficiently out of keeping with his appearance to excite some degree of curiosity, and I told him I should like to hear more of the story.

"It's not much as such as you might care for," the man replied.

"Here," he said, turning to the little ones, who were straying towards the green mound again, "you mustn't touch them posies, thou knowest; go and get some of them," and he jerked a small piece of coal he had in his hand towards where some daisies and dandelions were growing in among the rank grass.

"He worked in Fenton's Pit along o' me, an' though we never had angry words, many an' many a day would pass and neither him nor me would speak. He was quick, as I said, and when he hadn't had drink would keep hisself to hisself. There was a lass living in these parts then, and Fighting Joe was fond of her. I don't know that he had said much to her, but we could see he was about as fond of that lass as a lad could well be. I know that, for mother was living then, and this lass would often be between her house and ours.

"It seems that one Sunday, as it might be this, Joe had met her, and told her how fond he was of her, and asked her to become his wife. She told mother this that same night. Well, it seems she said that Joe mustn't look for that, for she was already promised, and was going to be wed that Whitsuntide. When she told Joe that, he never said a word, but he grew very white in the face, and turned quietly away.

"The next day he had to work beside the very man who was promised to the lass he loved. Well, they had been at work for some time, when Joe's mate, turning round to get hold of a shorter pick that was lying near, sees him standing behind him with his arm raised, and the pick in his hand, as if in doubt whether to strike or not, and with a look in his eyes as he had never been known to wear before.

"The two men looked at one another, without speaking for a while, till Joe said: 'God forgive me!' and turned away, and from that day they never worked side by side again. I don't know how it was but we used to think Joe kept away on purpose—I mean, so as not to be in the way to strike the other one. That would be a matter of three or four months before the fire."

"What fire?" I asked.

"What fire?" the other repeated, in a tone of astonishment. "Why, Fenton's Pit. Did you never hear of the fire in Fenton's Pit?"

"No," I replied; "you know I am a stranger here."

"Ah, you must be, I should think," the man said, somewhat roughly, "if you never heard tell of that."

He took a small blackened pipe from his pocket, and filled the bowl in a mechanical way, for his thoughts were evidently far away, and his face became saddened and almost tender in its expression under their influence.

He remained silent so long, that I said: "I should like to hear about that fire, if you don't mind telling me."

"Was you ever down in a pit, mate?" he asked.

I told him no, but had often thought I should like to see one.

"Better stay where you are," the man answered.

"Ah!" he added, after another pause, "it's strange how we mining people die; but it's stranger how we live!"

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"I've worked in the pit for more nor twenty years," he replied; "but I never go down in the cage now—that is, since that time I speak on—but I think I may be going to my grave. What with the rising of the water, or the fall of the coal, or the choke-damp, that means death, the lives of such as us ain't worth much; but all these put together ain't nothing to a pit on fire.

"When the coal is bursting out with heat, and the heavy masses of earth fall down, crushing or laming them that can't get out of the way—when the cry is: 'Every man for himself, and God above for us all!'—when, fainting and struggling, they think for a moment of wife and children, and then they fall and die!

"Well, that was the sort of fire I speak of, and all of those at work in the pit that day rushed for the lift that might carry them up away from the place where the flames were roaring and rushing with the noise of a great wind.

"Well, Fighting Joe was the last man in the lift, as they thought; but just as they were beginning to move, they heard a loud cry for help, and they saw that other one—him who had married Joe's sweetheart—making for the lift, and begging them, for God's sake not to leave him behind.

"Well, I tell you, the lift was overfull then; but Joe sprang from it, and seizing hold of the other one, with the help of those inside, hauled him in, and all we heard him say was: 'Tell her I did it, an' God bless thee, mate!'

"Then we heard the roar of the flames, and we never saw Joe again."

The man sat quietly for a second or two, and though his voice did not falter, he added in a softer tone:

"But the next day, when the fire had burned itself out, I was one of them that went down into the pit.

"There was a crowd of the miners' wives and children standing at the pit mouth, and when we came up again, we laid a body gently on the ground, and the men took off their caps, and said ne'er a word, while the women cried, and many of them sobbed aloud. It was blackened and burned, and but for where the pitman's jacket saved him, it might have been no more than the earth it was lying on.

"But as we stooped tenderly to raise and carry the body away, the jacket fell off, and there on that part where once beat a true heart, was a lock of woman's hair.

"'He had begged it of her,' she said, 'so often, she had not the heart to refuse him;' and God only knows, mate, what comfort poor Joe might have felt in wearing it for her sake.

"We buried him with that little curl lying on his breast, and with many a sob, and many a 'God bless thee, poor lad!' we lowered him to his rest.

"We planted them little flowers, and it seemed to me as if they growed brighter on his tomb than anywhere else."

He paused again, and as I stole a look at him, I saw two large tears rolling slowly down his hard face.

He was a little embarrassed at my observing them, I think, for he said:

"Don't you think worse of me, mate, because I'm giving way a bit, but I am the man Joe saved."

A. GOODMAN.

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HIGH PLAY.

A COMEDY OFF THE STAGE.

By George Manville Fenn.

SUMMARY.

The story opens with an interview between Lady Braetoun and her son Roderick, in which she endeavours to induce him to give up fast living and marry Olive, Isaac Emsworth's heiress. After the interview he goes to see his racehorse in the country with Lucy Lee, a chorus girl, familiarly known as "Baby." Emsworth takes Olive to consult Dr. Murray, who advises a voyage to South Africa in the *Greyburg*, in which he also is going. Roderick, who is friendly with Murray, comes for advice on the terribly bad condition of his health, and the Doctor recommends a trip in the same boat. Lucy Lee, on being discarded, returns to her aunt's theatrical shop in Great Russell Street, and tells her the facts of the case, intimating her intention of refusing all the money and presents he offered her.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Threatening Cloud.

"Let me come to you with nothing but what's my own, Auntie," sobbed the girl, sinking upon her knees to clasp the woman's hands and press them to her lips. "I'll be like a servant to you, if you like; only take me, Auntie dear, and let me try and forget it all."

"Take you? Oh, my own, own pet!"

There was another long embrace, and then Lucy rose to her feet, to stand looking hard and strange.

"What is it, my pet?" whispered Mrs. Duncan. "Don't look like that. Are you faint? Let me send for the stout and hysters now."

"Auntie," cried the girl passionately, "I can't bear it. I can't sit down like this without a word."

"Then you should have let him have it at once, my pet."

"No, no, I don't mean him. I couldn't hurt him; I mean her. She has taken him away from me. She can never love him as I do."

"Never, my precious, and serve him right. But come and sit down again, and don't, pray, look like that. You frighten me. I know it's hard to bear, but bear it we must, just as I had to when your pore dear uncle died."

The girl was now pacing the room, her face looking pale and convulsed, as she held her hands tightly clenched before her.

"Don't, don't, my precious, take on about it. Have too much sperritt. Let him marry her if he likes. It won't be very long before he'll wish it all undone, see if he don't. You let him marry; it'll be like your revenge."

"I can't, I can't!" cried Lucy, in a low, harsh whisper. "Now it has come to that, I feel I must do something, Aunt," she cried fiercely. "I told him so. I shall kill her!"

"Lucy! My own gal! Don't, don't talk like that. You can't do it, you know."

"I can, and I will," she almost whispered now. And there was a look in her beautiful eyes, an intensity in her manner, that sent a chill through the coarse woman at her side.

"You can't—you can't do it, my dear. Don't you see there's the lor. It would stop you. It always does stop you from doing what you like. I never see the use of the lor. It never done me any good. If it had done its duty it would have punished some of the people who robbed me. If it had I should have been a rich woman by now. No, my darling, you mustn't talk about killing her, you know, because that would mean killing my darling, too."

"Well, and what does it matter now?"

"Why, my precious, it would mean killing me."

"Poor old Auntie!" said the girl, with a wild laugh. "But I could——" She whispered something in her ear, finishing with a strange malignant laugh.

"And—spoil her beauty for her, and make him hate the sight of her? Yes, there's something in that, my dear. He'd soon have done with her then. And what right had she to come atween you two? But oh! no, no, my darling," continued the woman with a shudder; "you're not the sort of girl to do that, Lucy. There's the lor, too, again, and the perlice. No, no, my precious, you mustn't do that: I can't have you hurt or took away now I've got you back, but if it must be done," she continued huskily. "I wouldn't mind—if it will do you good, my dear—I'd do it, dear, for you."

"I shall kill her!"

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"You would do it!" cried Lucy fiercely. "Why, she never did you harm."

"No, but she's ruined you. Isn't that enough?"

The girl made no reply, but stood gazing straight before her into vacancy; a vacancy peopled, however, by the shadowy forms of those who had destroyed the happiness of her life.

At last her lips moved, and a peculiar, intent look was in her eyes, as she said, as if to herself:

"He could never look upon her again—so easy, at any time. Why not at the church?"

"Lucy, my darling!" cried her aunt in alarm, "what is it? What did you——"

"Say?" said the girl, looking at her strangely. "I did not speak, Auntie, I was thinking."

"Thinking!"

"Yes; of what I ought to do. Auntie, I must bring him back to me, so there isn't room for both of us to live."

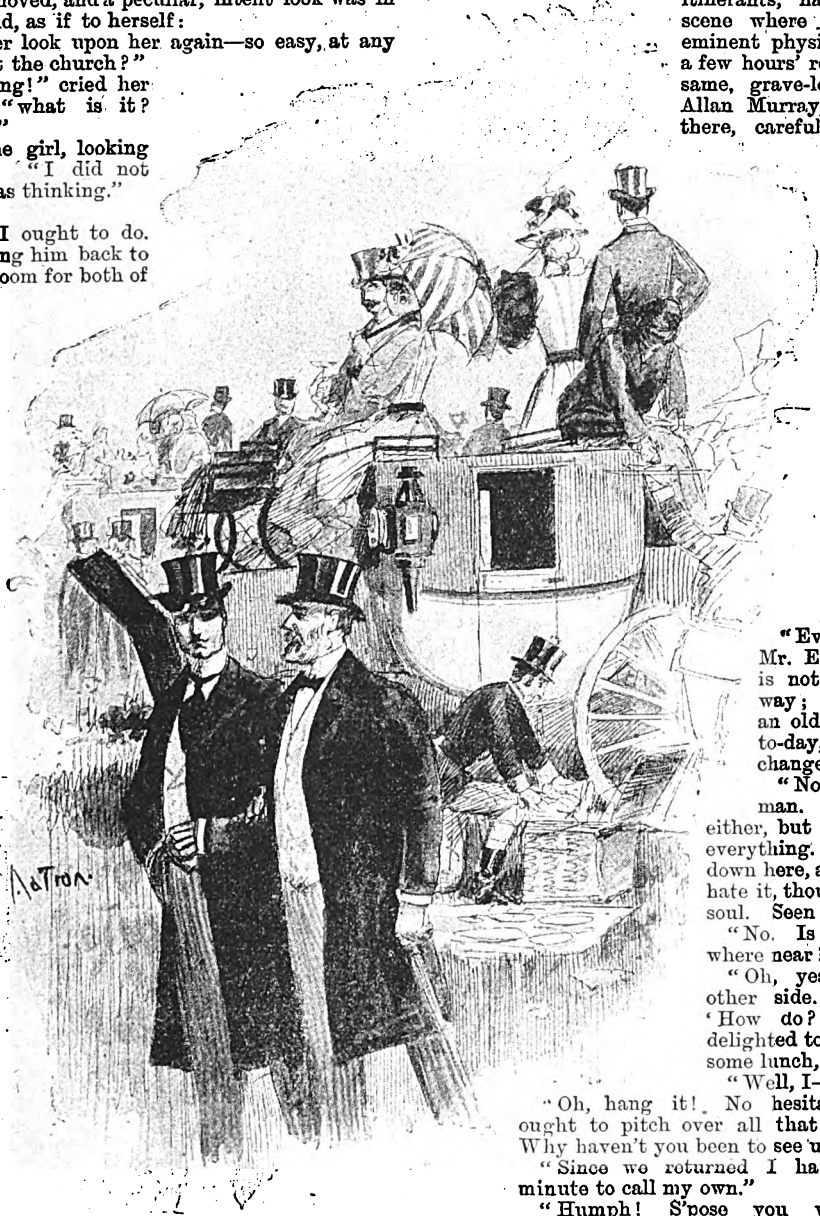
The aunt caught the girl's hand and swung her round to gaze wildly in her face.

"Lucy, darling, don't look like that."

"And he'd never look me in the eyes again—never kiss me and call me all his own," said the girl with a shudder. "It would make him hate me, but he would not love her, and if I did it everything would end."

Mrs. Duncan looked in alarm at her niece, and then about the room as if for help, but saw nothing save a grotesque mask which so hung in one of the corners of the shop that it seemed to be leering round at them with one eye.

Turning again with a shudder to her niece, she seized her by the arms and shook her, but without chasing the fixed strange look from her eyes.



"May I ask your meaning, Mr. Emsworth?"

"Lucy, my precious, what is it?" she cried wildly. "What is it you are thinking, dear?"

"Only whether it would be very hard to die."

CHAPTER IX.

The Dark Races of Mankind.

They generally had a drenching rain at the Highdown races, but this was an exception. The ladies' dresses, the dusty roads, the bright sunshine, all indicated a fine day, and the place was crowded, while carriages of every description were packed wherever the stands had left room.

The fine weather might have been the attraction, but that crowded course, with the hurrying of people to get good places for the best race, the yelling of the betting men, and the mingled strains of bad music cruelly murdered by itinerants, hardly seemed the scene where a hard working, eminent physician would go for a few hours' relaxation. All the same, grave-looking, handsome Allan Murray, M.D., was down there, carefully scanning the carriages, with the consequence that the lines of thought on his brow seemed to deepen. He had been along one line and back by another, evidently in search of a particular vehicle, but in vain; and he was about to cross the course when a quick, decisive voice behind him exclaimed:

"Why, 'tis you! How are you, Doctor? Who'd have thought of seeing you here!"

"Evidently not you, Mr. Emsworth. Racing is not certainly in my way; but the horse of an old schoolfellow runs to-day, and I wanted a change, so I came down."

"No law against it, man. Not in my way, either, but I like her to see everything. Plenty of society down here, and so we came. I hate it, though—I do, 'pon my soul. Seen her?"

"No. Is the carriage anywhere near?"

"Oh, yes; just over the other side. Come and say 'How do?' Olive will be delighted to see you. There's some lunch, too, on the way."

"Well, I——"

"Oh, hang it! No hesitation, man. You ought to pitch over all that shyness with me. Why haven't you been to see us?"

"Since we returned I have hardly had a minute to call my own."

"Humph! S'pose you would be pretty busy," said Emsworth, accompanying the words with a keen look; "but that isn't it altogether. I studied you a bit, Doctor, for I like you, I do really."

Murray looked at him, and a peculiar suffocating feeling came into his breast.

"Yes, that's how it is, Murray, and I'm sorry. I'm not blind, you know. Had to fight too many clever men to do what I've done. But I thought better of you."

"May I ask your meaning, Mr. Emsworth?"

"I'm a plain man, Doctor, and I'll tell you at once. Look

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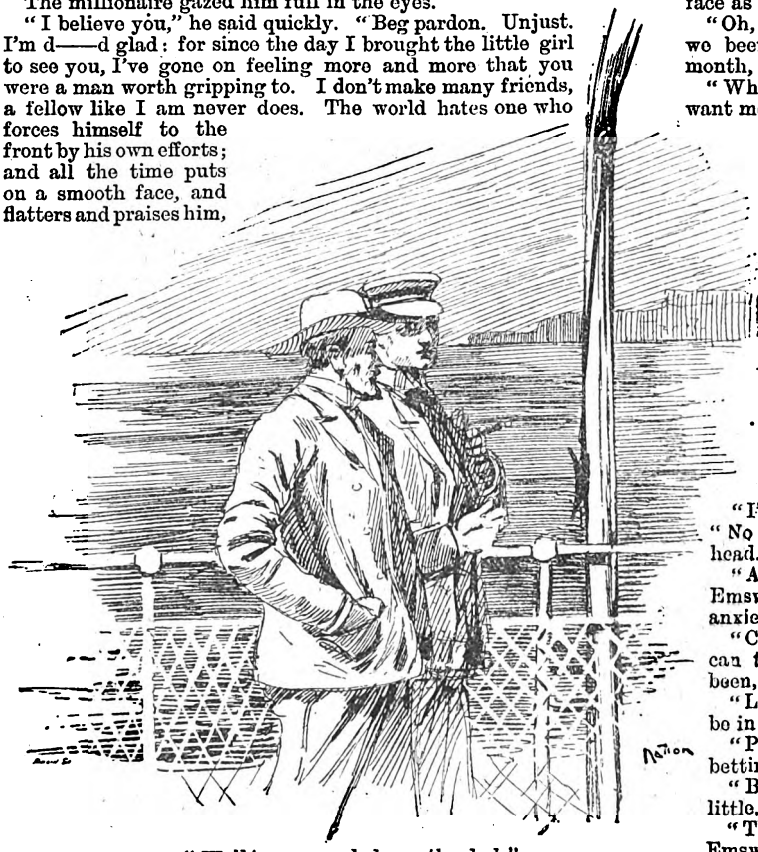
here: I rose from the ranks, and I'm not ashamed of it; but I'm always getting my back set up by some one or another who looks down on the plebeian or *parvenu*, or whatever they call me. I'm tolerated in society for her sake. They let me in because of the heiress. I'm not blind, and I put up with a good deal. I know I am wanting in the polish of a university man, and can't talk as society people do. I've had to make my way. I drop an 'h' now and then, I suppose, or do something wrong in society eyes, but I took to you during our Cape trip, and I thought you too sound and solid a man to look down on one who is self-made. I did, Doctor, upon my soul."

"You wrong me, Mr. Emsworth, indeed, you do."

The millionaire gazed him full in the eyes.

"I believe you," he said quickly. "Beg pardon. Unjust. I'm d——d glad: for since the day I brought the little girl to see you, I've gone on feeling more and more that you were a man worth gripping to. I don't make many friends, a fellow like I am never does. The world hates one who forces himself to the front by his own efforts; and all the time puts on a smooth face, and flatters and praises him,



"Walking up and down the deck."

and friends come to him in shoals, like flies round a bit of carrion, eh?"

"But I don't think you have much cause to complain."

"Don't you?" said the other abruptly. "I do. Why haven't you been?"

"Well, really, I——"

"Humph! ha! Waited for a formal invitation to dinner, I suppose?"

"No, indeed, you wrong me."

"Didn't I say to you over and over again, when you and I were walking up and down the deck of that vessel having our cigar: 'Come and see me, Doctor, when we get back, and I shall be glad?'"

"Yes; often."

"Then why didn't you come?"

"Such invitations, kindly meant, are so common, Mr. Emsworth. People give them freely and think no more of them. I am a busy man. You are a busy man, and——"

"Are busy men to have no rest, sir? You ought to have come, that is if you can bear the society of so common-place a chap."

"Don't say that again," said the Doctor warmly. "I will come and prove to you that your words do me an injustice."

"Hah, then I'm very glad I came down to-day. Thought it a horrible nuisance, for I felt that I shouldn't meet a soul I liked. Come along, here's the carriage. Olive will be delighted; she has felt quite hurt at not seeing our sea-going friend, and has been at me to get up a dinner and invite you. Here, Olive, my dear, I've found an old friend."

Allan Murray's heart gave a great throb as he saw the bright flush and the look of eager pleasure on his patient's face as she held out her hand to him.

"Oh, Doctor, Doctor," she cried, "what have we been doing to offend you? Back a whole month, and you have not been near."

"Why, you have not wanted me, and do not want me now. What do you say, Lady Braetoun?" he said merrily, as he turned and took the hand of that lady, who gave him her best society smile to conceal a slight feeling of annoyance which had troubled her on seeing the very warm reception the young physician received.

"Indeed, no, Mr. Murray—I beg pardon—Doctor Murray. I have been telling Mr. Emsworth that the voyage has done wonders."

"Voyage and the Doctor's advice together," said Emsworth bluntly. "There, don't scold him, Olive. I've given it him well. He is very repentant, and won't do so any more."

"Then I shall forgive him," cried Olive playfully. "But oh, Doctor Murray, do you care for all this stupid racing?"

"I'll answer for him," said her father quickly. "No; he doesn't. Got too much brains in his head. Come down to see Braetoun's horse win."

"And it will win. Don't you think so, Mr. Emsworth?" said Lady Braetoun with real anxiety.

"Can't say, ma'am. Only the knowing ones can tell. I don't understand horses. Has he been, Olive?"

"Lord Braetoun? No, papa, dear. He has to be in the—saddling-field, don't they call it?"

"Paddock, my dear. Hope you are not betting."

"But I am, papa," said the girl, colouring a little. "A pair of gloves."

"Then I hope you'll lose them," said Emsworth gruffly. "I hate racing and betting, and all the rest of it."

"I'm very, very glad to hear you say so, Mr. Emsworth," cried Lady Braetoun. "But, you see, it has grown to be such a custom with the aristocracy that I do not wonder at Roderick taking it up. But we shall have to wean him from it now. Eh, Olive, my dear?"

The girl looked at her quickly, and then turned, to find Murray's eyes fixed upon her intently in a gaze which made her colour vividly.

"I—I—isn't that the bell for the next race, Lady Braetoun?"

"I suppose so, my dear," said her chaperon blandly, and, adjusting her gold-rimmed glasses, she took up a race card and began to study it, while a curious pang shot through Murray, and he turned to look toward the course, along which a line of mounted police were slowly riding.

He was brought back to the present from a memory of many scenes on the great ocean-going steamer, when Olive was receiving the incense of the younger passengers, and most of all from Braetoun, by a hand upon his arm.

"Want to see this tomfoolery?" said Emsworth in a

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low voice, only heard by the ears for which the words were intended.

"I? No," was the reply, as the crowd seemed to begin to revolve before the Doctor's eyes.

"Come on, then; I want to talk to you. Take care of her, Lady Braetoun. We'll come back after the race for some lunch."

Murray made an effort to calm the rush of emotion which sent the blood hurrying to his temples, and he turned and raised his hat, meeting Olive's eyes again directed at him in a deprecating way, which seemed to say: "Don't be angry with me, Doctor, please."

The next minute he was with his companion outside the crowd, and felt Olive's father thrust an arm through his.

"Hah, we can breathe now," said Emsworth. "How I do hate a mob. Look here, Doctor. I've wanted you to come and see us ever since we got back, so as to tell you what has been going on."

Murray was silent. He knew, and dare not trust himself to speak, for it was all too plain. Olive liked him—her every look and word told him that she liked him. It was all over now; the hopes that had flashed through his brain, and had grown brighter and brighter ever since the day when they first met, had suddenly become dark. She liked him: she looked up to him evidently as a friend whose respect she cared to win, and he had been, dreamer that he was, hoping that some day their intimacy might ripen into love.

Emsworth went on talking about knowing someone before the voyage was planned, about his being so unwell, and yet so much in earnest that when he heard they were going abroad he determined to follow them.

"And you must have seen, my dear Doctor, how devoted he was to her all through the voyage."

These words sounded plainly; the others had all been blurred. And now Murray answered slowly:

"Yes—yes, I saw that Braetoun was attentive; several of the other young passengers were."

"Yes, but he was regularly smitten, and no wonder."

The father looked round proudly at the young doctor, who said in a voice he did not know for his own:

"No wonder!" and then felt as if he would have given anything to be alone.

"Well, of course, I was a bit flattered, and—yes, I'll own it like a man and a father—a bit pleased. Fine old family, high position. Proud thing for me. She's all I care about in the world, and I'll say it: I shall be glad to see her Lady Braetoun, and the old woman the dowager. I shan't marry her though; too wide awake for that! and I shall take good care that she doesn't interfere too much with the young folks. But there, the old girl has behaved very well. I'm not blind. She took to chaperoning Olive from the first, and if ever she tells me she hadn't certain ideas of her own from the beginning I shall say something rude."

There was a burst of shouting, and one of "They're off!" but it was all a confused murmur to Murray. He had only ears for the words of the man at his side.

"It has all been very nice and above board," he continued. "Braetoun was as attentive as could be, but he never spoke till we got back, and then he came to me like a man—a nobleman, and told me he loved her."

Murray drew a deep breath, as if he were in agony, and the scene began to reel round him again.

"Said he had never known the slightest desire to join his fate to any woman before, but that since he had seen Olive life seemed a different thing. Told me as a man of the world honestly that he had been a bit rackety, and fooled away a lot of money, but that henceforth he was going to make a fresh start, and that if I would give my consent to his asking her to be his wife he'd give her a proud position in London, the capital of the world, and—well, all that a honest English gentleman should say to the father of the girl he loved."

"And did he—did he say anything about his health?" said Murray, dragging the words out of him as if they were hard to say.

"His health? Oh, yes! That he had been a bit bad, but the sea trip had set him up and he was a better man than ever."

"A better man than ever," said the Doctor through his teeth.

"Yes, and that he was going to drop racing and sell his horses to pay his debts; and then he quite won me over by his honesty."

"By his honesty!"

"Yes. That's about all. I wanted to tell you for you to congratulate me. Old schoolfellow of yours, you see, and of course you'll be glad to see him well married. I don't mind his being poor. Olive will have plenty, and I shall keep in the background. I'm not going to be forcing myself to the front and be always slapping him on the back so that people may see, and as good as say to them: 'This is Lord Braetoun, my son-in-law.' No; I want her to be happy, that's all I think about. Well, say something, man."

Lady Braetoun.

Murray started at this abrupt request.

"And Miss Emsworth, sir, what did she say?"

"Eh? Well, at first she wanted to beg off. So young, you see. She was flattered, but a bit startled, and I don't honestly believe that she had ever thought much about leaving me, but by degrees she has grown pleased and animated, and the old lady makes a deal of fuss over her, and I suppose it will be all right. No mother to advise her, and that's where Lady Braetoun comes in so well. Oh, it's all right, I think."

"All right, he thinks! Does he know—can he know one tithe of what I could tell him? Ought I to tell him, and stop what would be an infamy? And if I did, what would she say? How could I go impartially and speak? God help me! What shall I do?"

Strange, wild thoughts to torture a loving man, there, in the midst of an excited yelling crowd, for the race was over and the numbers were up.

"Humph! Race is run," said Emsworth sourly. "Braetoun's nag was a bit of a favourite, I hear. Between ourselves, doctor, I hope he has lost. Make him disgusted and ready to give it up. Horse racing's a fine thing. I like to see the beautiful creatures they breed, and to see them run; but modern horse-racing is a miserable set-out of gambling, carried on by blacklegs and swindlers to such an extent that your honest lover of good sport has no chance. I want to get Braetoun out of it as soon as I can. Best thing, eh?"

"Yes, certainly," said Murray, for his companion waited for him to speak.

"Come to the carriage now, and have a bit of lunch. I

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wanted to tell you about your little patient. God bless her! You wish her happiness, I know."

"From my very soul!" cried Murray, with a sudden burst of energy which made Emsworth look at him wonderingly, and then smile with satisfaction as he pressed his companion's arm.

"Thankye, Murray, thankye. That does me good. I wasn't blind; I saw how my darling had impressed you during the voyage. Do you know, she confided to me, how shocked and startled she was when we first met. She said she expected to find you a grey headed old gentleman, but you won upon her at once, and she soon felt as if she had known you from a child, and could come to you for advice and help in everything."

Murray breathed hard and struggled to keep a calm, composed expression of countenance.

"I was glad to hear her talk so," continued Emsworth, "for I've great faith in Olive's clear-sightedness. It shows me I was not wrong about you. But there—that's over, and I'm glad of it. You don't say much about it, but that's your way. You never do say much. Think the more, eh?"

"Yes," said Murray gravely. "I think the more."

"All a dream," he added to himself; "and now I am awake."

"Ah, Murray, how are you, old man?" rang out as Braetoun caught sight of him, and held out his hand. "Come, Mr. Emsworth, we want that glass of champagne you talked about, so as to drink to my ill-luck."

"What, have you lost?"

"Lost!" cried Braetoun, with a reckless laugh, "why, the horse was nowhere. My Bella Donna could have won, though, easily. Yes, Murray, my usual luck—lost."

"Then we'll have the champagne at once," said Emsworth, rubbing his hands. "I'm heartily glad of it, my boy, heartily."

"Thank you," said Braetoun, laughing, and turning to Olive who looked troubled. "Encouraging, isn't it, for a poor fellow!"

Emsworth looked from the young man to Olive and back, before placing his glass to his lips.

The servant was busy the while, arranging the contents of the lunch basket, and though Murray felt that he must go where he could be alone and think, he could not drag himself away. It was like a waking nightmare to him, in which everything was unreal, even to the last scene of that fateful day.

Murray saw her eyes flash through her thin veil.

For just in the middle of the luncheon, while Braetoun was attending to Olive, who, with animated countenance, was listening to something he was saying, the young man's eyes became suddenly fixed, and a cadaverous change came over his face.

For the moment Murray was the only one present to notice it, and as he took a step forward, glass in hand, and followed his old companion's eyes, he saw that they were fixed upon an elegantly dressed lady who had just unloosed her hand from where it rested upon the arm of a heavy, over-dressed woman. Murray saw her eyes flash through her thin veil, and then she turned to gaze searchingly and fiercely at Olive, who involuntarily shrank away and laid her hand upon Braetoun's arm.

It was all so momentary that Murray was the only other witness of the situation in the comedy of life, till, with a wild passionate cry the girl stepped closely up, then raised her hands, and Olive uttered a faint cry.

(To be continued.)

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BRITISH WORKMAN'S AND GENERAL ASSURANCE CO. Ltd.

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EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT.—The results of the year's working surpasses everything before accomplished. The increase in business in the past, and the still greater increase expected in the future, have rendered it necessary for the Company to take in a further considerable portion of the Broad Street Corner property.

OLD AGE PENSIONS.—During the year further efforts have been made to meet the requirements of the Old Age Pension Scheme, under the Company's Endowment Assurance policies, and Special Tables of Benefits have been issued.

SPECIAL INDUSTRIAL TABLES.—These also have been prepared, and they show the great advantages to be derived from the payment of premiums either yearly, half-yearly, or quarterly instead of weekly. Under these tables a considerable amount of business has already been transacted.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE.—The total income of the Company was £438,250, and total expenditure £395,249, leaving a balance on the year's accounts of £43,001.

NEW BUSINESS.—The total number of policies issued for the year was 354,805 at an annual premium of £218,587.

CLAIMS.—The amount paid in claims during the year in the Ordinary department was £15,527, including £1,153 in surrender claims. The amount paid in the Industrial department was £160,295, including £8,051 in surrender claims.

The Directors recommend a dividend at the rate of 12½ per cent. upon the paid-up capital of the Company, free of income-tax. This dividend, which is in course of payment, is the largest distribution hitherto paid to the shareholders, and the prospect is of a steadily increasing dividend from year to year. The shares—£1 fully paid—are now quoted at 50s., and at this high premium it is difficult to obtain them.

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The DAY of FEEBLE THINGS.—In the first five years the average premium income was £2,131. The average annual income during the last quinquennium is £347,819. The comparison is convincing proof of the growing confidence of the people, and of the expanding strength and usefulness of the Company. The premium income of the year 1895-6 exceeds that of the average of the quinquennium, and amounts to £428,089.

THE TESTIMONY OF FIGURES.—The premium income for the last thirteen years is briefly stated as below:—

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1885	130,057
1886	142,864
1887	153,384
1888	173,543
1889	207,575
1890	243,889
1891	274,969
1892	289,406
1893	306,234
1894	335,282
1895	380,088
1896	428,089

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1843	Star	£459,186
1840	U. K. Temperance and General	£439,024
1845	Royal (1895)	£402,460

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TRIUMPHAL PROGRESS.—The progress has been triumphal. The modest venture of 1866 has developed into a large and prosperous company, with a total income of £438,250, and total funds amounting to £249,429.

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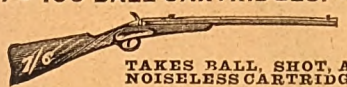

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SHORT STORIES

No. 399.] For the Week ending August 22nd, 1896. [1d.

A STRAY LETTER.

My Louis XV. chiffonier is a very handsome and graceful piece of furniture. It is inlaid and polished with locks of burnished copper, and always seems to be smiling as if its red and white mosaics were merry, rosy lips.

It was given to me by my grandmother, who inherited it from her grandmother, and I verily believe it once stood in a boudoir of the palace of Marly.

Never was an innocent little piece of furniture abused and railed so mercilessly as my chiffonier was when I chanced to think of it one day during my sojourn at the Piraeus, in Greece. You will, no doubt, ask why I thrust my trembling hand through my hair, and cried out: "Miserable idiot!" without stating whether the epithet was applied to myself or to my chiffonier. Good heavens, the only wonder was that I left a single hair on my head! Judge for yourself.

I had been so unfortunate—some time before—as to be loved by the most charming of women. I shall not attempt to describe her, not even by the colour of her hair; it is sufficient to say that for two years I called her "my angel" and "bright image of my dreams." At the end of that period, I allowed one of my friends to say to me, in speaking of her: "How could you be such a fool?" She sent me back my letters, and I neglected to return hers, but put the whole lot in a drawer of my old chiffonier, without thinking to turn the key.

That chiffonier was in my room; my room was in my mother's château; my mother's château was eight hundred leagues away, in the middle of Provence. In setting off unexpectedly on a diplomatic mission I had completely forgotten to destroy those

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remains of an attachment which had been delightful—so long as it lasted.

When I accidentally called out the memory of those letters from an obscure corner of my brain, I started up in surprise and shame, for I knew that my thoughtlessness might seriously comprise a woman who had done nothing to deserve such treatment at my hands. I felt that my conduct had been unworthy of a gentleman, and in a fine frenzy I rushed out of the house, inquired for the first steamship bound for Marseilles, took passage, and, listening to nothing but the voice of my conscience, returned to France.

A week later I arrived at the maternal abode, and I will spare you a recital of the ejaculations, the "What, you, George! So soon?" Which greeted me as soon as I appeared. My mother nearly stifled me with her embrace, and was sure that something dreadful had happened to me, and I had great difficulty in reassuring her. When she had grown calm, I said, in an indifferent a tone as possible:

"Will you have my bag sent to my room, mother, dear?"

"Certainly, my son; you must be tired out," she answered. Then, summoning a servant, she said: "Take my son's luggage to the blue room, Pierre."

"You mean the green room," I added.

"No, the blue room," persisted my mother.

"But the green room is my room."

"It was yours once, George," she said smilingly.

"And whose is it now?" I asked in surprise, and my mother pointed to the door, saying merrily:

"Here comes the present occupant."

"Gabrielle!" I cried, going to meet my cousin, the loveliest and most charming of girls, with abundant blonde hair, eyes as blue as heaven, a smile of childish innocence, and teeth like pearls. It was she, of all persons, who was occupying the green room, and who, no doubt, had ransacked the drawers and cupboards.

Unfortunate, thrice unfortunate man that I was!

Gabrielle—gay, artless and confiding, though a trifle shy—gave me her hand demurely, as she said:

"How do you do, Cousin George?"

My face must have betrayed my confusion as I took her hand, and looked searchingly for some sign of dissimulation in her soft eyes. Had she found the letters? Had she read them? To tell the truth, Mme. Blanc had loved me ardently, and had been so imprudent as to express her sentiments in writing, running the gamut of ah's and oh's, with plentiful exclamation points attached thereto. And suppose little Gabrielle had read them—I blushed at the thought.

But, quite calmly, she said: "How do you do, Cousin George?"—that was all; and in my great palm lay a soft, cool, maidenly little hand.

Ah, but what abyss is deeper than a woman's heart, as the Psalmist says; suppose she had read the letters! The only way to make sure was to go into the room and look for them. Gabrielle's room! What sweet melody in the words; yet I felt that I dared not enter that sanctuary, although I had known my cousin since she was a child.

"Come, George, and see how prettily I have arranged your room," she said suddenly.

Joy, bliss, ecstasy filled me as she spoke. I was saved. Innocence had come to the rescue of depravity!

Lightly and gracefully she ran up the staircase. What a pretty figure she had! I followed her like a culprit, feeling almost afraid to go; but yet I must at all hazards get my letters.

My former room was perfectly charming, decked out in blue and white, with no odour of cigars anywhere. The little bed was modestly draped with snowy curtains, which looked like the wings of guardian angels. I looked around anxiously for the old chiffonier. There it stood as usual.

"May I have some water, Cousin Gabrielle? I am dying of thirst," I said.

She took up the *carafe*, but I, artful demon, had already observed that it was empty.

"Wait a minute; I will get you some," she said, and left the room.

I rushed to the chiffonier, and opened the drawer. Horror! it was empty.

The next instant my cousin returned, gave me a glass of water, then showed me her album, and we talked merrily, just as we used to do when we were playfellows.

But where were my letters? Had she found them and hidden them away, or had she burned them? My head seemed to swim as I wondered.

As soon as I could think of a pretext I left Gabrielle, and in the doorway I met my aunt, her mother. She greeted me joyfully, then shook her finger at me in a mysterious way, and in a very knowing whisper said:

"Come with me, you naughty, careless boy." I followed her into her own room, where she opened a drawer, saying meanwhile:

"When we first arrived here, it fortunately occurred to me that before putting a young lady into a bachelor's room it would be well for me to look about it a little. I have had some experience of young men and their ways." Here she put a package into my hand. "Heavens and earth—my letters!"

I threw my arms round my aunt's neck, kissed her rapturously, and confessed everything.

A week passed. One morning, when I got up, I found a tiny piece of paper lying on the floor, as if it had been slipped under my door. I picked it up; it was a letter.

"What does this mean?" I thought, and then I unfolded it and read:

"Dear Cousin,—Why do you not tell mamma all about it?"

"'All about it!' What does she mean? 'Dear Cousin!' It is from Gabrielle!"

I did not understand it at all, and waited anxiously for the breakfast hour. When I heard my cousin go downstairs, I darted out and was going speak to her; but she blushed, turned her face away, and, putting a piece of paper into my hand, said hurriedly:

"Take back your letter, and speak to mamma."

My letter! I rushed out into the garden, and read the missive. Thunder and lightning! it was my writing, my style, my name.

"You are adorable, therefore I adore you. Will you listen to me? Will you let me devote my life to you? A word from you, and I will throw myself at your feet."

It was, indeed, my letter—it was one of my effusions to the ex-queen of my heart. It had slipped out of the package of letters, and Gabrielle, finding it in the chiffonier, thought that I had placed it there for her, and her answer was "Speak to mamma." The result of the accident was, I spoke to "mamma," and I married Gabrielle; I adore her, and am the happiest husband in the world.

Esther Noanes.

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STOLEN! £2,000.

At 3.45 on the afternoon of March 6th, 1887, the paying cashier of the —— bank cashed a cheque for £2,000, drawn by the highly respected firm of Ployd, Gow, and Co., of Fenchurch Street, merchants. It was presented by the manager of the firm.

At 3.55 the manager of Ployd, Gow, and Co. entered the bank and handed in his books and cheques amounting to £5,000. The paying cashier looked up as he heard his voice.

He called someone to take his place and disappeared into the secretary's room, and within twelve minutes the police were at work on the case.

The cheque presented at 3.45 was a forgery, and the man who presented it someone who had made himself up like Mr. Smith of Ployd, Gow, and Co's.

This was not a difficult task. The counterfeit man was the same height as the original and about the same make. Smith had not spoken a hundred words to the cashier during the five years his firm had dealt with the bank.

He always wore a blue serge office coat whatever the weather. He always wore a silk top hat, and it invariably worked its way to the back of his head before he had worn it three minutes.

No one ever saw him at the bank without his gold-rimmed eye-glasses and his tightly rolled umbrella.

Smith had a friendly nod for the patrons he knew in a business way, but he seldom spoke a single word to any one.

Officers were sent to every railway terminus; they searched the hotels and every likely place for a man to try to change his clothes. If the fellow had not some safe hiding place selected in advance the chances were more than ten to one against his making an escape.

In room 5 of Cremane's private and commercial hotel, which I will admit was not a first-class establishment, but still good enough for a traveller earning £5 a week, I read most of the particulars given above in the evening paper. The officials had done their best to keep the whole affair dark until some clue was gained, but the reporters had been too many for them.

I had come in from my round of calls utterly tired out. Reaching my room, I pulled off my boots, lighted a pipe, sat down with my feet on the bed, and this bank business was the first thing which caught my eye as I glanced over the paper. I had just finished the article when the night porter came up.

"Heard about the bank swindle?" he asked, as he entered my room, without the preliminary trouble of tapping.

"Just read it."

"Cool chap, wasn't he? And, I say, there are a couple of detectives downstairs now. They say they've shadowed him here, and they say they're going to search the whole place. They are on the floor below now, and will want to come in here in a minute."

He had scarcely finished speaking when the men appeared. I was a head shorter than Ployd's manager. I was thin, while he was stout, and I was young, while he was middle-aged.

But those two sleuthhounds came in on tip-toe, looked at me out of the corners of their eyes, and sat down on the edge of my two chairs to question me, the bigger of the two taking the precaution to place his seat between me and the door. It was fully a quarter of an hour before they had finished, and then they seemed to take it as a personal injury that I hadn't committed the crime.

Before my visitors left one of them suggested with a wink to his comrade that I might as well be taken along on general principles, as there was no telling what I would not own up to after a week in prison. But the other was not so evil-minded.

In fact, he took a fatherly interest in my welfare and put his hand upon my shoulder pleasantly and compassionately as he advised me it would be better to restore the money while there was yet time. I refused to disgorge, and he went out sorrowing, saying that I had missed a golden opportunity and that I should like to repent and wear a convict's suit.

The hotel was thoroughly searched. Those men did their duty; and I think would have carried off every soul within the place as a suspicious character had not the manager interfered, and the detectives finally withdrew, with at least two pocket-books crammed with notes.

At ten o'clock I was finishing my third pipe and had long before exchanged my paper for a novel. I was just getting sleepy when a queer thing happened.

My bed was in one corner of the room. I sat on a chair on the left-hand side, with my feet across the middle. I had my book on a line with my eyes, and all had been quiet for the last half-hour, when suddenly a voice exclaimed:

"Well, old man, that must be an interesting yarn."

I bounded to my feet and—saw no one. I looked round the room carefully, peering into every corner—no one. I slipped towards the door on tiptoe and opened it with a jerk and saw—no one.

Then I turned, and there was a man standing on the other side of my bed. He wasn't a ghost. He was made of blood, flesh and bones like myself.

To say I was frightened is putting it mildly. I was scared. I sank right into a chair with my mouth open and my eyes bulging out, until my visitor laughed outright.

"Who are you?" I gasped faintly.

"Well, that's a fair question," he replied. "I suppose you've got a right to ask. For the last three hours, up to a minute ago, I was the man under the bed, and now I'm the man on the bed," and suiting the action to the word he lay himself out at full length.

He was a cool hand. I knew human nature well enough to know he had plenty of nerve behind his cheek.

It wasn't all put on. As he lay there I noticed a revolver in his hand. Then I began to understand.

The evening paper had given a portrait of Smith, and I saw that this was his double. It dawned on me all of a sudden that he was the identical chap.

"You were under the bed when I came in?" I queried as we sat looking at each other, and I was wondering how to reach the bell.

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"Exactly," he replied.

"And you heard what the porter said, and the detectives?"

"Every word."

"And, to come to the point, you're the man they want?"

"I am."

"How the dickens did you get here?"

"I didn't choose this abode for its comfort," he said, "nor for its company. I had other plans, in fact. But they miscarried. I dodged into this hotel in search of a temporary asylum, and it looks as if I had found a lunatic asylum. Did you ever see £2,000 in one pile? It's a refreshing sight. See here."

He watched me with piercing eyes, and though he was toying with his revolver carelessly enough, I saw he had his finger on the trigger all the time. He bent over from the bed and picked up a bundle of notes from the floor.

"This means a visit to the tailor's, quail on toast with champagne, a long trip to America or the Continent," and he fondly patted the money. "So they've got an account in the papers, have they? I'd like to read it. Thanks."

He skimmed through the article with evident enjoyment, now and then chuckling to himself. Then he said:

"Pretty close shave that. I'm sorry for the cashier, but suppose he will wriggle out of the responsibility somehow. Excuse my asking the question, but what do you do for a living?"

"I'm a traveller in calicoes."

"Married?"

"No."

"Ever been abroad?"

"No."

"Look here, old chappie," he went on with easy familiarity, as he stretched himself on the bed, "you're giving me shelter and I'll do you a turn. Hand in your resignation and come with me. It will do you good and open your eyes. This little pile will do us first class for a year."

"I'll see you hanged first, you cheeky villain," I shouted. "I'm not making tours with bank thieves and gaol birds. Your trip will end in prison, if it doesn't start there."

"Too peppery, altogether too peppery for the head traveller to a respectable firm," he went on quietly. "And do you think I'll be arrested, as you know so much about it?"

"Certainly. I'm going to take you downstairs and hand you over to the police."

"That's a lie," he said, as he swung his feet off the bed and stood up. "I don't blame you for refusing a trip on the Continent, but please don't make an idiot of yourself in other ways."

"How do you mean?" I asked, also getting up and trying to keep my head.

"Just look at things straight and you'll see. I'm no chicken. Having played for a big stake and won it, I am not likely to let myself be balked by a kid like you. I'm armed, as you see. You're not, so keep your back hair on Even without arms I could do for you, being the larger of the two."

"You cold-blooded scoundrel," I muttered.

"No, don't call names, it's low," he said pleasantly. "Let's consider what is your path of duty. I've got the best of the bank. And how many people have the bank got the best of before? Last year over twenty banks closed their doors in the face of depositors. Every failure was brought about by some kind of fraud. And don't flatter yourself that you owe a duty to the public. The public would let you starve or freeze and not move a finger. You owe a duty to yourself. It is to take change of air. And now's your chance. Preserve the present state of your health, that's my advice, and very good advice, too."

"All of which means," I interrupted, "that you will shoot me if I give the alarm?"

"Precisely."

"Then I shan't do so."

"I thought as much."

He climbed again on to the bed and continued: "I thought I was right when I sized you up. We have now come to an understanding. I've got one or two favours to ask, but I won't keep you long, and I see you want to go to bed. Ah, there are your scissors. I must sacrifice my moustache. Please sit over by the window."

He laid his revolver on the dressing-table and cut off his fine chestnut moustache. I sat watching him and wondered if I had gone out of my mind, or if, perchance, I was dreaming.

"You shave yourself, don't you?" he finally asked, as he turned round and faced me.

I pointed to my razor and strop, and in barely another moment he stood before me clean shaven.

He had sandy hair, while his eyebrows were almost red. There was a bottle of black ink on the table. He dipped his handkerchief into it and painted his eyebrows. With the same fluid he made as neat a black eye as any prize fighter would care to boast, and he was chuckling as he turned to me:

"Just one thing more, old man—a suit of clothes. I must get off this blue serge. Perhaps it will fit you. Your oldest suit, please. I will pay cash for it."

I handed over a much worn suit.

"Rather a tight fit, but it will do," he said. "Here's £5 for it."

"I don't want your dirty money," I said savagely.

"Don't be finicky, it's silly. Now, then, to wrap up the money in a newspaper, and then I'm off. Look here, my boy, take this £100, it will make up for any little inconveniences I have caused you."

"I'd starve first."

"Oh, come now, you're too good for this world. What are you going to do when I leave the room?"

"Kick myself for an ass and then go to bed, most likely."

"Go to bed without the kicking part. You are a very sensible young man, you may take my word for it. If I'm arrested I'll say nothing about what happened here. Ta, ta!"

He reached the doorway and then he turned. "Here's a present for you," he sang out and threw his revolver on the bed. "It's no use to me, I lost my cartridges getting here. Adieu," and then he was gone.

I locked the door and sat down. After a quarter of an hour I slipped into bed. The next morning I awoke with a fearful headache. I went to my dressing-table and there, rolled up in a neat parcel, was the £100.

Did the man get away? Yes; he walked downstairs and out into the street, and the detectives never got a clue of him after that night.

About the money. I returned it to the bank by post, and that part of the business is still worrying the detectives. I could tell them a thing or two, but I won't.

Holly Wilson.

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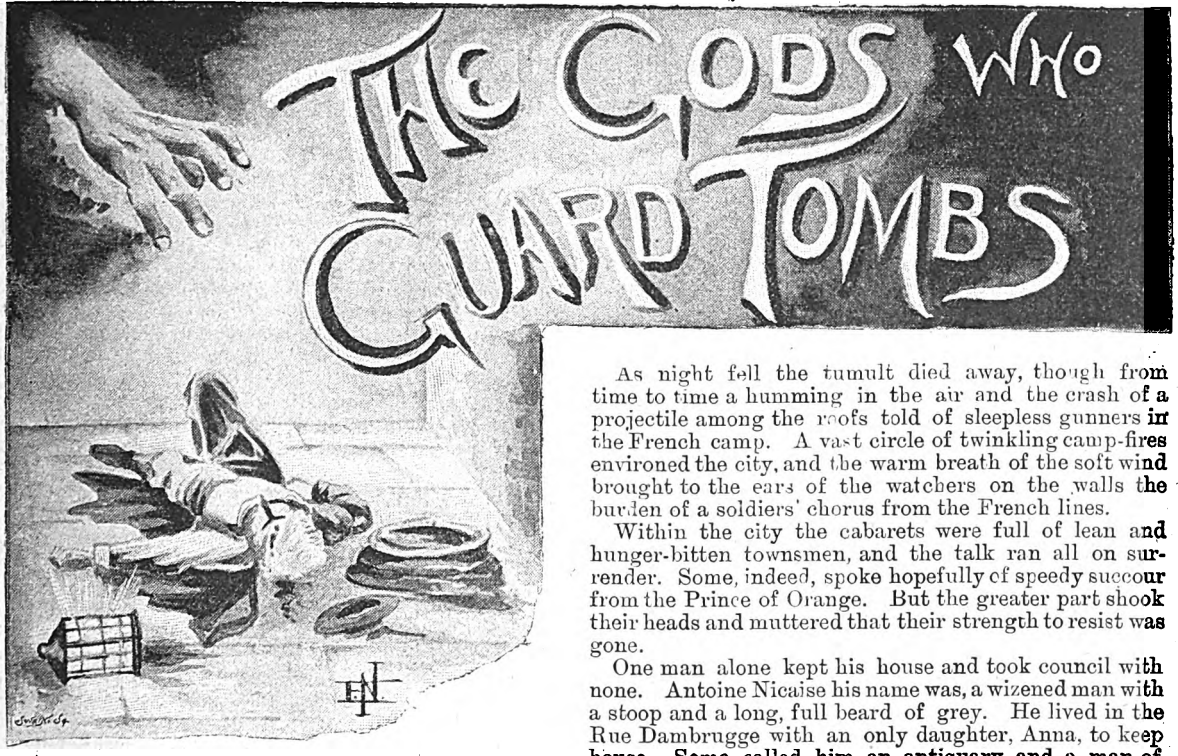
The Gods Who Guard Tombs



All day long the big siege-guns had battered and boomed round the walls of Tournai. On the plain about the city the French troops marched and counter-marched, throwing up earthworks above ground, while below, the sappers burrowed like restless moles, ever drawing nearer and nearer to the foundations of the besieged city. To and fro across the face of the country scurried the cavalry, raiding farms and granaries, driving before them herds of cattle, and bringing great store of grain into the camp.

Within the town the bright sunshine fell on pallid cheeks and bloodshot eyes. Four long weeks had they withstood behind their walls the terrible onslaught of the French army which was fighting under the very eyes of the most Christian king, Louis XIV. himself. But now they were almost come to an end. Food and water there was little enough of, and already they had stripped the lead from the roofs of churches and burghers' houses alike to make bullets and cannon-shot. From their counter-mines the workmen could hear the steady thumping of the French advance, and above ground the forlorn hopes grew stronger and bolder every day.

That very afternoon the attack had been concentrated on a breach in the southern bastion held by the picked troops of the Royal Auvergnais Regiment. The Frenchmen had scaled the steep escarpment nimble as goats and gained a footing in the breach. For a while the great guns were silent, but a terrible hurly burly of sound took their place. Shrieks and groans; the cheers of the assailants and the answering shouts of the besieged; bugles blowing and church bells jangling a tumultuous alarm sent up into the quiet sky a vast discordant clamour. In the end the attack was repulsed; but the wavering confidence of the townsfolk was mightily shaken.

As night fell the tumult died away, though from time to time a humming in the air and the crash of a projectile among the roofs told of sleepless gunners in the French camp. A vast circle of twinkling camp-fires environed the city, and the warm breath of the soft wind brought to the ears of the watchers on the walls the burden of a soldiers' chorus from the French lines.

Within the city the cabarets were full of lean and hunger-bitten townsmen, and the talk ran all on surrender. Some, indeed, spoke hopefully of speedy succour from the Prince of Orange. But the greater part shook their heads and muttered that their strength to resist was gone.

One man alone kept his house and took council with none. Antoine Nicaise his name was, a wizened man with a stoop and a long, full beard of grey. He lived in the Rue Dambrugge with an only daughter, Anna, to keep house. Some called him an antiquary and a man of learning, but others wagged their heads and said: "Some day the Devil will fly away with him and all his works!" and left him to go his own way..

In a back chamber but scantily furnished yet bestrewn with many books sat Antoine intent upon an ancient volume, straining his eyes in the dim candle-light over the crabbed writing on the open page. The book he read was not printed with type, but laboriously traced by a monkish hand. As he read it, it was plain to see that within him worked a great eagerness: and now and again he broke out aloud with a show of petulance:

"Curse them and their siege! Wherefore can they not yield or repulse the enemy? Here is a great store of wealth lying near to my hand, yet for these rascally Frenchmen must I sit close within these bare walls, and dine scantily off horseflesh and yermin. May a plague lay hold on them!"

On his right lay rule and compasses and a large sheet of parchment on which was traced a plan with intersecting lines carefully measured and set to a scale. To this he would turn from his book and carefully consult, marking here and there little crosses in red ink.

Suddenly the door opened and a slight, fair haired girl entered timidly enough. The old man looked up.

"So, then, thou hast returned, thou naughty child! Where hast thou been gadding about when no honest maid should be astir? I'll warrant thou hast been talking lightly with that wastrel Pierre Gobrecht and forgetting thy old father!"

"Nay, father," returned the maid, her fair skin all ablaze and a tear in each eye, "Pierre is no wastrel, but a sturdy armourer such as all men praise in these days; and I love him!"

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"Armourer!" says he. "Look you, Anna, I will have ye marry no armourers. Let but these sons of Belial, these French fiends be gone with their cannon, and I will find that which will make thee above these burghers, and above the burgomaster himself. Thou shalt wed a duke or a baron and have a castle and many servants and jewels."

"But, father, I want none of these things. I would rather have the love of an honest man like Pierre, than be the proudest lady in the land."

"Peace, girl! leave me to my work!" returned Antoine sourly, and Anna left the chamber with a sore heart.

Now as the night drew on there were rumours of a surrender; and these spread rapidly, and few of the townsfolk slept, but stood at their doorways talking excitedly. At daybreak there came together the burgomaster and the governor and certain of the chief captains who were over the garrison. And these met in the burgomaster's house. But about noon, when the firing should have been at its hottest, a white flag was run up from the principal tower which defended the gate of the city; and when this was seen, the French gunners let be for awhile.

From the big gate issued a little band headed by a herald with a white flag, and so were lost in the French lines. But soon came the tidings that the leaders of both sides had arranged a truce for three days whilst conditions were discussed for the yielding of the city.

On the second morning of the truce Antoine Nicaise rose early and breakfasted before daybreak. When he had finished he took a great empty sack and flung it over his shoulder, and in his hands he carried a pick and shovel. But the parchment map or chart that he had expended so much care upon he thrust into his bosom. And when Anna would have asked him whither he was bound, he answered shortly: "I go to win thee great riches," and so was gone. But Anna was greatly perplexed, and would have stopped him, but that she feared his wrath. So she held herself within doors all day wondering greatly what had taken her father.

Antoine went out with his sack and his tools down to the grand square, passing the church of St. Quentin which was sadly mauled by the cannon-fire of the French. When he came to the great gates he found them open, and a large crush of country folk pouring in with provisions to sell. The antiquary took no note of these but elbowed his way through the clamorous crowd and out into the open plain. Once there, he turned sharply to the right and making a detour arrived at the east corner of the city. From this point there ran a great highway right to Namur, but it did not enter the city, skirting it rather and crossing the border into France. Tradition and the tales of the country folk held that this highway was built by the Romans. Here the French troops had not established themselves, for the city on that side was too strongly defended by nature and art to afford any hope of breaking in. And of passers-by there were none.

Antoine Nicaise dropped his tools and sack from his shoulder. Thrusting his hand within his cloak he pulled out the parchment and examined it carefully. Then he marked a point in the centre of the road and took thirteen strides from it. At the thirteenth he stopped, and, throwing down his cloak to mark the spot, ran to fetch his pick and shovel and sack.

Just there was a little mound such as you may see on many country roads. This the old man attacked with his tools, manifesting an astonishing energy and strength not to be expected from a man of his meagre stature and scanty breadth of shoulder. At first the earth fell away easily before his onset until he had digged a hole deep enough to take him up to the chin. By this time the sun had climbed to the meridian and beat sheer down on the old man's back. Still he toiled on, his face begrimed with sweat and dust from out of which gleamed his deep-set eyes fired with a lurid light of anticipation.

All at once his spade struck upon some hard substance. With a half-muffled cry of glee the antiquary pushed back his long matted hair and in fevered haste cleared away the soil from the spot. Peering down as the sun's rays fell upon the hole, he found a massive stone flooring carefully laid. A shout of exultation burst from his lips. Down on his knees he went, thrusting his long skinny fingers into the cracks, striving to tear up the great stone with his puny nails, till the blood ran out from his finger tips. Then he took his pick, bearing his whole weight and strength upon it to move the stone. But the masonry was stout and heavy; for long it resisted all his efforts. Despite the heat which was now become very great the old man plied his tool upon the interstices with a desperate energy. The perspiration streaming down his visage fell upon his long beard, matting the hair, till he wore the appearance of a maniac.

Yet at last the work was accomplished: the stone moved slowly but surely, until it was levered up and a gaping cavity disclosed. Flinging himself flat upon his stomach Antoine thrust his right arm into the opening and brought it back with something that shone dully in the sunlight. It was a golden vase of ancient workmanship.

For a few moments the old man regarded it in silence, his hand trembling with uncontrolled excitement. Then with a fearful look about him he thrust the vase into his sack, and taking flint and tinder from his wallet kindled a light by whose rays he lowered himself into the cavity.

By the light of his candle Antoine found himself in a narrow cell with walls of solid masonry. About the right hand side ran three stone shelves, one above the other, whereon were ranged various articles. It was from the topmost of these shelves that he had reached the golden urn.

Whether the vessels on the shelves were all of gold the dim illumination of his torch failed to inform him. But opening the mouth of his sack he swept them in, vases, urns, a necklace, and a heap of coins whose falling clink sounded sweet in the antiquary's ears; last of all he laid his hands on a flask which seemed to contain a liquid.

As he pushed the flask into his sack a shadow fell across the ground at his feet. A cold fear seized his heart, turning him deadly sick so that he scarce durst raise his head. From above a voice cried roughly:

"What have we here? Here is some sneaking plot if I mistake not! Henri, Richard, Mortbleu! Hither, lads, and look you on this old mole, sapping with some ill-intent, I'll warrant me."

With shouts and imprecations two or three soldiers leapt down into the hole and dragged the trembling antiquary out. But he had the presence of mind to grasp his sack tightly.

Blinking in the bright afternoon sun and his teeth chattering with fear Antoine Nicaise stood in the midst of a patrol of French musketeers on the dusty road.

"Holy virgin!" exclaimed one who carried a pike and wore a sergeant's stripes, "this is a notorious mummy

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Say now my antique crow-scarer, why dwell ye in a hole in the ground? Art afeared lest the sun's rays should scorch your delicate complexion?"

The soldiers welcomed this sally with a shout of laughter. But Antoine kept his peace, though his knees could scarcely support him. And the sergeant continued:

"Come now, thou blind old mole, cease to wag thy beard and answer my questions or I must convey thee to the provost-marshal. But what is this?" and he laid his hand on the parchment which the rough hauling had caused to project from the old man's robe.

As the soldier's eye fell upon the carefully traced lines and the red crosses marked here and there he knit his brows and exclaimed in a sterner voice:

"This smells of some deep laid scheme. By'r lady I think I have unearthed some plot here. To the king he shall go and that without delay. Henri, Mortbleu, seize the villain and hold him fast. Fall in you others, and quick march to the king."

Down the dusty road tramped the little knot, the sergeant's pike and the muskets and accoutrements of the men spirting little dazzling flashes of reflected light as they moved in order. And in their midst tottered old Antoine, still tightly clutching his sack, his lips working and his eyes strained with fear.

Meanwhile in the silent house in the Rue Dambrugge Anna Nicaise went about her household work with an anxious look, for her heart misgave her whither her father had gone. Not for three long months had he crossed the threshold to go forth, but had kept his room poring over the ancient volumes and measuring out lines on his parchment. As every hour sounded she would go to the door and look out, but only the sunlit empty street met her eyes.

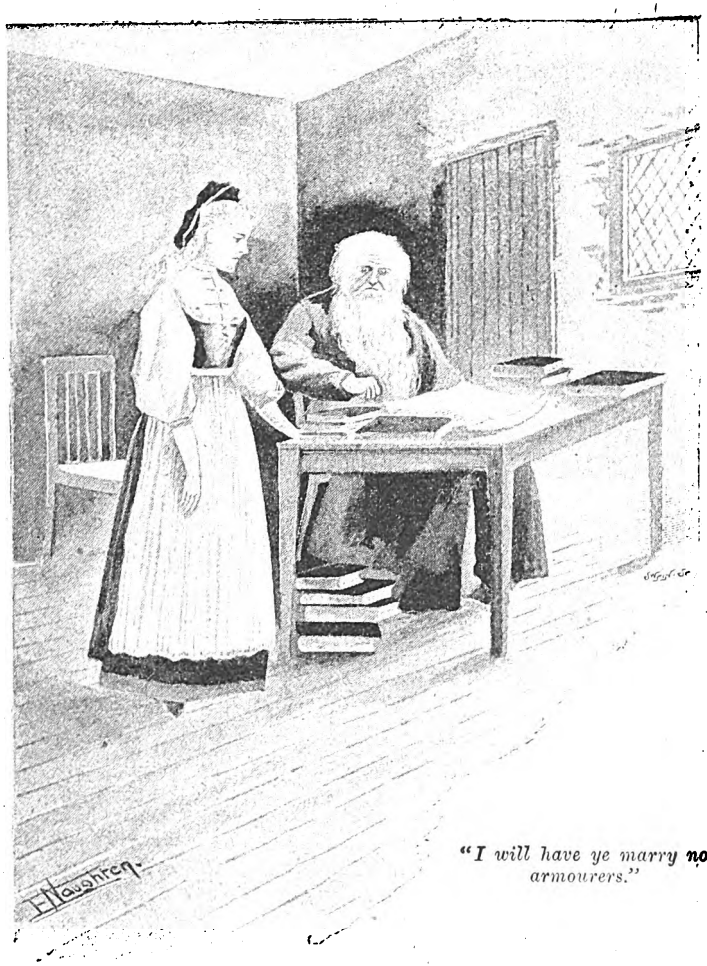
So the afternoon drew on until it might have been five of the clock when the girl heard footsteps sounding in the vacant street. Running to the open door she was met by the tall figure of her lover, Pierre Gobrecht the armourer.

"Oh, Pierre, hast thou heard aught of my father?" she cried, "he went forth at daybreak, I know not whither, nor would he tell me. Now I am sorely afraid some mishap has chanced him." And burying her face in her hands she fell to sobbing bitterly.

"Nay, Anna, never be afeard," said the armourer, clasping her in his arms, "perchance thy father hath lost his way or found an old friend."

"But he never had any friends," protested the girl. "He must have fallen into the hands of the French!"

Now Pierre set about comforting her as lovers have done since the flaming sword barred the way to Eden, and will do till the crack of doom. And presently he said he would go forth and look for the antiquary; and at that nothing would do but that she should accompany him. So the pair went out towards the great gates, and of every wayfarer they inquired if he had seen or heard aught of Antoine Nicaise. But all of them returned the same answer that neither had they laid eyes upon him nor looked to hear of him abroad that was like a hermit. And at each answer after this fashion Anna's heart sank lower, and she had much ado to keep from weeping afresh.



"I will have ye marry no armourers."

But just as they reached the great gates, there encountered them one with a full body and short thick legs who came bustling towards them. He was a shoemaker who lived in the Rue Dambrugge and a gossiping fellow, portentously important in the street, but at home a menial to his spouse. And when he saw Anna he called out upon her and told how he had seen her father hauled off to the French camp by a party of soldiery.

At these sudden tidings the poor girl was like to have swooned, and leant heavily upon Pierre's arm. But shortly recovering she insisted that her companion should lead her with all haste to the French camp to seek her father. And this at first he was loth to do, not caring to expose his betrothed to the jests of the soldiers. But her intreaties prevailed, and they went out through the gate into the wide expanse of the plain.

Now after some minutes they came to the outskirts of the French camp, and despite her anxiety Anna greatly wondered to see the order and strictness of rule which was manifest throughout that great army. Round the

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circuit of the encampment were posted sentries at equal distances, walking to and fro with musket at shoulder. Ever and again a relief guard would be marched down to relieve with due precision and discipline one of the sentinels. On an open space squads of men in bright blue uniforms and white breeches were being drilled, with many hoarse calls from their officer. On the left lay the cavalry lines, long rows of picketed horses champing and whinnying, while on the right were massed together large tumbrils filled with ammunition for the ordnance.

As they passed quickly through the turbid life of the camp Pierre laid his hand on the shoulder of a tall grenadier who was hurrying past:

"I prithee, sir," he exclaimed, "tell me if thou knowest aught of a certain old man whom report says has been taken prisoner this day by a French patrol."

"Ay, that do I," responded the other gruffly. "He whom you seek is but just now brought before the king out yonder," pointing to a large farmhouse that lay some thousand yards away. "You had best go thither. King Louis is fond enough of a fair lass's face!" And he turned such a glance of admiration on Anna as had like to have brought upon him the weight of the armourer's fist. But realising the danger Pierre restrained himself and they hurried on to the farm house.

In front of the door paced a long, thin, lath of a dragoon with an enormous moustache and a mahogany face, a large sabre at the slope over his shoulder. As he walked he clinked his spurs and jangled his scabbard on the ground. At a little distance a group of six of his comrades, the rest of the guard, sat in a row on a seat that ran along the wall, chatting and laughing together.

As Pierre and Anna walked swiftly towards the door with the intention of entering, the big dragoon thrust his long form before them, exclaiming:

"Stand back there in the King's name!"

Then seeing that the armourer pressed forward, though Anna hung back timidly, the trooper brandished his sabre, preparing to strike down the intruder. But Pierre was too quick for him. Bending low he ran swiftly under his guard, grasped him by the waist belt, and with a throw often practised in the playing fields round Tournai on saints' days, hurled the dragoon over his shoulder. With arms and legs wide apart he described spread-eagle fashion a semi-circle in the air, and then striking the ground with considerable force lay still, stunned.

But before Pierre could gain an entrance the other troopers, who had gazed in amazement at their comrade's mishap, flung themselves upon him, and for all his brawny arms and desperate struggles their weight bore him down. Pinning him to the ground they deliberated what they should do with him.

But apparently the noise of the struggle and the girl's shrill cries had penetrated within. For now an officer of high rank came hurrying out and inquired the reason of the tumult.

On seeing him the soldiers let go their hold on Pierre and he stood up, and with him the sentry who had now recovered somewhat, but still rubbed his sore head with a grim look upon the cause of it. So each told his story and Anna added her testimony. The upshot of it was that the officer directed two of the men to lead the prisoner into the building, charging them to guard him straitly, and to bring the girl with him.

At first the difference between the bright sun outside and the dim light of the farmhouse blinded Pierre and Anna. But their eyes growing accustomed to the change, they found themselves in a long chamber with a low ceiling, raftered and coloured a dusky brown by many years of smoke. Round the wainscotted walls were gathered noblemen and officers in gorgeous uniforms and long curling wigs. At the far end of the room on a raised daïs sat the Grand Monarque himself, for here it was he held his daily court. He was dressed in a long pale blue coat, a flowered crimson vest, and black silk breeches, a slight figure of a man, not uncomely in countenance, yet with a commanding eye and a regal air. Around him were grouped two princes of royal blood, the High Chamberlain, and the Provost Marshal, Alexandre de Goulard, a harsh, black-visaged man with a huge moustache curling back towards his ears. In a chair set by the king's side Anna saw one whom she thought the

Insisted that her companion should lead her to the French camp.

most beautiful lady she had ever set eyes on. She was of a goodly stature with a finely proportioned figure. But her face and features were of a rare excellence; her eyes black as night and large-orbed, while her raven tresses curled down each side of her countenance, and were pulled back over her shell-like ears. This was the King's "Second Spouse" as she was termed, Madame de Montespan, a woman of great beauty and wit. And at that time her will was paramount with Louis.

Anna had scarce time to discover her father standing over against her between two soldiers when the King spoke:

"How now, my Lord Marquis, who are these malignants who disturb our court assembled here?"

"May it please your Majesty," returned the officer, bowing low. "These are two townspeople of Tournai

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This fellow would have forced an entrance in, and when the sentry forbade him, took him and heaved him over his shoulder. And as to the girl, she will have it that she is the daughter of yon old hermit."

"Is it so, my lord?" returned the King, who appeared in a goodly humour. Then, turning to the armourer: "So then, my young brawler, you would even force your way into the royal presence without a by-your-leave, and when my good fellows hindered, you set about breaking their necks. By my star, madame," he exclaimed to the lady at his side, "but methinks it would serve my turn to have him strung up at once as a warning to turbulent fellows and destroyers of the peace. And as for the damsel," he added, turning to Anna, "I trow you came to assist your companion by turning the heads and breaking the hearts of my lieges with that pretty face." And he stared hard at her, so that she was fain to hang her head.

But Pierre, nothing daunted, spoke out right bravely. "Nay, sire, I had meant no harm to your soldiers. But that saucy knave at the door would not let me pass when I sought to bring this lass to her father, who she heard was in prison."

"Well-a-day," returned the king, smiling somewhat, "stand aside until I have done with this venerable prisoner. Guards, bring forward the old man!"

So Antoine Nicaise was led forth and set in the centre of the room facing the daïs, and all eyes were turned upon him. The king questioned the sergeant of the patrol who had taken him, and he told his story, how they had discovered the prisoner digging by the roadside, and on him had found a map in different colours, and how this had smelt to him of plots and mining. When the king had heard this, he turned to Antoine and bade him speak. And the antiquary obeyed, making obeisance to His Majesty.

"May it please you, Sire, but I am no malefactor, neither have I hatched any plot against your Majesty. My name is Antoine Nicaise, and a simple antiquary of Tournai am I, nurtured in poverty. Yet I have ever been a student, and spent years in poring over old volumes. Now it happened in my youth I did some slight service to a monk of the Franciscan Abbey which lies some four miles from the city. He was an aged man, and a student like myself, and when he came to die he sent for me, and," continued Antoine, "if I do not weary your Majesty I will relate how I came to be digging by the roadside."

The king, who appeared greatly interested, signed to him to proceed.

"On his death-bed he sent for me, and when I arrived he motioned me to his side and said:

"'Antoine, I have conceived for thee a great affection, and would requite thee for the service thou didst once render me. As for me, I am a-dying, and riches are no more than the dust of the road. Yet with thee it is different, for thou hast a child to nurture and provide for. Look you in yonder press,' said he, pointing to a corner, 'and take from thence that antique volume. Study that and therein you will find a sure road to wealth.' And with that and a word of farewell he turned his face to the wall and died.

"So I took the book home, Sire, and studied it then at my leisure. It was written in the Roman tongue by the crabbed hand of a monkish copyist, and not facile for weakening eyes to read. Yet at the last I unearthed its secrets. It proved to be an ancient record of the Druids written in the reign of the Emperor Domitian.

"Therein I found it stated, as indeed the peasants tell to this day, that the road at the east of the city was built by the Romans as was their custom when they had conquered a country. For as your Majesty is well aware it was a saying amongst that proud nation 'All roads lead to Rome.' Likewise this book revealed that, as was the wont of the Romans, their rich dead were buried by this roadside, and in their graves were stored with the ashes, jewels and coins of great value. By conning the pages assiduously for several years I constructed a plan which the soldiers who arrested me have taken from me, suspecting it to be some treacherous plot against your Majesty.

"I had no sooner completed this map, marking out the position of the graves by careful measurements, than the French army was directed against the city, and the siege began.

"You may figure to yourself, Sire, the rage and despair with which I watched your lines drawn around our walls, fearing lest some unlucky cannon ball or stray musket-shot might terminate my existence, and bury my secret with me.

"At length there came the time when, reduced by famine and pestilence, the commanders of Tournai flew the flag of truce. As quickly as I might my preparations were made, and to-day at early morn I set forth with pick-axe and shovel, my plan in my bosom, and having gained the road digged there with all diligence till I found the object of my search. And the rest of the tale, Sire, your soldiers have related."

To this long recital King Louis had listened with great attention, and the interest of the tale had taken the whole assembly by the ears. Madame de Montespan leant forward with sparkling eyes and parted lips. The silence was broken by King Louis.

"Antoine Nicaise," said he, "we have heard your tale, nor do we disbelieve it. But it yet remains that you should put the topstone to the structure of your narrative by disclosing to us what you discovered in this old Roman sepulchre. For by all accounts it should prove somewhat entertaining."

"Willingly, your Majesty," returned the antiquary, and with that he pulled apart the mouth of the sack. Diving his arm into its recesses he brought out one after another all those articles that had lain hidden in the grave for so many centuries, and handed them to the King.

First he drew forth an alabaster vase, containing the ashes of the dead Roman. Then came another vase of gold, chased with the loves of gods and goddesses; then three gold rings adorned with precious stones, two gold spurs, the bit of a battle horse inlaid with silver and gold, upon which the rust of many years lay lightly. With these were a seal on which was emblazoned a rough coat of arms, and a necklace of pearls. And at this last the fair eyes of Madame de Montespan grew big with surprise and delight, for the stones were large and choice. But still Antoine brought out fresh spoils from the sack's mouth—a golden stylus and a hundred pieces of gold bearing the effigy of the Emperor Domitian.

"Stay," exclaimed Louis. "If I have read my history aright, and the works of the ancients, there should be an offering of wine to slake the thirst of the toiling ferryman of the Styx. Where is Charon's flask of wine?"

"Nay, but that is here, too," answered the antiquary, drawing forth a crystal flask. "The wine has become quite clear."

"Come, gentlemen," said the king in a merry mood, "who will drink a health to this old Roman lord?" But none of the courtiers seemed eager to pledge the ashes.

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Suddenly Louis uttered an exclamation. He had taken up the alabaster vase, and, having broken the seal thereon, was pouring out the ashes. As he did so, his eye caught upon an inscription on its uptilted surface. Slowly he spelled out the words, till at last the sentence was complete. And thus it ran:

"Dii qui sepulchra custodiunt, poena acerrima afficiant illum qui in hoc mausoleum irrumpat. In vita sua casus resque adversas satis crudeles Aurelius Silvius passus est, in sepulchro saltem placide quiescat."

"*Eh bien,*" cried King Louis, looking round. "Who amongst you, gentlemen, will turn that into French for us?" Then, no one offering among the courtiers, he added: "It seems we must e'en translate it for ourself. Thus, methinks it should go: May the Gods who guard tombs punish him who breaks open this mausoleum. The troubles and misfortunes of Aurelius Silvius have been cruel enough during his lifetime; in the tomb at least let him have peace."

As the King recited this in a slow and solemn tone, the more superstitious of those about him shook their heads and whispered to their fellows that they at least would not care to change places with the antiquary. But Louis said:

"Come, now, good sir, you have proved the truth of your story up to the hilt, and as for us you are free. Yet belike you have only exchanged one judge for another yet more potent because unseen. Fear you the curse of these dead ashes?"

Antoine stood up straight smiling scornfully.

"Many thanks do I return to your Majesty for your noble generosity and justice. But for the curse, it troubles me not at all. Ill words break no bones, they say, and I fear a live man's arm worse than the idle threat of a parcel of ashes. But with your Majesty's leave, I would humbly offer Madame this necklace of pearls, which is not unworthy to deck that ivory neck."

But Madame, though her heart greatly desired the necklace, was yet constrained by fear to reject the offer, roundly declaring that she would have no part or lot in breaking into the Roman's tomb.

So the king ordered the guard to release Antoine and his daughter and Pierre, sending them back to Tournai with an escort, for the incident had greatly entertained him, relieving as it did the tedium of camp-life.

On the next day, when the truce expired, the terms of capitulation were agreed upon, and the town was handed over to the French on honourable conditions. But the antiquary journeyed secretly to Antwerp, and there disposed of his treasure to an English merchant, returning well pleased with his bargain. Among the gossips of the town, indeed, when tongues wagged freely, it was confidently reported that he had received the price of one hundred thousand livres. Be that as it may, Antoine Nicaise remained in the old house in the Rue Dambrugge, saying little to his fellows, and sternly forbidding his daughter from any intercourse with her lover. Meanwhile a French garrison was quartered on Tournai, and the citizens, being unmolested, returned to their avocations, and the city resumed its ordinary aspect.

But the return of peace without brought no quiet to the antiquary's mind. A restless desire ever burned in his bones. He could not sleep of nights, but would lie awake, his quickened fancy roaming over the treasures that yet lay hidden in the graves along the roadside. Ever it appeared to him that giant hands, formless but of a terrible intensity, laid hold of him and dragged him forth from the city to the Roman highway. His blood coursed at fever-heat through his veins, and he would be impelled to rise from his bed and lighting a candle sit poring over the parchment until the dawn of day brought sanity to his brain.

Thus the time passed. The blackness of night brought ever an intense longing, a keener thirst for more gold, which the calm light of day could scarcely master. Hazardous it could not but be, since all the country-side knew of his great discovery. Already he dreaded lest the parchment should be stolen from him, and hid it at the bottom of a heavy iron-clamped chest.

Drew himself into a doorway to escape observation.

But at last the visions of the night, these terrible, mysterious impulsions, turned the scale. One night after Anna had retired to her room, Antoine made his preparations softly, and biding impatiently till a half hour after one sallied out into the vacant street. His features had grown gaunter as the desire consumed him, and from beneath his broad-brimmed hat his eyes gleamed like burning coals.

A damp, warm wind met him as he stole down the street, and the overhanging eaves of the houses dripped with moisture. Little pools of rain lay here and there in the unevenness of the way, and blinked beneath the infrequent oil lamps till to Antoine they seemed like twinkling eyes that spied on his every step. Despite the closeness of the air and the thickness of his cloak the old man shivered like one caught with a fit of ague.

This time he avoided the great gates of the city, and

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directed his steps towards a point where a breach had been made by the French cannonade. As he crossed the Place des Armes he heard the tramp of the approaching watchman, and drew himself into a doorway to escape observation. Presently the man appeared, swinging a heavy lantern, and calling as he went: "Two of the clock, Sirs, and a cloudy night."

On sped Antoine noiselessly past the great houses that lifted their walls to the lowering clouds, and whose blank windows stared across the square like the pathetic sightless eyes of a blind beggar. Once he thought he heard stealthy steps at his back treading in time with his own, and turning round sharply caught, as he thought, a dark shadow slipping quickly behind a projecting buttress. With a catch in his breath and a sinking in the pit of his stomach that brought on a deadly feeling of nausea, he compelled himself to retrace his steps, and prove if his eyes had deceived him. Nothing, however, could he find lurking behind the buttress; and, comforting himself with the thought that it was but the silent flight of a night-bird, Antoine resumed his way.

Threading a narrow lane at its further end he came upon the place he sought. Here the ordnance of the French had battered a great gap in the wall, and about the cavity lay strewn in fantastic masses, great heaps of broken masonry, fascines and sacks of earth. Through these the old man groped and blundered, with many imprecations as his shins struck against sharp edges, till at last he passed through the dry moat and out into the open country.

Not a solitary star broke through the blackness which lay like a thick blanket hung low over the plain. But Antoine Nicaise knew the ground well, and, turning sharply to the right, took his bearings by a tall row of poplars, and hurried along over the humid ground.

To his fevered brain the void night was filled with fearful gigantic shapes, that crowded round him, urging him to quicken his pace. All at once to his strained ears came a sharp sound, like the rattling of a displaced stone a hundred yards behind. This time he dare not turn back; a panic terror took him by the heels, and for all the weight of the tools onhis shoulder and his heavy cloak, he hurled himself headlong forward, splashing through mire and puddles, till at length he gained the goal he sought for.

But here another difficulty met him. In the lack of light one portion of the high-road was so like another that it seemed as if the antiquary's journey should end in vain. But Antoine was not to be baffled. Casting all fears to the winds as the gold hunger gripped him more fiercely, he took a lantern from his sack, and by the aid of steel and tinder, lighted the candle. Then, pacing up and down some two hundred yards either way, the lantern revealed a familiar clump of bushes that stood in his mind's eye as a landmark. The rest was easily done. By the candle-rays he consulted his map, measured out the distances, and in the end hit upon the exact point.

A gloomy dawn found him deep in a cavity of his own making, and ere the bells in the city towers and steeples sounded the hour of eight Antoine had forced his way into the second mausoleum, and stood surveying its contents with the aid of his lantern.

On a sudden a pebble dislodged from above came rattling down at his feet. Another followed, striking him upon the head. Startled, he dropped his lantern on the ground and looked up. Over the edge of the aperture appeared three faces, and at the sight of them Antoine Nicaise felt his time had come. Three evil faces were they; the first, a long, lantern-jawed, cadaverous visage with deep-sunk, malevolent eyes; the second, covered with a red bristling moustache and beard, with a purple scar running obliquely across the forehead; and the last pouch-cheeked, double-jowled, with features contorted in a horrrible grin.

The old man's knees rapped together. At his feet the candle in the overturned lantern flared and flickered as the wax melted. A frenzied terror shook him, his ears were filled with a great roaring, and before his eyes in lurid red letters stood out the words: "May the Gods who guard tombs punish him who breaks open this mausoleum."

He tried with all his force to cry out. But as his mouth opened the keen point of a dagger hurled deftly from above took him in the throat, and he fell forward on his face, clawing convulsively at the ground.

"Curse me," ejaculated the rotund robber, as they filled in the grave after they had emptied it of the spoil. "This antiquary was surely a man of forethought thus to dig his own sepulchre. He hath saved us thereby much trouble and no little expense in sexton's dues."

So Antoine Nicaise was seen no more in Tournai. And when the rumour of his disappearance spread abroad folks shook their heads and whispered mysteriously. So that to this day they will tell you in the city how the Devil flew away with the antiquary.

ARTHUR PAGE.

Post-Card Competition.—No. 8.

WHAT word in this issue, over five letters in length, contains the *greatest proportion* of elongated letters (p's, b's, t's, y's, etc.)? A guinea is offered to the reader living within 100 miles of London who first points this out, and another guinea to the reader living beyond this distance. *Post-cards only, please.* Other forms of communication will be disqualified

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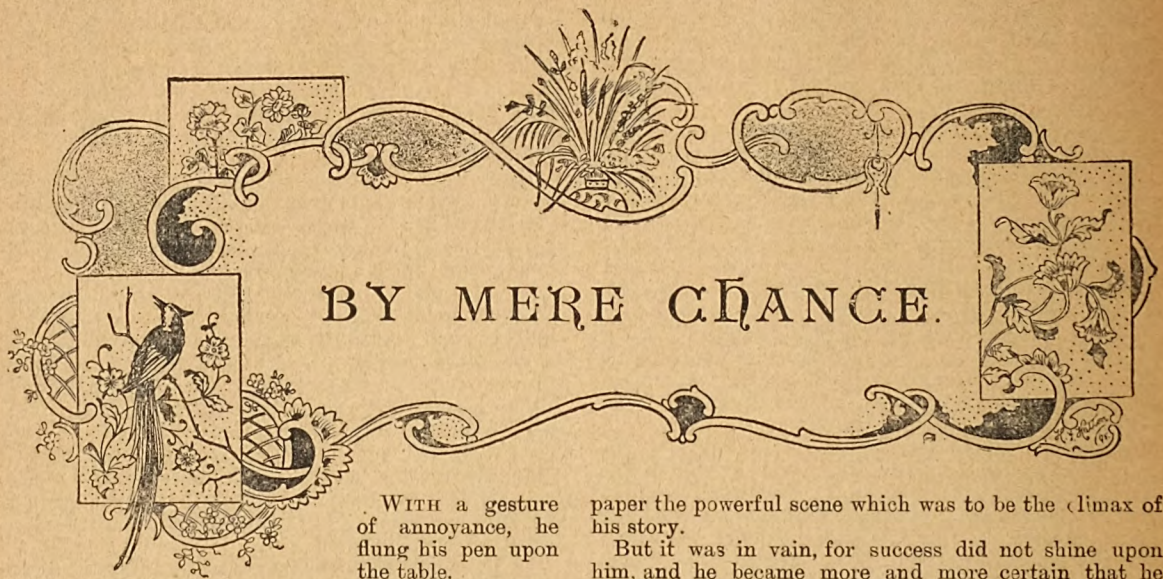

BY MERE CHANCE.

With a gesture of annoyance, he flung his pen upon the table.

"It is useless! I shall never succeed in describing this scene until I have actually experienced it," he said to himself.

An ordinary, common or garden writer of short stories would never have taken the matter so to heart. But he, Paulus Frank, the apostle of realism, could never allow a story with description in it that was not true to life go into the ruthless hands of the critics.

The plot of his novel was certainly simple enough. Two jealous, spiteful women had entered into a plot against the noble, innocent heroine of the tale.

By every possible means they sought to destroy her position in the eyes of her husband, and those of the world. They finally agreed upon the plan of sending an anonymous letter to her husband, wherein they accused the wife of faithlessness.

Paulus Frank cultivated close relations with a man whom he had selected as the model for this hero, and often invited him for that reason to his house.

He had just reached the point where he had to describe how this man, who was naturally cold blooded, stands before his wife with a deadly pallor on his face and confronts her with the letter, threatening to shoot her unless she makes a frank confession of the whole transaction.

And it was just this scene that Paulus Frank felt himself powerless to describe.

Would the wife defend herself with the vigour and spirit against such an attack, or would she merely allow herself a contemptuous little laugh when brought face to face with the calumny?

Would her insulted and innocent heart rise in indignant protest against such a gross accusation, or would she merely let the matter drift on and make no further explanation than a quiet denial?

What expression would her face wear? Would she turn deadly pale or wear the flush of shame? Would her hands pluck nervously at her little handkerchief, or would she stand motionless and erect before him as if turned into stone under his very eyes?

And the answer to all these questions he did not find readily in his mind. Inspiration had left him in the lurch. Twenty times and more he strove to put on the paper the powerful scene which was to be the climax of his story.

But it was in vain, for success did not shine upon him, and he became more and more certain that he would only be able to portray the scene with justice and power when he had actually been through it himself, and felt every phase of emotion recorded in lines of fire on his heart.

Once this peculiar thought had taken possession of him, he was unable to rest until he saw it realised.

It came to him one morning with such force that he let his fist fall upon the table with a bang that almost shattered the glasses.

"Have you gone crazy?" cried his pretty young wife, raising her clear blue eyes to his face. "What's the matter? Ever since you began that wretched novel of yours you seem to be quite a different man."

And as he only stared at her and made no answer, she went on to reproach him soundly for his conduct.

"It cannot continue like this," she concluded. "It must stop before long," and then buried herself again in her work.

At the same moment the servant appeared on the scene with the announcement that the doctor was at the door.

A young man entered and greeted the husband and wife with the familiarity of an old acquaintance. Frank returned his greeting, then looked vacantly before him, and appeared to interest himself deeply in the pattern of the tablecloth.

Shortly after Frank went to his study with pleasure written all over his face. At length he seemed to have found a way out of his difficulty. He wavered, however, undecided for a little while. But why not? What harm was there?

Besides it was not possible in any other way. He would be obliged to write a plain, accusatory letter to his wife, but then he would confess it all afterwards and ask her forgiveness.

Thus there could be no further harm attaching to his plan, and he would be freed of all difficulty and be able to describe the scene with powerful realism.

He could not understand why the idea had not occurred to him sooner. It was so simple and so natural, and there seemed to be absolutely no other escape from his difficulty.

Thank goodness the time was now approaching when

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he would be able to hear the bitter protest of the innocent and calumniated wife.

Forthwith he was anxious to execute his design, but his heart beat a little faster at the thought of it. With difficulty he wrote a few lines in an altered handwriting, which interpreted in a pitiable way the accusation of the wife whom he adored and loved. And, in order to make the deception more complete, he added thereto the initials of the name of her supposed lover and traducer.

For this purpose he selected the name of the young doctor who had only a few minutes before come to his house on a visit.

"It is true, I know, that my wife cannot endure him," he said to himself, "but what of that? The scene will be all the more natural and powerful."

Yet somehow as he wrote the address on the envelope —his own address—a sad feeling stole over him.

"Some things cause pain, even in a joke," he murmured to himself. "How thankful I am for my wife's stainless character!"

And with trembling fingers he finished the writing. Then he weighed carefully in his mind what the next step should be and finally carried it to the post-office himself.

All was going splendidly. In the evening they intended to go to the theatre, so that she would find this letter, on which so much depended, among her other papers and letters when they got home again. The whole scene would be acted at night just as in a real novel. It was splendid.

When they came out of the theatre it was already late.

"After midnight," remarked Frank as they passed the tall clock in the hall.

He asked the maidservant who opened the door for them if there were any letters, and she gave him those that had come while they had been at the theatre.

While his wife sank with a tired sigh into an arm-chair and untied her veil he remained standing and ran his eye over the addresses.

Suddenly something seemed to strike him. He raised his eyebrows slightly, and casting a stern glance in the direction of his wife tucked the correspondence under his arm, bade her good-night, and went abruptly into his study.

The young wife observed him narrowly, drew a deep breath as her custom was, and shook her head. She did not ask him whether there were any letters for her among his own, and he, of course, did not tell her.

Then she took her candle from the servant girl, and walked slowly towards her bedroom.

Once in his workroom, Frank indulged in a contented little laugh. At last the goal was in sight. In a few moments he would know all he wanted to know! Yes, all, and he laughed again. Then it would be easy for him to describe the scene from beginning to end in a masterly manner.

Just a little more patience, and her maid will have left her. Going up and down in his room, he calculates what effect will be produced on the world by his novel, drawn in the most realistic manner from Nature itself.

"I wonder what makes her so slow to-night?" he said to himself.

In the stillness of the night he could hear the sounds of their voices. Then he heard her lay down her rings on the marble slab of the dressing-table. Thereupon the clear sounds of her merry laughter floated through the air to his ears.

"To-day of all days, she seems to take so long," he murmured to himself.

A little while longer he walked up and down the room with excited brain. Then he heard the opening and shutting of the door and steps dying away in the distance.

"At last!" he exclaimed with a sigh.

Softly and with great caution he pressed the door handle, walked lightly through the dressing-room into the bedroom, and entered with such suddenness and violence that the young wife cried aloud with fear and astonishment.

"How you frightened me! Have you gone crazy?"

He made no answer, but stood in silence, watching carefully every gesture that she made and every change of expression that crossed her face.

Then in measured steps and with a pale, earnest face he approached her.

The fair young wife sat upright in bed.

The night candle burnt brightly on the table beside her.

With trembling, feverish hands he held out the terrible letter to her.

"There! Read that!" he cried in an angry, pained tone of the outraged, injured husband.

The woman turned suddenly to a deathly pallor. She seized the letter hastily and cast a rapid glance over it.

For a moment she raised her eyes to her husband's face, but only for a moment, for she immediately again read over the letter that she held in her trembling hand.

"I know all," he added quietly, watching every movement she made. "I know it all," he repeated louder and in sullen anger.

She made no reply. Her mouth twitched nervously, her eyelids dropped, and with a wild cry of hysterical anguish she slipped out of the bed and flung herself at his feet. The amazed husband looked on with a dull sensation of horror in his heart, while she clung to his knees, and with an agonised voice groaned out:

"Forgive me! Forgive me!" JESSIE BOYD.

RESULT OF NO. 5

Jumbled Story Competition.

(See page 250.)

A good number of competitors in this competition came very near putting the story together correctly, but a certain proportion failed to strictly comply with the conditions. Some *wrote* the title or the author's name, some omitted stops, some pasted on the lines so feebly that they came off before the paper reached the checkers, while a few neglected to put their names on their attempts. Altogether, thirty-four competitors were absolutely correct. We have added a few shillings to the £10, with the result that each winner receives 6s. as a share of the prize. Names of the winners appear below:

Mrs. Horsfield, Ipswich; Miss H. Pearson, Ashton-under-Lyne; Mrs. Farrant, Canterbury; C. Sewell, Greenhithe, Kent; Miss Wiesner, Glasgow; Miss L. Vanhegan, London; A. Douglas, Greenock; Miss L. Reader, Islington; F. Heard, Leytonstone; H. Biggs, London; J. Sangster, Hull; A. Padmore, Bristol; T. Hess, Liverpool; Mrs. Harrison, Putney; E. Carter, Gospel Oak; A. C. Dalgetty, Macclesfield; Mr. W. H. Bonham, Dublin; Mr. F. May, London; Jno. Eccles, Hoylake; Mrs. Bleakston, Sunderland; Mrs. Ivor, Midlothian; Miss P. Mitchell, Gateshead-on-Lyne; Miss Shipstone, Hornsey; A. Budgen, Dorset; Corporal Wm. E. Barrett, Omagh; Miss F. H. Enchus, Enfield; Miss M. Burgess, St. John's Wood; W. Glenny, West Dulwich; W. B. Hand, London; J. B. Crane, Peckham; Miss Bert Allen, Chiswick; E. Scanes, West Kensington; Miss Barry, Ipswich; Mdme. M. Sydney, London.

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A Romance of the American War.

It was in the year 1862. We were lying before Richmond, and McChellan was waiting for orders, which, alas! never came, to move on to the Confederate capital and put a speedy termination to the war.

Our Colonel was a noble specimen of a Virginian gentleman, who had at the outbreak of the struggle espoused the cause of the North, in opposition to the wishes of his wife and relatives.

His patriotism brought about a separation from his family.

His wife and her daughter, a young girl of sixteen years, went to live with his father-in-law, who was an ardent Confederate, while the Colonel joined the Union troops at Washington.

This much of his history we knew, and it accounted for his almost gloomy demeanour.

It was evident that he loved his wife and child, and though he had given them up at his country's call, yet the separation was hard to bear.

Still, not a murmur passed his lips, and he was respected and loved by the regiment who acknowledged him as their leader.

I was at the time a captain, commanding a detachment under him, and one evening he sent me word to come to his headquarters.

"Captain," he said to me as I entered, "I have just received a communication from General McChellan himself, that the enemy have obtained secret information of the movements of the very division I command. There must be spies in the camp. This thing must be stopped. My honour and fidelity to my country are brought into suspicion thereby. I commission you to ferret out who it is that betrays us, and no mercy shall be shown him."

"Colonel Thornton," replied I, "my suspicions have been awakened in the same direction."

"Ah," exclaimed he, "whom do you suspect?"

"Some time ago," continued I, "we had a young drummer boy among us. The other day he was brought into the camp a corpse. The men had found him dead in the woods. His face was shattered by a ball beyond all recognition, and he was only known to be our drummer boy by the clothes he wore. A sheet was wrapped round the corpse, and it was interred. Just as the body was being lowered into the grave, the sheet slightly fell away from his head, and I saw that the hair was black. At that time it did not strike me, but afterwards I remembered that our drummer boy had flaxen hair. Since then I cannot help suspecting that that boy was a spy, and that he had used this stratagem to escape from the camp unnoticed."

"You say he was only a boy?"

"Yes, a lad about sixteen years old."

"I believe your suspicions are right. When did this occur?" said the Colonel.

"Yesterday morning."

"No doubt the boy has obtained all the information possible, and is now on his way to join the Rebel Army."

"If he is," said I, "he can still be captured. The Confederates are over two days' journey off. The boy is no doubt skulking through the woods, and the recent rains have made the way almost impassable to one on foot. If I set out at once with a detachment on horseback I think I can overtake him."

To this the Colonel agreed, and less than fifteen minutes later I started at the head of six men on my expedition.

We scoured through the woods during the whole night, and as we were well mounted we travelled a considerable distance.

Just at daybreak the next morning a cry of one of our men drew us up before a clump of bushes.

There, on the grassy mead which carpeted the earth, lay stretched in a deep sleep a young girl.

Her dress was torn and bespattered with mud, her arms and hands were scratched by the briars through which she had passed.

Yes, she was very beautiful, and as I peered into her face, I was struck with the resemblance she bore to the drummer boy for whom we were searching.

Yes, there was the same fair countenance, the florid complexion, the flaxen hair, now loosened from its restraint and extending in a mass over her head and shoulders.

My heart throbbed violently as I thought that the drummer boy might have been a girl in disguise, that the sleeper was a girl spy.

To satisfy my mind I alighted from my horse and bent closely over her. Fatigue and exhaustion had rendered her sleep so profound that I did not awaken her.

I drew forth a package of papers from her pocket.

They were addressed to a noted Confederate general.

I broke the seal and read the contents.

There was a full description of our numerical strength, our plans and future movements.

There was no doubt.

The beautiful sleeper was a girl spy.

"Men," said I, and my voice slightly trembled, "do your duty."

With averted countenances several of my men approached and wakened her.

"Oh, I am lost! I am lost!" cried she, sinking to the ground.

"Handcuff her," ordered I, "and place her on a horse."

"Ah," shouted she, "whither will you bring me?"

"To the Colonel," said I.

"Oh, no, no," begged she, turning as pale as death, "do not bring me to him. Kill me here. I fear not death. I beg not for life. Only kill me, kill me on this spot."

Her pleading was, however, in vain. I could but order my men to proceed as I had directed. She now began to struggle and scream. It was with the greatest difficulty that she was bound and put on horseback.

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It was late in the afternoon when we arrived in camp.

I immediately proceeded to the headquarters of the Colonel.

"Well," asked he, as I entered; "have you succeeded?"

"I have," replied I, "the spy is caught."

"Caught?"

"Yes. Only it seems that the drummer boy was but a disguise. The spy is a girl."

"A girl!" exclaimed he in surprise.

"Yes, here she is."

My men at that moment dragged in the struggling captive.

Freeing herself from her captors, she rushed towards the Colonel, and kneeling in the dust before him, exclaimed:

"Father!"

"Ida—my daughter!" shrieked he in such a tone of anguish that it pierced the very souls of those who heard it.

It was midnight when the court-martial adjourned.

The Colonel had not taken part in the council, and I was commissioned to inform him of the result of their deliberations.

I found the Colonel sitting at his desk reading a Bible.

He seemed unnaturally calm.

"Well?" asked he eagerly. "They have found her guilty?"

I could only nod.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried, momentarily overcome.

"They have found her guilty," said I, "but they have not sentenced her. They know how much you love your daughter, and they have left it to you to decide her fate. You can doom her to death; you can set her free. Oh, sir, let me beg for your daughter's life. Let her live. A father's love will be a sufficient reason for this act of clemency in the eyes of all the world."

He paced up and down the room with agitated steps.

I anxiously waited for him to speak.

At last he turned to me and abruptly said:

"Bring her to me, and be present to await further orders."

I departed, and a moment later returned with the beautiful girl.

With slow steps and eyes bent to the ground, she advanced until she stood before her father.

He gazed at her for a moment, and then turned away to hide the tears that sprang to his eyes.

"I must be firm, I must be firm," he muttered.

Gradually he became calm, and, gazing full at her, said, in a voice that betrayed not the slightest sign of passion:

"Ida, you were the light of my days, the hope of my existence. I thought to behold you the happy wife of a worthy man. But now all that is passed. You have chosen not only to betray your country, but your father."

"No, no," she cried wildly; "not my father, not you. My grandfather pictured to me how glorious would be the service I could perform for the South. Everyone around us was ready to die for the cause. I felt the inspiration; I became a spy. When I was sent to this division I knew you were its leader. It is true I obtained the information they desired of me. I carried the messages with me when I was captured. It was my intention to surrender them up only on the condition that whatever would happen your life should be saved."

"I care but little what becomes of me," replied he sternly, "it is the betrayal of your country that demands your punishment."

"And that is?" gasped she.

"Death!"

The next morning was sad and dreary.

The drizzling rain fell from the dull, leaden clouds.

All nature seemed to weep at the mournful spectacle about to be enacted.

The Colonel was calm and stern.

Not a sign of the tumult within his breast was visible in his almost impassive countenance.

"Lead forth your prisoner," said he to me in icy tones.

I left his presence, and soon returned with horror depicted on my visage.

"Oh, sir," cried I, kneeling before him, "she is dead!"

"Ah, dead!" exclaimed he.

"Yes," continued I, "she lies cold and inanimate in her cell. She has poisoned herself, for I found this phial in her hand. See, it is marked 'poison.'"

"Heaven's will be done," ejaculated he.

"Sir," cried I, "she is now dead. You have kept your faith to your country. Will you allow us to prepare for an interment worthy of the daughter of our commander?"

"Do with her as you may," sighed he, sinking gloomily into a chair.

I left him thus to make the necessary arrangements for the funeral.

It was a grand affair, but the father did not attend it.

* * * * *

Three years passed away, and the war was over.

Colonel Thornton had been raised to the rank of general, and I to that of colonel.

We were in Washington, and I sent the General a courteous invitation to my approaching marriage.

He arrived quite late, and the guests were already assembled in the magnificent hall.

Not without a tremor I led my beautiful bride up to him.

She raised her veil, and, kneeling before him, softly murmured:

"Father!"

He staggered back, grew pale, and seemed to be struggling with a violent emotion.

Then stretching forth his arms he clasped her to his breast, and, whilst tears coursed down his furrowed cheeks, exclaimed:

"Alive, my Ida, alive. Oh, Heaven be praised!"

An explanation, of course, followed.

I confessed that I had induced the girl spy to counterfeit death as the only means by which she could save her life and her father's honour.

The funeral had been but a sham, and the girl spy was secretly conveyed to her friends.

I dare not reveal the secret while the war lasted, and the company was equally bound to silence.

When, however, peace and harmony had been restored to the country, I sought her whose life I had saved, and, wooing, won her.

The General, in the fulness of his joy, forgave the ruse, and his happiness was made complete by a reconciliation with his wife, who was also present.

Years have passed since then, and when I behold the beaming countenance of General Thornton, my father-in-law, I thank Heaven that it was permitted to me to save the life of the "Girl Spy."

FRANCIS J. PALMER.

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PAUPER BLUE BLOOD

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

CHARACTERS.

SEFTON RAVENSCROFT.—Son of the late Sir Reginald Ravenscroft and a pauper, owing to his father's failure.

GEORGINA PLUFF.—A governess in the family until Sir Reginald's death, when she intimidates Sefton into marrying her.

JOHN PLUFF.—A wealthy retired grocer, and cousin to Georgina Pluff (Lady Ravenscroft). In return for attendance at his dinners and At Homes, he supplies her with money.

MRS. RATHBONE.—A widow of whom John Pluff is rather fond, to the disgust of Georgina, who anticipates becoming his sole heiress.

LADY NORAH CANNINGTON.—In love with Sefton but who is compelled by her father to break off the engagement, owing to the former's poverty, and marry the Duke of Malvern.

CHAPTER XVI.

MAKING THE RUNNING.

THE baby was six weeks old, and Georgina had been quarrelling with her husband on the subject of god-parents.

"Of course, Pluff will have to be one," she declared, "that goes without saying."

"I wish you would not say 'Pluff.' You have only taken to that expression lately. Can't you give him a 'cousin' or a 'Mr.' occasionally?"

"I've picked it up from Mrs. Humphery's letters; our long correspondence has made us so very intimate, and she always speaks of John as 'Pluff,' now. Perhaps it does sound rather masculine."

"That you shall never do!"

"Any how, I would rather he was not asked to be godfather."

"And why not, in the name of goodness?" cried Georgina shrilly.

"Well, it might be awkward for the poor little beggar when he grows up. John Pluff will take a sort of parental interest in him which he may not quite appreciate when he's old enough to understand."

Georgina looked at her husband solemnly.

"Sefton, I really did not give you credit for being such a fool. I hope you don't intend training the boy to be stuck up and rude to his mother's relation."

"I don't wish to argue about it, but we've had enough of John Pluff. I'm not going to have a grocer for my son's godfather."

"Grocer, indeed! He left the business four years ago. Besides, you seem to forget a boy requires two godfathers. I mean mine to have money for use, and name for swagger. I shall therefore ask my cousin and your uncle, Lord Macphairson."

The words startled as well as angered Sefton. He brought his fist down on the table with a thud.

"That you shall never do! Have you no sense of decency, no proper pride, no fine feelings to know when you are snubbed? He never approved of our marriage, and on hearing of it wrote my mother a very hot letter, which, out of consideration, I refrained from showing you, though you richly deserved to read it. Since then he has utterly ignored our existence, and you would so far lower yourself to ask a favour of him."

"You exaggerate everything, Sefton. Because the old idiot was crotchety at first, that is no reason why he should not have calmed down by degrees, and be ready to take the olive branch I am about to hold out. Now that I have done the right thing, and presented his sister's son with an heir to the estate, he may look more leniently upon me. I will humour you so far: *if* Lord Macphairson consents I'll let you off John Pluff. A little buttering note to him saying the swells offered, and we could not refuse them, though *I* was bitterly disappointed, etc., will put it all right. Then you can ask your beloved Mr. Shirling, and," with a sneer, "the Duchess of Malvern to stand as godmother!"

Sefton gave Georgina a look she did not forget for the rest of the day. She could not think what it reminded her of, but remembered eventually she had seen something like it upon one of the waxen murderers in the Chamber of Horrors.

"Write," he muttered, "and see what you will get from Lord Macphairson!"

A mocking laugh was his only reply as he left Georgina.

"You think you know a great deal," she said when he was well out of earshot. "But I can write a fascinating letter when I please, and I fancy I shall succeed in 'fetching' Uncle M."

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So she indited a pathetic little epistle, with a good deal of unnecessary gush towards the finish. Had she known where to stop she might have gained the day.

Lord Macphairson hated humbug, and no small quantity of scandal had reached his ears concerning his nephew's wife at the time of Sir Reginald's death.

He answered Lady Ravenscroft by return. The letter was handed her at dinner. She waited before opening it till the servant left the room; then she did so slowly, and without looking at her husband. He, however, watched her face curiously, guessing the refusal from the vexed twitching of her eyebrows. She set her lips, breathing fiercely through her nostrils; then she folded it again without a word, still keeping her eyes averted.

"I should like to see the letter," he said at last.

Hot, petulant tears of offended dignity were forcing their scalding drops to the surface of Georgina's vision; she dared hardly trust herself to speak. She could not cope with Lord Macphairson's reply; it was too clever—and too true.

Tearing the sheet into atoms, with the fierce gestures of one who destroys a mortal foe, she crumbled the scattered pieces in her hand and flung them across to Sefton, saying: "Take the letter, and read it, if you like!"

He watched her sail from the room with the air of a tragedy queen, her head aloft, her eyes flashing; but for once it was not acting. The dramatic hand of Nature had asserted itself, and given a strange majesty to Georgina's bearing.

The scene quickened Sefton's sluggish blood; he felt like an actor in a drama, forgetting for the moment that he was himself. Following Georgina stealthily, he tracked her to the shrubbery. The red blossoms had long since died and been cut down, but she knew the spot, and it was thither she wended her way.

"Reginald," she whispered, "come to me; come, if you can, I adjure you, in the name of our love!"

She stood with her face turned up to the sky.

Two strong arms gripped her suddenly; hot, mad kisses fell upon her ashen cheek—kisses she had not felt for an eternity, kisses that had come from no lips but those that were long dead.

She stared at him, her fingers strained through her hair

She dared not move; but a scream, half joyful, yet thrilling with agonised terror, broke from her. As it did so, the man thrust her away. He remembered she was Georgina.

His wife looked at him wonderingly, still trembling from the shock.

"See," she said, "how long it is since you held me in your arms. I did not know you; I was afraid."

A nervous laugh broke from Sefton.

"I beg your pardon," he replied. "For the moment I thought I was my father."

She stared at him, her fingers strained through her hair, dishevelled from his caress.

"*What do you mean?*"

There was a horrified vibration in her tone.

Sir Sefton could not explain.

"Come in," he said; "these September nights are cold." She followed him without a word, still perplexed and somewhat dazed.

"You look tired. Go to bed, Georgina. I shall smoke in the study."

He walked away. She heard him lock the door.

"What *did* it mean?" he asked himself—"that wild fever of hate or love?" He felt as if he were stabbing her with every kiss, yet it gave him momentary, inexplicable delight.

"I suppose it's the same old riddle," he said, lighting a cigarette. "The mystery of sex!"

* * * * *

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An apparition in pale blue greeted Georgina's astonished eyes.

Until the end of July Georgina had received constant letters from Mrs. Humphery, detailing Mr. Pluff's movements. He was seen driving daily with Mrs. Rathbone in the Park, and not only that, they had also appeared at theatres together and other places of amusement.

Then London became deserted, and the thread snapped. John Pluff drifted seawards, wrote frequently to Lady Ravenscroft, but never mentioned Mrs. Rathbone. For all his cousin knew, he might have married the widow secretly. The dread of this possible *dénouement* troubled Georgina sadly.

But now that she had carried her point and John Pluff was expected for the christening, her fears were lulled. At least, he would be free from Mrs. Rathbone at Ravenscroft Park!

Georgina, however, reckoned without her host. For the day after John Reginald had received his name at the font, her nerves experienced one of the severest shocks she had ever suffered through Mr. Pluff.

They were walking together, she and Cousin John, talking of John, junior's future, when an apparition in pale blue greeted Georgina's astonished eyes.

It was Mrs. Rathbone, in a diaphanous muslin gown, a hat of palest forget-me-nots, holding a sprig of unripe blackberries in her gloved hands. She gave a little shriek of joy upon seeing Lady Ravenscroft, and tripped forward on her high heels.

"How do you *do!*" she cried, beaming beneath Georgina's frigid welcome. "Delighted to meet you again; and dear Mr. Pluff, too, looking so well and sunburnt after his visit to the briny!"

Lady Ravenscroft noticed John showed no sign of surprise. He just gazed adoringly at this faked up specimen of decaying youth, and retained the widow's hand.

"How is it you are here?" asked Georgina, ill-concealing her amazement and displeasure.

"My doctor ordered me country air. I was to take a thorough change, he said. So I thought a little driving tour would do me good. I happened to be passing, when I heard from Mr. Pluff that he was staying in this neighbourhood. An excursion alone is always tedious, so I decided to put up and rest a few days at an ideal farmhouse close by, and was wending my way now to call upon you, Lady Ravenscroft."

Cousin John looked horribly triumphant. He actually appreciated this woman's pursuance of him. It appealed to his conceit.

Georgina said "Oh!" rather expressively, and relapsed into silence.

Mrs. Rathbone held up her blackberry twig pathetically.

"Can you tell me if these nasty, hard, red things are really what we used to eat and enjoy in our childhood?"

"Is it so long that you have forgotten?" asked Lady Ravenscroft sneeringly.

"Yes, indeed. I am thirty-three to-morrow."

Georgina longed to tell Mrs. Rathbone to her face that she was an untruthful cat, and must be fifty if a day, but refrained for the sake of John Pluff and his money bags.

"Oh! that's nothing!" broke in the man's cheery voice, "you're quite a chicken still at thirty-three. Guess you married the General young, for all the adventures you crammed into your married life!"

"Indeed I did! He plucked his flower in its bud. I was only sixteen, and still in the school-room, when he made me his offer. The Bottlemeads protested at first, declaring that such a mere child could not be fitted for the responsibilities of matrimony. But the dear General's persuasive powers prevailed, and then—he was such a good family."

"The General showed his excellent taste," declared Mr. Pluff. "He knew a good thing when he saw it, and didn't let the grass grow under his feet. I admire his foresight. He could tell what you'd grow into—you bet."

"I hope he was not disappointed," sighed Mrs. Rathbone.

The conversation was growing beyond Georgina's powers of endurance.

"Don't let us stand like so many tramps on the roadside," she said testily. "Come, Cousin John, or we shall be late for tea, and Sefton gets dreadfully hungry before five."

She turned without inviting Mrs. Rathbone to accompany them. Mr. Pluff's sense of hospitality was outraged.

"I say, Georgy, you have forgotten your manners, I think. You are goin' to ask Mrs. R. to join us in a cup, eh?"

The widow was blushing as red as her wig.

"Of course, if she likes," replied Lady Ravenscroft, "only you know Sefton has such a headache to-day."

"He didn't mention it to me," retorted her cousin.

"I have no wish to intrude myself upon Lady Ravenscroft," said Mrs. Rathbone, an angry look in her eyes.

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"Oh! don't you notice her," whispered John Pluff, squeezing the widow's elbow. "Georgy can be an awful shrew, but she simmers down. She don't mean no harm. It's just her way."

"A very unpleasant way for all that," replied Mrs. Rathbone. "I shall go back to my humble glass of milk at the farm, and that dreadfully thick brown bread. Which *is* the turning, Mr. Pluff?"

"Georgina," he called to the retreating figure. "I am going to see this lady 'ome, so don't you wait tea."

Lady Ravenscroft turned sharply. She had only made matters worse by her exhibition of temper. They would be alone at the farm, and Mrs. Rathbone's back was up. Who could say into what folly she might lead poor misguided John.

"Please don't be offended," she cooed softly, changing her tactics, "I dare say it will cheer Sefton up. Whatever I say or do on the spur of the moment is always misunderstood!"

Mrs. Rathbone appeared pacified. She was dying to get into Ravenscroft Park.

Lady Ravenscroft shadowed John Pluff for the rest of the day, but when he started out to walk home with Mrs. Rathbone, Georgina's weary feet refused to carry her a yard further. Yet she waited for him at the gate anxiously.

He was an unconscionably long time, and not in the best of humours when his cousin commented on his lengthened absence.

"You don't give a fellow a chance," he said, "to make the running. By Jingo! she's a stunning woman, but don't give you no opportunity to pop the question. She's tip top company so long as you trot 'er out, and do 'er well, but when you begin to get practical she's wonderful shy, and rakes up the dear General just when the words are a swelling and a burning on your tongue. He's never allowed to lie peaceful in his grave, poor chap."

Georgina tottered and nearly fell.

So the game was up! It rested now in the widow's hand!

CHAPTER XVII.

An Accident.

Mr. Pluff spent the remainder of his visit almost entirely in Mrs. Rathbone's society.

He frequently brought her to various meals at Ravenscroft Park, telling Georgina to do the thing in style, and he would settle the accounts at the end of the week.

His cousin, too disgusted to protest, watched the courtship in mute horror.

The apathy of despair was upon her, she felt numb and sick with disappointment.

All her rosy dreams of inheriting John's fortune dwindled.

Surely some guardian angel should have stayed her fingers when she penned that fatal advertisement for a paying guest! Now, just retribution stared her in the face, as she watched Mr. Pluff drive away daily with the widow, to admire the first pallor of autumn's yellow lines upon the dull green trees.

"Such *beautiful* country!" Mrs. Rathbone exclaimed in rapturous tones to Georgina, "and Mr. Pluff has such a poetic soul. You would not believe how deeply he is affected by Nature, quite touching in a man of his build!"

"Yes," retorted Lady Ravenscroft snappishly, "he's too stout for sentiment. At his age he ought to have done with such follies. I wonder you can encourage him."

"Really! Well, we all take different views of human nature, and I believe that the soothing influence of the world beautiful, seen and discussed in the presence of a kindred soul, calms the brute nature, and makes poor, low, grovelling man almost divine!"

The widow raised her eyes upwards as she spoke.

"Bah!" retorted Georgina. "There's not much of the divine in John! But I would rather see good honest feet of clay than hidden vice posing on a pedestal whose foundation is hypocrisy."

"A strongly expressed opinion," murmured Mrs. Rathbone unruffled. "You confuse sentiment and sentimentality, Lady Ravenscroft. They are absolutely different. The first is ennobling, and the second merely the outcome of drivelling morbidity. The only fault I have to find in *dear* Mr. Pluff is his lack of ambition to leave his mark on the world. I am a true Bottlemead, and had I been a man instead of a weak and helpless woman, the craving for immortality which permeates nearly every human breast should never have been left unattained by me! My husband, cut off in his prime, had courage if needful to face the death dealing cannon with a smile upon his lips.

"You will never make a hero of John Pluff," said Georgina bitterly, "and I should hardly think your grand Bottlemeads or the General, who was such a *good* family, would care to see you associating (were they alive) with a man who four years back stood behind the counter of his own grocery store dealing out flour and sugar to the inhabitants of Sydenham."

Georgina watched eagerly for the effect of this speech, but Mrs. Rathbone smiled placidly.

"Mr. Pluff," she murmured, "is by nature refined and gentle. Flour only whitens the hands, and some libellous people *had* told me your cousin was a Soho butcher, though of *course* I never believed it. Still it is pleasant to hear the truth from one of his nearest living relatives."

Georgina bit her lip. The shot had failed.

A pause, during which the subject of their recent conversation appeared in white flannels that suited ill his portly frame, a coat of divers colours, and a straw hat. He

"You don't give a fellow a chance to make the running."

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"You confuse sentiment and sentimentality."

removed the pipe from his mouth upon beholding Mrs. Rathbone. She was gowned in a coat and skirt of navy linen, a coquettish little sailor hat tilted rather on one side rested upon the marvellous red curls of her elaborate wig.

"We're got up regular fine for our expedition!" exclaimed Mr. Pluff.

"Where are you going?" asked Georgina.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? Mrs. Rathbone wanted to go out on the river here. Of course, I know it's a mass of deeps and shallows, and no ordinary rowing boat can be navigated with them rocks about. But the farmer at Mrs. Rathbone's lodgings knew of a young fellow in the village who keeps a canoe. 'That will just suit us,' said I. 'Go and tell the lad I wish to hire it for my lady friend.' So the farmer struck a bargain with the boy, and the boat's waiting now at the stepping-stones; as tidy a little craft as ever I saw."

"But do you know how to paddle it?" asked Georgina. "The stream is very strong. I am sure it is not safe."

She was wondering what her cousin weighed, and whether, if he managed to squeeze his body into the canoe, the frail bark would sink to the bottom.

But John laughed long and loudly at her fears.

"We are not nervous," with a proud glance at Mrs. Rathbone. "There's a woman of spirit for you, Georgina! She won't hesitate to trust herself to me. Dare say we shan't go far, but it's pleasant to lounge on the water. Well, so long, my dear!" waving his hand to Lady Ravenscroft, and offering the widow his arm.

The two sauntered away, Georgina's eyes following them none too kindly.

"Lucky the canoe won't hold three," whispered Mr. Pluff, "or she," jerking his thumb in a backward direction, "would have offered herself as sure as a gun."

"I am afraid my presence here causes Lady Ravenscroft some annoyance. I *wonder* why?"

Mrs. Rathbone raised her eyebrows innocently, half smothering a sigh.

"It's the green-eyed monster, my dear Mrs. R., that is troubling my poor little Georgie, and sometimes I do feel downright sorry for 'er! She is so wrapped up in me, she can't bear not to have my undivided attention. You see her husband is a grumpy sort of chap, and no company!"

"I think he looks mad!" replied Mrs. Rathbone. "His eyes frighten me! He always seems to be staring—staring—at something that is invisible to others. I have felt little shivers all down my spine often when he comes near me, and should never be surprised to hear that an awful tragedy had taken place at Ravenscroft Park."

"No; now you don't mean that, really?" he gasped. "You see his Pa must have had a screw loose to blow out his brains for nothink. You make me regular shuddery!"

"Still I can't be blind to the fact that I depress his wife more than he does."

"Well, to be candid, my dear lady, it's your 'air. She was jealous of it from the first. That Titian tint fairly unsettled her. She has not got much to boast of on 'er own head, and the colour is just muddy! She would give her eyes to grow a pile like yours."

"Now you flatter!" laughed the widow, shaking her flaring curls at him. "Bad boy!"

They were nearing the silver stream, and the sight of the canoe excited Mr. Pluff. He held forth on his nautical powers, how he had steered the *Skylark* off Brighton, and gained a reputation at Margate for rowing out the prettiest girls, and hiring the best boats at the tallest prices.

But Mrs. Rathbone discovered to her sorrow, when

He paddled wildly first one side and then the other.

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eventually they were settled in the slender Canadian, that Mr. Pluff had absolutely no idea of managing a canoe.

He paddled wildly first one side and then the other, wobbling it so dangerously—she screamed and implored him to stop.

"It's all right now, I'm getting into it," he assured her. "Don't you fret yourself."

But for his heavy weight acting as ballast, they must have upset. Mrs. Rathbone knew this, and as the tide whirled them down, her terror increased.

She was wise enough, however, to see that Mr. Pluff would never give in so long as she doubted his powers of steering.

"There! You are doing it splendidly!" she gasped, concealing her agitation. "But you must be so hot, and I should enjoy a little quiet chat with you! Supposing we were to stop under that next tree?"

The intonation of her voice, the expression in her eyes, was irresistible. John Pluff could but obey.

She grasped a low bough of the tree gratefully.

"How pleasant and cool it is here!" she murmured. "The peace of this spot charms me!"

A satisfied chuckle broke from her companion, if ever his chance had come it was at this moment.

"*Mrs. R.*," he began determinedly, "now mind," as a faint crimson dyed the whole of her face in a moment, "I'm not to be put off. You've shilly-shallied with me long enough. I've a fine fortune to offer you and a large 'eart, what seems about to burst right out of my shirt whenever you deigns to smile upon me. Now, won't you be pleased to take a second 'usband, and be the bright star of his 'ome, the guiding planet in his empty life?"

A look of perplexity stole into the widow's eyes. Mr. Pluff noticed they had a hunted expression and that she raised her hands as if to ward off something.

He waited in suspense for her reply.

"Your question is a very difficult one for me to deal with," she began nervously, yet gazing at him in the same admiring manner. "Your goodness to me is so overwhelming, your generosity so touching, that I could fall at your feet, were I in a more suitable position to do so, and kiss your very boots. By this you will see that my whole heart is in your keeping, and were it possible for me to become your wife I would marry you to-morrow—but——

"To be candid with you, my dear—John" (she spoke the name tenderly) "I must own to a slight—a very slight deception, which, when you know *all* the circumstances, you will, in your kindness, overlook and forgive."

"Deception? Eh, what's that?" asked Mr. Pluff, pricking up his ears.

"I wanted your friendship, the strong arm of a man to lean upon—one I could trust to the world's end. Have you ever wondered why I am so friendless and deserted, associating with none of my husband's late admirers? My own past is spotless as the driven snow, but *his*——"

Here she broke off again, and applied the corner of a scented square of lace to her lowered eyes.

"Yes—yes."

"His was a great and grand career; but he was frequently led away by impulse, and his sweet, confiding nature was taken advantage of by scoundrels. He is now—poor, gallant soul!—not chained, as you supposed, by the fetters of the grave, but behind the ruthless bolts of a horrible gaol; therefore I throw myself in my loneliness upon your pity—to intreat you not to cast me off, but to respect my confidence and cherish my stricken and empty heart!"

For a moment Mr. Pluff could not speak. Mrs. Rathbone supposed he was overcome by emotion, struck dumb by her pathetic tale. The tone of his voice somewhat took her aback when John Pluff thought fit to reply.

"Oh!" he began, deliberately eyeing her severely, "so you're not a widdy after all, and the dear General's in chokee, is he? A nice fool you've made of me, Mrs. R. If you 'ad confided in me from the first I would have stood by you and respected you. But what I do hold to is honesty and openness. So long as people treat me fair and square I don't say nothing; but when it comes to a lady passing 'erself off as marriageable goods when she's got a live partner of her own locked away—well, I'll be jiggered if I like it. You've been makin' use of me, Mrs. R. You wanted a handy man to trot you about, and burn 'is wings like a bloomin' moth buzzin' round a candle! You 'aven't acted right by me, and no amount of talking will mend the matter. As to calling it a slight, a very slight deception, that's bally nonsense, though of course I don't know 'ow thin your poor gentleman may be. Still, though the law does think fit to detain 'im, is that any reason why I should dishonour 'is name still further by a-cherishin' of your lonely 'eart. I'm downright disappointed, and that's the truth!"

Mr. Pluff's plain speaking staggered Mrs. Rathbone. She had mistaken her man for once.

"You are very hard, and speak most cruelly!" she whimpered. "I did not know you could be such a monster, or I should not have betrayed my secret."

"Oh, don't you fear as I shall repeat it. I ain't that sort. But what I do say and stick to is that you are not the person I took you for, Mrs. R. I thought you a true and honest woman with noble hinstincts and the right kind of principles. I've been dodging about after you for the last three months for the sole object of placing you at the 'ead of my table, and saying—that's Mrs. Pluff. Now the deal's off, and we'd best part."

Mr. Pluff gurgled and rose to the surface.

He pushed the canoe into mid-stream, and in moody silence Mrs. Rathbone watched her flushed and angered escort frantically endeavour to paddle against the current.

His efforts were futile, the boat turned and twisted till it struck heavily against a rock, lurching violently. In his hurry to right it, Mr. Pluff upset the canoe on the other side. A wild scream and the General's wife was plunged head foremost into the water.

Mr. Pluff gurgled and rose to the surface.

Where was Mrs. R.?

(To be continued.)

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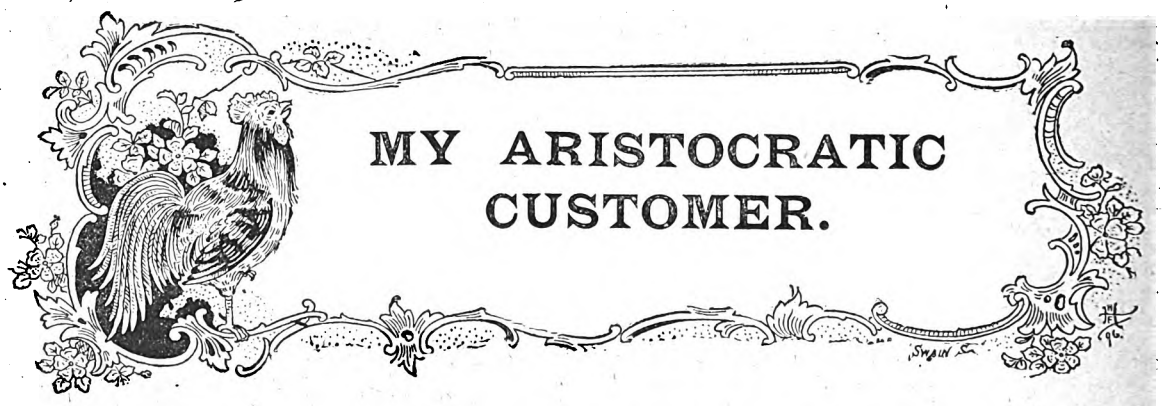

MY ARISTOCRATIC CUSTOMER.

Bullion, my friend, whose laugh as he spoke was not as jolly as usual, is known to be one of the largest and most reliable dealers in jewellery and precious stones in London.

"Was I ever bit?" he said; "yes, I have been bit, and in the worst way, too. As I have acknowledged this much to you, I may as well tell the most complete swindle of which I was ever made the victim.

"One day in August all my assistants but one were away on a holiday, and I was 'tending' shop. Business was dull, and I thought as I gazed out upon the almost deserted streets, but for all the profit there was in keeping open, we might as well shut up and be off.

"My attention was aroused from this reverie by the opening of the shop door. I looked up as there entered a perfect type of the gentleman. His clothing was of the best material, and in thorough taste. He was tall, with snow-white necktie, and gold-rimmed spectacles across his nose. He might have been a bank manager, a member of Parliament, a clergyman. He certainly looked respectable enough to be either.

"'I have been recommended to you, sir—Mr. Bullion, I believe?'—I bowed—'by Messrs. Blank, Blankety and Blank. I understand you have the best assortment of diamonds in London.'

"'I believe that no house in England carries a larger or more varied stock,' I replied.

"'Well, my daughter is with me here from the provinces, and has met the gentleman to whom she has been engaged for several years. He has been through the Burmese war and gained the high promotion he merits, but his leave of absence is short, and I have yielded to the young people that the wedding should take place here.

"'Lacking time to make preparation for more rational gifts, I must do the best I can, and deck her out with the jewels that all women love so well. At all events, diamonds are a good investment. Let us see what you have.'

"I displayed my entire stock, tray after tray of glittering gems I produced, and though he handled them and held them up in different lights, there was not one sign of those suspicious movements which we dealers have learned to know so well and to watch for so closely.

"At last he made his selections—a pair of earrings sixty pounds, a bracelet one hundred pounds, a brooch twenty-five pounds, a solitaire ring forty pounds, and a lace pin for the only bridesmaid twenty pounds. All these were set with the finest first-water diamonds; two hundred and forty-five pounds—rather a good hour's work for a hot August morning.

"While it was being done up, the gentleman was busy counting over the contents of a large pocket-book, and when I handed him the small but valuable package and the bill (the bill, from force of habit, being presented a little in advance) he passed me over some bank notes. There were two hundred and forty pounds in all.

"Replacing the large pocket-book in his breast pocket, he produced a small purse, and proceeded to pay the balance. After searching in every pocket he found himself a sovereign short.

"While he fumbled and fussed, and while I partly occupied myself in trying to look as though I was paying no attention to him, I noticed a rather roughly dressed, thick-set man pass and re-pass the door. Then he came up and flattened his nose against the plate glass window. His next move was to place his body inside the door and close it. Then, with a sigh of relief and a disgustingly familiar wink towards me, he said, under his breath: 'In time, after all?' then stepped up to my customer, whose back had been turned to him, and smacked him on the shoulder.

"'Hey, Dick, at your old tricks yet, are you?'

"The gentleman turned round and seemed to be struck speechless. As for me, I was red-hot with rage.

"'What do you mean?' I demanded, 'by coming into this place and insulting my customer? Who are you, sir?'

"'Customer, eh? Been buying, has he? He's a nice customer, he is; and as to who I am and what I mean, there's my card, that'll soon tell you all you want to know.'

"'I don't want your card, sir. This gentleman has bought my goods and paid for them—paid for them, sir!' and I glanced at the card and saw detective thereon, but still I was not ready to believe. 'I don't care if you are a dozen detectives, you can't insult gentlemen in my shop; I'll call a policeman.'

"'Call three or four if you want to,' said the rough intruder; 'but, Dick,' and now he addressed the gentleman, 'will you go quietly with me, or will you not?'

"Judge of my amazement to hear my elegant customer exclaim; 'You've got me dead, wot's the use o' chinnin'?' and then the mask fell, and I could see what a sleek-looking, deep villain he was.

"'You see, sir,' said the rough man to me, in a tone of apology, 'this is Diamond Dick, the downiest jewel thief in the business. I know his lay, and saw him come in here, and I think you'll say it's mighty lucky I did.

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What he paid you may look all right, but you'll find something crooked in it. Anyhow, he's 'wanted' for three or four other jobs in as many places.'

"To say I was astonished is to draw it very mildly. I was so dumfounded that I lost my head completely.

"'Jest let me see the cash he gave you,' said the detective, and I handed it over.

"'Jest so,' said he, again; 'I'll jest take charge of this until we get to the office, and,' putting his hand in the villain's pocket, 'I'll jest take charge of these shinersalso, then you'll know they are all safe.' And he transferred money and jewellery to his own pocket.

"My former customer was surly and had nothing to say. Of course, I had to accompany them to the police station. I bade my assistant call a carriage, and we all entered. A short drive brought us to the police station. The cells were in the basement, the office on the floor above.

"The carriage halted. Under instructions from the detective I alighted and entered the office, to wait until he locked his prisoner in a cell downstairs, prior to making a formal complaint. As I closed the door of the room I heard the carriage drive away.

"I waited five minutes, ten, fifteen, and then heartily out of patience, I abruptly made my way into the presence of the Inspector, and demanded when he was going to take the charge against Diamond Dick, and asked the whereabouts of the detective.

"The Inspector stared.

"I explained.

"The Inspector smiled.

"I became angry.

"Then he grew serious.

"'My dear sir,' said he, 'you are evidently the victim of an artfully planned robbery. The villain and detective are confederates, and your money and diamonds are, I am afraid, lost to you for ever. I am very sorry, and will help you all I can, but you see it will be a difficult job to track the thieves down. We have absolutely no clue to work upon.'

"And a difficult job it proved—too difficult, in fact, for Scotland Yard to cope with, for I never set eyes on my gems again." H. P. Leggett.

THE TRAITRESS.

By leaning out of the little balcony of my town chambers I could catch a glimpse of the street-artist who worked on the pavement below; I could see the top of his venerable, white-haired head, and occasionly had a momentary vision of two white hands outstretched in an appeal for aid from the passers-by.

These hands particularly interested me. It seemed remarkable in a man of his age and occupation that they should be so white and smooth and delicate. The fingers were long and slender, and the nails well kept and pointed. His face, too, was none the less remarkable, for beneath the rags and dirt that he affected I could see that he must once have been a handsome man. As an artist I observed this, although to a casual passer-by it would not be noticeable; an artist is one who can see beauty in everything.

In the same way I observed that the woman who lived in the great house opposite must also once have been beautiful. In spite of the paint and the veils and the ungainly clothing and her withered cheeks and sunken eyes, I could imagine her with the freshness of youth and health upon her; and she was surprisingly lovely.

When I had nothing better to do, I would sit in my window and wait until she should come out to take the air. Presently her carriage would drive up; a magnificent equipment with its silvered harness, prancing horses and liveried men. The butler would swing open the door, and my lady, passing by the bowing footmen, would come to the top of the steps. Then a strange thing would happen. She would pause for a moment and throw a glance at the figure of the street-artist across the road; she would shiver, and shrink away; then she would run hastily down the steps, and with one last look, into which was thrown a mingling of hate and loathing and fear, she would enter her carriage and drive quickly away.

On these occasions I leant over the balcony and looked at the old man below. He would be sitting forward, with his white hands held out in front of him, his head thrown back, and a fine look of triumph, scorn, and defiance in his bright eyes.

When my lady drove home again a similar scene would be enacted. As the carriage approached the house she would shrink away from the street-artist; yet her eyes would invariably be drawn towards his, and shivering, she would quickly leave the carriage and seek the safety of home.

It was an oppressive, sultry day in July, when London was broiling under the hot sun, that I first became acquainted with the street-artist. I had paused for a moment to admire a ship he had drawn, and to give him my usual donation, when I noticed he was sitting forward in a huddled position, with his head on his knees. He was evidently suffering from the heat. I asked him whether he would come up to my rooms and have something to refresh him. He refused at first, but eventually I had my way, and, collecting his things together, I took his arm and led him upstairs to my comfortable bachelor quarters.

I sat him down in my easiest chair and mixed him a reviving drink. He sipped it gratefully, and seemed happy.

After that I frequently took compassion on him, and in the end we became firm friends.

One day when he was in my room his eye fell on a little silver vase which I numbered among my treasures. I had thrown a bunch of violets into it as I came in the night before, and when he had finished examining the workmanship he sniffed the flowers eagerly.

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Then he leant back in his chair and sniffed them again.

"They remind me——" He checked himself abruptly, and put the vase hastily down. "They remind me of something," he said.

"There is nothing," I remarked, "that brings back old memories so much as a scent. The whiff of certain brands of cigarettes, for instance, or the scent on a woman's handkerchief or dress, or, as in your case, of a flower. Won't you confide in me?"

I refilled his glass and he took up the vase again, sniffed the violets once more, then leant back on the cushions, and told me his story in a few tragic words.

"These were the flowers that she always wore. She was wearing them that night in the conservatory. I shall never forget it. She was lying back in a low chair by my side, with her hands hanging down, and her eyes half closed, looking languidly into mine. She allowed me to take her hands, to stroke them, and fondle them, and to whisper a hundred sweet things in her ears. I was mad. She turned me mad. I swear that she led me on, until I was mad."

The old man leant forward, and his voice was very eager.

"Then I told her of my hopes and ambitions. I was young then; only between twenty and thirty years old. But I had my dreams and ideals, and what is more I had turned them into practical form.

"When I was nineteen I had an idea. Only two living people knew how great and how mighty an idea it was; it would have revolutionised the whole world. From that moment I thought of nothing else. I spent my fortune in fulfilling it, thousands and thousands, too many to count, and on the same night that I allowed a woman to turn my brain, the time had come—my model worked.

"That night I sat alone in my workshop, and saw my hopes fulfilled. I allowed my mind to wander, and leaning back from the table, I fell asleep and dreamt a strange dream of my conquest of the world.

"Two days later she came to see me. Beautiful as she had looked that night in the conservatory, she was ten times more lovely as she stood at the door, her fingers resting on the handle, and a smile on her lips. I sprang forward to meet her, and, taking her in my arms, I kissed her. She returned my embrace.

"She said she had come to hear more of my ambitions, and to see my ideal. And I, fool that I was, innocent, trusting fool, I led her to my secret working place, and lying beneath its glass globe I showed her my model.

"Then I told her of the dream that I had had the night before, and I asked her to share my triumph. Already I had held out my arms to claim her for my own, when suddenly the love-light died out of her eyes, and stepping back she said, in cold tones that haunt me to this day: 'Perhaps you are not aware, sir, that in a week's time I marry Lord Gateacre.'

"I was numbed: I could not speak or breathe; I felt as a brute animal must feel when a slaughterer's axe finds a resting place in its brain; I believe my heart broke.

"At that moment I heard a sharp click. My eyes fell on a tiny camera that she concealed in her hand. The sound brought me to life again. She thought, no doubt, that I would be too numbed to move.

"She was about to photograph my model.

"In an instant I realised everything. My brain found the reason of it all as in a flash. She had led me on to love her, in order that, in my mad passion, she might wean from me my secret. Then she would take it to her chosen master and sell it to him.

"Now she had almost learnt it; with the photograph that she would take, she would be able to understand it. Ah, the traitress! The vile, the accursed traitress!

"I seized the delicate model in both hands, and holding it high above my head, I hurled it from me; it crashed against an iron anvil, and fell, broken into a thousand fragments at her feet.

"At the same instant the camera clicked again, but my outstretched hands was all that the photograph revealed. I have preserved them as they were then, and she dreams of them every night.

"I turned round, and I believe I should have seized her by her white throat and strangled her. But she had fled.

"A week later she was married. As she stepped proudly down from her carriage, holding the arm of her lord, she saw me, as you see me now, squatting at the side of the street, with my hands outstretched, and my eyes gleaming, and she looked on the life that she had ruined.

"She was carried into the house, senseless.

"Since that day I have sat in front of her home, and I look at her as she comes out, and I look at her as she drives away, and I look at her when she comes back. I haunt her always, she dreams of me at nights, her beauty fades, she grows old and shrunken, and she will die."

The old man leant back on the cushions, and reached out his hand for the violets.

His story had exhausted him.

J. M. Woodward.

JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 8.

Six Prizes, one of £5 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the next page in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, but the title and author's name are jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, August 24th.

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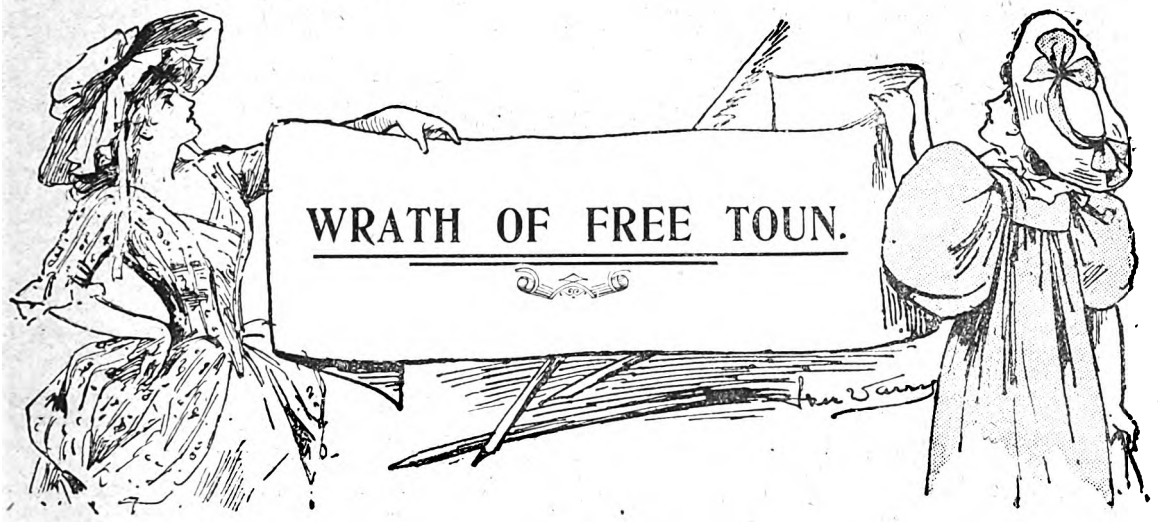
JUMBLED STORY. No. 8.]



The sentiment was a truly patriotic one.

Sedan had fallen but a few days before; and all Germans whom they had met up to the present had open eyes.

They marched away from the little valley with bands as the sun was rising gloriously and pouring his rays in the vicinity of the regimental stores.

In the hurry of departure they soon forgot a little national disgrace.

But they were not disposed to take much trouble in France.

They did not understand.

Later in the day a poor-looking woman with one child had been recently disturbed, and who was weeping excuses made by a dirty little Polish Jew.

The miserable Jew whined and wept, and protested qualifications for acting the part of judge.

It was easy enough to guess his nationality; he was a German: and it is clear that he is nothing but a German Frenchmen felt that nothing but blood could wipe out the enemy.

They had caught him red-handed, absolutely attempting to understand him.

And none thought of the woman with the ragged shawl whom they had just shot as a spy.

They were in no humour just then for sifting the Polish Jew than the German armies.

So they brought him before the general, a bluff, hard general, when they told him that his orders had been playing, colours flying, and the various other accompaniments of "glorious war."

"What were you doing there?" thundered the general. It will encourage the others."

"He was sneaking about near the bread waggons, that day, "a likely story, I must say. Where are his dirty beard, which evidently had not been trimmed for this important capture.

"Where was he found, do you say?" he asked.

He was a miserable enough looking specimen of general," was the reply of the lieutenant who had made that he was doing no harm—that he was only looking around her head, lying beside the mound where the sod proved to be.

"*Sacré nom,*" he exclaimed, "the little fool. Why but his cries fell upon deaf ears. Mercy!—after Sedan!

It would make a beginning, as it were.

"Bread!" sneered the general, who had dined well drinking, hard-swearing soldier, with as much feeling in weeks past.

At least that is what he tried to tell them.

And it was so much easier to overcome a diminutive wife and children, I should like to know. He only speaks before a platoon, and bound his eyes.

Besides, he was easier to deal with than most of the humanity, in all conscience, small and thin, with a husband, who had left her the previous evening to try red-handed, prowling about within the French lines, for a bit of bread to bring back to his wife and childen.

The general was told about the mistake they had made.

So they took her, and showed her the newly-made Jew, and the Jews have never been a popular people in the camp, and began to make anxious inquiries about her spy. Take him away and let him be shot at daybreak.

Of course, the blood of this weedy-looking wretch could duly carried out.

The unfortunate wretch implored them for mercy; and obtain food for herself and the children.

"So perish all enemies of France!" exclaimed the grave.

They took him away, and on the following morning, his body as there is in a plank board, and about as many not be reckoned as very much; but it was something.

A likely thing, forsooth.

They threw him into a hastily made grave; and down upon the small valley, they led him forth, put him in her arms, and leading another by the hand, came into then prepared to retreat further before the advancing incident like this.

They questioned her; and after some time they found bitterly; while her two children looked on with wide that the missing husband was none other than the Jew did he not say so?"

The word was given, the rifles rang out, and the little Jew fell forward upon his face, dead.

After all, it was only the fortune of war.

JOHN TORNS.

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY. NO. 5.] [SEE PAGE 237.

A WOMAN'S TRICK.

Briefly, the situation was this: Lord Douglas had declined to give the appointment of Minister of Pepotoi to his old college friend, Deane; he had, in fact, intimated in his formal letter, that he had selected Diggles for the post.

Now Diggles, as all the world knew, was brother-in-law to Mrs. Montague; but whether this had anything to do with the matter it was not known. People said it had.

For they had noticed that his lordship made himself very pleasant to that lively and vivacious widow.

And it was known that she was for ever in dearth of flowers and jewels. Certain it was that she was now kept very well supplied with them.

Perhaps, for this reason, she cultivated Lord Douglas, in spite of the fact that with every package he inclosed something less acceptable (and less substantial) than the offering.

It should be mentioned, moreover, that Lord Douglas, in a moment of pressing need, had tied himself down for life to a very ineligible personage.

He himself bore his years well, and looked, especially in his long frock coat, every inch the Cabinet Minister that he was. With his wife, however, it was different. She seemed to grow stouter and shorter and redder as every year advanced. Finally, he was compelled to leave her down in the country, through fear that she should be mistaken for his housekeeper, whenever he was in town.

To make the situation clear, it should be added also that his lordship lived in mortal dread lest it should reach his wife's ears that anything beyond the strictest line of acquaintanceship passed between Mrs. Montague and himself.

Mr. Deane, the disappointed aspirant to the Ministership of Pepotoi, had long lived in hopes of obtaining this post.

It meant a good deal more to him than people supposed.

He was a hard-working, capable man, if not particularly brilliant, and he had every right to expect that it should have been his. It was clear to see that Diggles had obtained it merely on account of the fact that he was brother-in-law to Mrs. Montague.

The blow had fallen on Deane and his pretty little wife as they were taking their first sip of coffee one morning at breakfast. His face fell as he read the letter, and, with a mumbled apology, he gathered his other papers together and hastily left the room.

His wife looked wistfully after him, and then at his uneaten breakfast. She read the letter through, and her mouth took a determined expression.

That afternoon Mrs. Deane dropped in at the well known jewellers of Bond Street, Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett. As an esteemed customer she was privileged to wander about the shop at will until she should chance on a suitable trinket for a wedding present.

It happened that her search led her to a counter where two immense bronzes had been placed for the time. Although engrossed in the tray of knick-knacks which the assistant was displaying, she noticed, herself unseen, the glass doors swing open, and a tall, commanding-looking man enter.

"Is that pearl necklace ready yet?" he demanded.

Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett bowed low to the counter. They were very sorry, but it had not arrived; it would come in a couple of hours.

Could they send it off for his lordship? It would go by the five-o'clock post without fail. Would his lordship be good enough to give the address?

"203, Craven Road, Park Lane," replied his lordship in a loud voice, and strode angrily from the shop.

Mrs. Deane's heart stopped beating. She felt as though she would like to shriek. Here was an opportunity dropped right at her feet. She had only to stretch out her hand and take it, and she would win her game. She had thought all the morning of some means by which she might work the combination of Lord Douglas and his jealous wife, and Lord Douglas and pretty Mrs. Montague, and here was the solution.

"Have you any pearl necklaces?" she asked.

Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett had a few in stock, but, unfortunately, all of an inferior quality. Madame might have one at a bargain.

"Lord Douglas has just ordered a similar one to this," the firm continued, holding up for inspection a necklace of unique form.

Mrs Deane concluded the bargain, and drove away with the purchase.

She wondered, as she went home, if it was very wicked, this plot that she had devised. It was a chance, however, of ousting Diggles, and not to be missed.

At his office next morning the first thing Lord Douglas did was to write to Diggles, informing him of his appointment as Minister of Pepotoi. Then he looked at his letters. Among others was one which made him turn very pale when he had read it. He studied it again, and grew still paler.

It was written in a feminine hand, and ran as follows:

"Dear Lord Douglas,—I am in terrible perplexity: Two roads lie before me, and I do not know which to take. I ought, I feel, to let your dear wife know everything I have learnt. But on second thoughts I determined to send the parcel which I received by mistake this morning from Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett direct to you, and hear what you said. Yesterday I ordered a pearl necklace, and this morning I received one, but a different one, and one of superior quality. On a card inside was written: 'To Mrs. Montague, 203, Craven Road, Park Lane,' and below: 'With Lord Douglas' compliments.' I still keep the necklace, and await your reply as to what I shall do with it.—Yours sincerely, Mary Deane.

"P.S.—Your letter was such a disappointment. Will you not reconsider your decision?—M. D.

"P.S.S.—I still feel that I ought to write to your wife.—M. D."

Lord Douglas read this letter through three times; then he bit his lip hard, and his voice was very shaky, as, turning to his secretary, he said: "Have you posted that letter to Diggles yet?"

No, my lord," the man replied; "I was about to address the envelope."

"Then you may leave it," said Lord Douglas. "I have decided, after all, to give the position to Deane."

And Mrs. Deane chuckled to herself when the next post came in.

J. Marcus.

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By George Manville Fenn.

SUMMARY.

The story opens with an interview between Lady Braetonn and her son Roderick, in which she endeavours to induce him to give up "Baby" Lee, a chorus girl, and marry Olive, Isaac Emsworth's heiress. Emsworth takes Olive to consult Dr. Murray, who advises a voyage to South Africa in the *Greyberg*, in which he also is going. Roderick, who is friendly with Murray, comes for advice on the terribly bad condition of his health, and the Doctor recommends a trip in the same boat. "Baby" Lee, on being discarded, seeks means of revenging herself on Olive.

CHAPTER X.

A Blackguardly Compact.

Cyrus Daines had just seated himself at the table to enjoy his breakfast, armed with the last new review and a paper-knife looking like an ivory scimitar, carved as it was out of a huge walrus tusk. The room was the very perfection of a dwelling-place for a bachelor of literary taste, for it was lined as far as it was possible with well-crammed bookcases, and where it was not possible for a bookcase to stand, pictures, old china, curious weapons, and bits of *bric-à-brac* that were quaint and pleasing to the eye, and for the most part Japanese, filled up the gaps.

The place did not betoken wealth in its owner, but a tendency to comfort, and the situation was good, being a front room on the first floor in Jermyn Street, a heavily draped archway indicating — correctly — that there was a bedchamber behind.

The occupant, who laid down review and paper-knife beside his plate and coffee-cup, and took up a flower vase to sniff at some choice roses which decorated the attractive breakfast table, was a keen-eyed, fair, young-looking man of thirty, large of forehead — white as a woman's — and showing the net-work of blue veins in his temples; small of the lower portion of his face, his chin being made to look more pointed by a sharply trimmed beard of the smallest dimensions, and still more sharp by making the most of a tiny moustache with wax. Good-looking, but not attractive; for, to continue, everything was too sharp; his dark grey eyes were piercing, and his slightly aquiline nose, though beautifully and classically shaped, looked as if the skin had been too tightly drawn over the bone, while his white teeth seemed the sharpest of all. The very aspect of the man indicated that his tongue would be a keenly pointed weapon, kept well on edge for the benefit of his friends and discomfiture of his enemies, of which such a man would be sure to have many.

He was most carefully dressed, with the exception of the dressing-gown he wore, which was old and worn and emitted a peculiarly strong odour of choice tobacco, the means for smoking which were visible in various shapes about the room, and the scent of the roses having possibly suggested another kind of incense or fragrance, he pushed back his chair, and rose to cross to the mantel-piece, walking with a slight limp, and showing a peculiar attenuation of figure.

Invalid, who makes a brave effort to fight his weakness, you involuntarily said, weak from accident of birth, not from dissipation.

He took a cigarette from a box, lit it, and went back to the table and picked up the morning's paper, glanced at the Summary, and then turning to the sporting news, ran his eye down, pitched the paper aside and touched a table gong, which emitted a keenly piercing, silveryring.

"Poor old Rod!" he said, with a contemptuous laugh, as he examined his long, thin, white hands, turned his signet ring a little round, drew down his cuffs, and subsided into his chair. "Gone again. Well, he must have got well through all he has, and now starts with a fresh fortune—if they'll let him. Not bad taste."

The man . . . went on arranging the bright breakfast service.

Just then the door opened, and a man-servant in neat striped jacket entered with a tray containing coffee-pot, toast-rack, hot roll, and something savoury of odour in a covered dish.

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"No letters, Joe?"

"No, sir; nothing but the paper this morning. Lord Braetoun's horse nowhere yesterday, sir; forgot to tell you when you came home last night."

"Which means, you stupid idiot, that you had something on the race. And I told you not."

The man coughed slightly, and went on arranging the bright breakfast service.

"How much did you lose?" continued his master, taking up the great paper-knife and holding it as if about to decapitate the disobedient slave.

"Nothing, sir. Won."

"How was that?"

"Well, sir," said the man deprecatingly, "when you pick up a few tips, and know as a gent always has the luck against him, why, if you bet at all, you don't back."

"So I pay you good wages and find you a very comfortable, easy place, so that you may take advantage of the knowledge you gain of my friends to help to fleece them."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the man in an aggrieved tone, "I didn't win it of his lordship."

"That will do," said the master sharply, and the man left the room.

"Somebody else has, though, I'll be bound. Eh? What do you want?"

"Beg pardon, sir: his lordship."

There was a quick step on the landing, and Braetoun, looking haggard and careworn, strode in, giving his hat and cane to the man, before throwing himself into an easy chair.

"Morning!—Another cup and plate, Joe.—What'll you have?"

"Nothing," said the visitor sourly.

"Yes, you will.—Devilled kidneys and some tea—quick as you can."

The man glided out of the room, and the owner of the rooms began to pour himself out some coffee.

"Call him back, Cy. I want some brandy and soda."

"I suppose so; and you'll have tea. You did look decent day before yesterday. Seem to have had a wet night. What a fool you are, Rod."

"Tell me something I don't know, will you?" said the visitor bitterly.

"You don't know that yet. Here, you were regularly pulled round by that sea trip, and old Murray together, dropped in for a magnificent piece of luck, all going well, and you must begin the old game again. How long will it take you to learn that you must lose over horses in the long run, and that when you do, brandy won't bring the money back?"

"There, don't you turn against me, Cy. I came for comfort, not abuse."

"Come to the wrong shop then. I can't comfort. I can show you your faults."

"I don't want showing them; they're always dancing before me like so many devils."

"Had more brandy than I thought for last night. Better go and see Murray or you'll be having a mad fit again."

"Curse Murray!"

"That's right. Always curse those who do you good. Have a turn at me too. Go on. It will not spoil my breakfast."

"Do, for Heaven's sake, keep that vitriol tongue of yours quiet for a few minutes. Can't you see I'm in trouble?"

"Plain enough; but 'vitriol tongue' is good, though rather strong. But if you will risk money on races what is the good of ruining your health—I mean the apology for it you've got left—by flying to the brandy because you lose?"

Braetoun made an angry gesticulation, and shifted his position on the chair, started up, and crossed to a side table on which stood a water-cooler, poured himself out a glass and tossed it off.

"Hot coppers, eh? Can't recommend that water, old fellow; better have waited for the tea. I can back that."

"Cy, old man, I'm in a devil of a mess," cried the visitor throwing himself again in the chair.

"My dear Rod, you've been in a devil of a mess ever since we were at Eton. It is your nature to."

"And I want you to help me."

"Old story, and you know as well as I do that I can't. If I did play the gallantly heroic faithful friend, and raised money on all I've got, and backed your bills, it would only be trying to make one drop fill the Trafalgar Square fountains."

"Who said a word about money?" cried Braetoun savagely.

"You didn't mention it," said the other, eating away calmly, "but your words chinked like coin and rustled like paper. Want words then?"

"Yes; help and advice."

"Acts, deeds, and exploits, eh? Well, fire away."

"You are so clever."

"Excuse my rising to return thanks."

"You've got a way of getting over people with that tongue of yours."

"False, base flattery. Didn't I try to get that old scoundrel of a money-lender to renew your bills, and failed dismally?"

"Oh, that's nothing; money-lenders have no hearts, but ——send that fellow away as soon as you can."

For the man had entered with a fresh breakfast-tray, and proceeded to arrange the things in front of Braetoun very slowly and with great care, as if from sympathy with the loser of a race by which he had benefited.

"That will do, Joe," said his master, and the man left the room, feeling as if he would like to stay.

"Now then," said Daines sharply, "what do you want me to do?"

"Well, look here. You know I ran my colt at Highdown yesterday?"

"And lost. I know."

Braetoun winced a little, but went on:

"The Emsworths were down there."

"To see you lose. Look here, you want help. Take my advice: don't let the old man see any more of your losing games, or he'll be crying off with the match."

"There'll be no need; I'm going to drop all that now."

"He knew you lost?"

"Yes; but that wasn't the worst of it. They had taken down lunch, and the mater was with them."

"Yes; she is playing her cards very nicely for you, my son."

"Don't be a fool," said Braetoun angrily.—"We were in the midst of lunch and wine when someone came."

"The murdered Banquo to the feast?"

"Someone as bad. She came up towards the carriage."

"Which she?" said Daines caustically.

"If you are going to keep on fooling I must go," said Braetoun angrily. "You know whom I mean."

"I'm mum. Go on: I suppose you mean Baby Lee."

"Yes: came on purpose to make a scene. I could read it in her eyes; she was going to make a furious attack upon Miss Emsworth, when she had a sort of hysterical fit, and had to be carried off the ground. Fortunately Murray was with us, and he helped to get her away."

"Did he know who she was?"

"He seemed to guess from her words."

"And did Miss Emsworth, and your mother?"

"No, they didn't quite understand it. She hadn't time to speak. Passion, I suppose, but she was quite overcome. They fancied she had been betting on my colt, lost, and was savage with me."

"Then it turned out all right for you, and there's no need for help."

"But there is. I tremble for the future."

"Bah! Part from her civilly. Tell her the comedy's at an end, and you're going in for tragedy."

"I'm afraid it's tragedy now, and she'll stop the comedy to come."

"Oh, rubbish! Behave well to her; she seems a nice little woman."

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"I did all I could; gave her the house, furniture, and carriage, and a heavy cheque."

"That ought to satisfy her."

"But it doesn't. She has returned everything—presents and money, and letters."

"Give her some diamonds then."

"Where am I to get diamonds? I'm regularly stumped."

"Pooh! Not you. As soon as they know in Bond Street that you're to marry a wealthy heiress, you may order all the diamonds you like."

"She wouldn't take them, Cy. You don't know what a temper she has—I do."

"Strikes me, Rod, old fellow, that after all she must really care for you."

"I'm afraid she does," said Braetoun gloomily.

"Poor fellow; how horrible! Why, what a little fool the woman must be. It's ridiculous. But what can I do for you?"

"Help me, man; I daren't go to her now. I'm an engaged man, and I live in constant dread that she will call on the Emsworths and make a horrible scene."

"Yes: that would be awkward. The father would be furious, and the lady—nice, sweet innocent little body, by-the-way—would throw you over as sure as a gun."

"That she would," said Braetoun.

"Thinks you're a *preux chevalier*, and that sort of thing. Well, Roddy, old man, it strikes me that you're in what our friends across the water would call a pretty considerable muss."

"Well, I don't come here to be told that."

"S'pose not. Why did you come?"

"To see if you would help."

"Strange thing how my old school-fellows do come to me for help, especially if there's a lady in the case. Safe sort of card to play, I suppose. Little weakly cripple, and to be trusted."

"Of course, you always were a good clever fellow, Cy, and ready to help a lame dog over a style."

"*Similia similibus curantur*; lame dog to help another lame dog, eh?"

"That's it. Now then, set your wits to work. The mater's dead upon my marrying little Emsworth."

"Well, it would be the making of you. I suppose you could keep the old man out of sight."

"Oh, yes; I don't suppose we should be bothered much about him after we were married."

"Very warm, Rod?"

"I suppose so, but its rather a come down for a Braetoun to marry the daughter of such a man."

"Yes, it is, but money's money, my lad, and the lady is very presentable."

"Yes, she is rather nice."

"Wouldn't be if she knew all."

"There, that'll do. Now come, don't beat about the bush, say something, don't keep on eating."

"Give me time, old man, I ruminate like an ox when I eat, I'm thinking away all the time. It's a knotty point. You see, it's a grand thing, I should say, speaking as a slack-baked waster from old Mother Nature's pottery, upon whom the fair sex has never cast the amatory eye—a splendid thing for a man to have the chance of marrying a woman who really cares for him."

"And has an enormous fortune."

"Ye—es," said Daines, pushing away his plate and putting some more sugar into his coffee, to sit stirring it round and round; "but have some more tea."

"Oh, confound your tea! Talk—talk—talk! This worry tells upon me. I'm as seedy to-day as can be."

"A grand thing to be able to marry a woman who really worships you and thinks you perfect."

"Well, that's how a woman ought to feel about the man she marries," said Braetoun coolly.

"But, from what I've seen of life, not one woman in a score does. Soon gets to know too much of a man's seamy side, I suppose."

"Look here, Cy; you're getting into one of your confoundedly talky-talky moods, when you grow more cynical and say nastier and more spiteful things every minute. I've come for a sensible, matter-of-fact way out of this difficulty. Where are your cigarettes?"

"Old spot, dear boy; help yourself."

Braetoun took and lit one, to begin smoking fitfully.

"Now, then," he said; "come back to the subject. What would you do if you were me?"

"Do? Well, if I found out that a woman really worshipped me, and had proved her love, I should say to myself: 'That girl is as near perfection as mundane angels can be,' and I should consider that her genuine love covered everything. I should marry her as soon as I could."

"Well, of course, it's all so new. I haven't found out all that yet, but it's going on all right. I'm the better for my trip. The old man's willing, and I shall marry her as soon as I can."

"I was talking about the other one," said Daines quietly.

"What," roared Braetoun, dashing down his cigarette; "marry a ballet girl! I?"

"Man raises the woman he marries to his own station, dear boy."

"Cy, you're a fool."

"Can't help it. Nature made me the fool and cripple you see, and foolish parents insisted upon cheating the undertaker by rearing me."

"Marry Baby Lee, of the Theatre Royal, Thespis, when I I'm almost without a shilling!"

"If the girl loves you as you say, you'll be a rich man, Roddy."

"You idiot! If you weren't such a wretched little cripple I'd shake you till you couldn't speak. Confound your sharp-edged tongue! You said all that to get a rise out of me, just when I'm in the greatest hobble I was ever forked into in my life."

There was a little reddening of Daines' thin, white cheeks, but he went on unmoved.

"Best advice I can give you for both your sakes, and for that of the lady heiress as well. Rather hard on her, dear boy."

"Ha, ha! Here's little Diogenes Daines turning moralist. Look here: you'd better marry the girl yourself."

"The heiress?"

"You!" cried Braetoun, with a look of contempt which slightly deepened the colour in his friend's cheek. "Bah! —Baby. Now, that would be a way out of the difficulty."

"Perhaps she wouldn't have such an idiotic little cripple, Rod."

"I don't know. You've got what Paddy calls a soothering tongue of your own when you like to make it so. I believe you could humbug any woman into thinking you cared for her. Why, Cy, old man, she'd be the very thing for you. Damme, I'd give you five thou. if you'd marry her—I'd give you ten."

"Out of your wife's money?"

"Never you mind where the money came from," said Braetoun sourly. "I'd give it to put an end to the difficulty."

"And a very nice generous, manly offer," said Daines, lighting a cigarette.

Braetoun winced and stared hard at the speaker, who went on lighting his cigarette without moving a muscle of his face.

"Look here," he cried, "did you mean that sarcastically?"

"Sarcastic! When you offer me a chance to put ten thousand in my pocket and a pretty little wife on my arm? Hardly such an idiot as that. Well, I'll see the little girl for you and have a talk with her. I may, perhaps, bring her to reason without inflicting a miserable cripple upon her as a husband. Is she still at Brompton?"

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"Don't I tell you she's thrown up everything? No: she's with an old aunt in Great Russell Street. Mrs. Duncan, the costumier."

"Been there and tried to bring her to reason?"

"Yes: twice," said Braetoun sulkily.

"Well?"

"The old cat of an aunt flew at me and told me I ought to be ashamed of myself. Curse her!"

"How people do object to being told home truths," said Daines quietly. "And you told her you were not a bit ashamed, eh?"

"Wrong. I told her I was deucedly ashamed to be seen coming to her old rag shop, and that she and her niece ought to have been thoroughly grateful for what I had done, and then I came away."

"Without seeing the little girl?"

"Of course. I didn't want to see her again."

"Go back, old man, and see them both. Make them the offer once more of what they threw up in a pet. Perhaps they'll both have calmed down now."

"No, I can't stoop to do it again. But I'll hold to my bargain. I can't talk to either of them without flying in a passion. Since my illness I'm easily put out. You could go in that calm, cool, dispassionate way of yours and talk them round. Will you go? I give you *carte blanche* to settle the matter for me."

"Rather hard, too, upon me, to send me into the siren's cave. Suppose she really does capture me?"

"Don't be a fool. Will you go for me?"

"Oh, yes, I'll go."

"Cy, old man, you're a trump."

"I am, Rod. But let me see. Theatrical lady. Must introduce myself as a general utility man. Make the best terms for you I can?"

"Make any terms. You see what is at stake. Marry her if you like, and I'll hold to my bargain. The little fool, going on like this! Whatever did she expect?"

"Ah, to be sure, whatever did she expect? They are such fools, these women. They've no brains whatever, only vain little heads stuffed full of a soft kind of pith, which they call faith."

"There, there, there: don't preach, man. You'll do the best you can for me?"

"Of course, I will. And so you'd wish me to marry her?"

"If you liked. She really is a good little thing. But are you in earnest? 'Pon my soul, I never know when you are chaffing and when you are not."

"Wonder if you did," said Daines, looking at him with a peculiar, dry expression of countenance. "Really, old man, I hardly know myself. But, I say, this is serious. Are you going honestly to cut all the past when you marry this Miss Emsworth?"

"I am, on my soul."

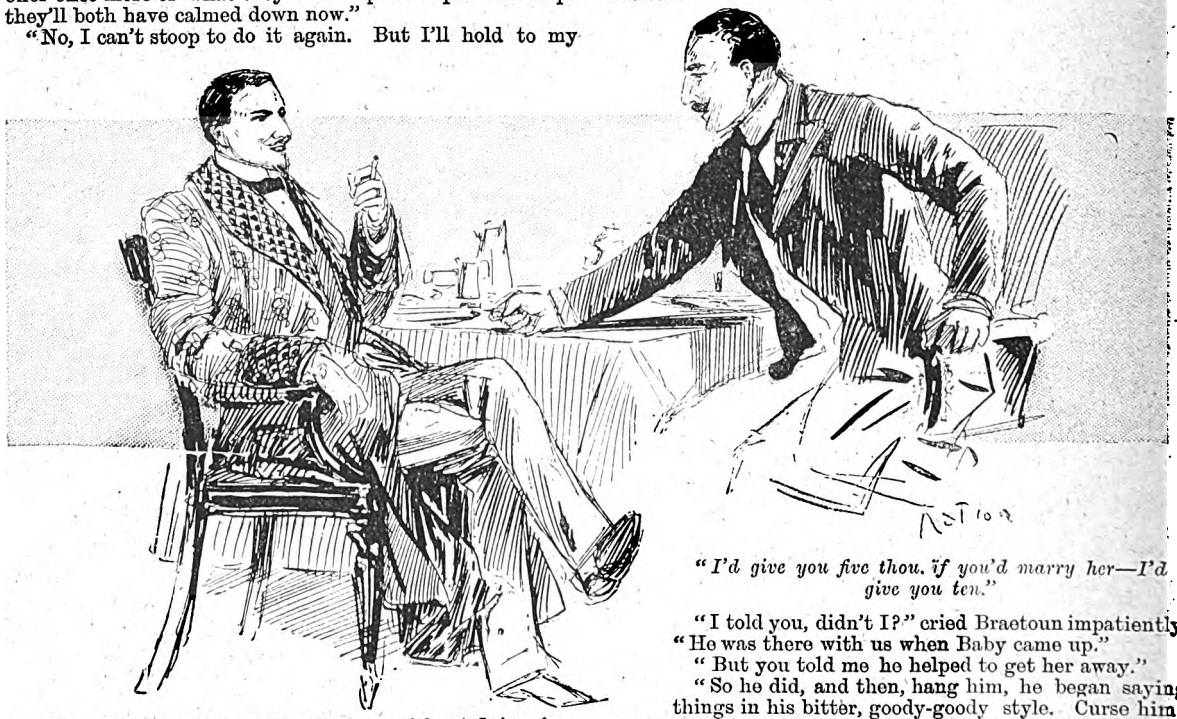
"Then, first of all go and see old Murray again. You don't look quite up to the mark."

"Oh, I'm all right; only a bit ruffled over this affair."

"More than ruffled. Rod, you look ill. Go and see him."

"Can't. We're a bit out."

"You can't afford to be out with Murray. What's the matter?"



"I'd give you five thou. if you'd marry her—I'd give you ten."

"I told you, didn't I?" cried Braetoun impatiently. "He was there with us when Baby came up."

"But you told me he helped to get her away."

"So he did, and then, hang him, he began saying things in his bitter, goody-goody style. Curse him! I can't stand it from him. I'm beginning to hate him."

"What did he say?"

"Never mind. Enough to make me feel as if I could shoot him."

"Don't. It would be like committing suicide."

"Why?"

"He told me he was the only man in London who understood your constitution. You've got very shaky, Rod, so take care, and don't kick away the prop that can hold you up."

"He's an offensive prig, with his assumption of what he calls honour and straightforward dealing. I used to like him, but of late——"

"It's grown more t'other, eh?—Going? Well, take care of yourself, while I take care of myself. Ta-ta."

Braetoun nodded and went out of the room, leaving Daines to sit back smoking another cigarette very slowly.

"Why am I going to do all this?" he mused. "I shall be acting like a scoundrel to help a scoundrel, and because we have always been so-called friends.—I'll put on my coat and go at once," he muttered. "Poor little

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Baby, there was always something about her that I liked. Only to think of the little hussy turning out so brave and true."

CHAPTER XI.

A Fish out of Water.

For the tench is said to be the physician among the fish.

It was the first night at the Thespis. The new burlesque was to be produced, with Edwards, of the quaint voice and figure; Lesser, of the dry method and twinkling feet; Ella Weller, who could look fascinatingly pretty, sing, dance, and act as well, for the first lady; and a host of other talent, as it was termed by the lessee—the said talent consisting in the possession of pretty faces, graceful forms, and the ability to act like an artist's lay figure. But with a good orchestra, whose leader had hashed up all the popular songs with *sauce piquante*, pretty scenery, and limelights at every wing, there was enough to attract one of London Society's many circles, and every seat was engaged.

The first-nighters were there in full force, and among them a few who were not first-nighters, unless at the theatres where good comedies were produced, and among these last was Allan Murray, who went, he told his friends, for a little diversion after a great deal of hard work.

There are serious diversions as well as light, and as to himself Allan Murray's diversion was to sit on the prompt side of the theatre, where he could see Lord Braetoun's private box, one of the best in the house—consequent, this, upon the fact that he had been long intimate with the lessee, and had possessed the right to go behind the scenes when the popular favourite, Baby Lee, was the great attraction.

Cyrus Daines, too, had left his blue china and *bric-à-brac*, to appear in faultless evening dress in a stall nearly in the centre of the same row as that in which Murray was seated.

The house filled rapidly, and Murray shook hands with his old college friend, Daines, and fully expected to be bantered in that worthy's most sarcastic manner for coming to a burlesque. But the thin dapper little fellow was particularly quiet, and went on almost directly to his place; and Murray noticed that he kept on glancing from time to time at the empty box on the grand tier—the second from the stage on the off prompt side.

In a few minutes Braetoun entered with his young wife, and as she settled herself in her seat, charming in her full flush of girlish beauty, glittering with diamonds, and carrying an enormous bouquet of lilies and roses, he stood back a little, looking pale and *blasé*, and gazing nonchalantly about the house, as he divested himself of his heavy fur-trimmed overcoat, nodding once or twice to friends in the stalls.

Quite a battery of opera-glasses was directed at once upon this box, and Murray, as he stood up, could hear scraps of conversation about its occupant—"Lady Braetoun"—"just married"—"millionaire's daughter"—"lucky fellow, Braetoun"—"charming"—"too much of the country lass," etc., etc.

But the opera glasses were passed unnoticed by Olive, to whom the scene was enjoyable to a degree. She had come at her husband's suggestion to see the new burlesque, and her eyes wandered here and there, till she caught sight of Cyrus Daines, who bowed to her, and she returned the salute at once. The next moment she had seen the tall dark figure of Murray, and she bent forward with her face lit up with smiles to give him a pleasant nod, turning directly after to call her husband's attention to these friends, with the result that Braetoun scowled.

"What the deuce brings him here?" he said to himself. "Come to stare at us, I suppose." The next minute he had taken his seat, stretched out his hand for the opera-glass he had placed upon the quilted cushion before him, and was focussing it for a sweep round the house, when Murray saw him put it down again quickly and begin talking to his wife.

This was simultaneous with a rustling in the box overhead, into which someone had just been ushered, but who it was the doctor could not have seen had he wished. He was conscious, however, of a curtain being slightly drawn by a delicately gloved little hand, then a great bouquet of yellow roses was laid upon the cushion, and the battery of opera-glasses was directed now in this direction.

A few minutes later Allan saw Daines bow to the fresh-comer, and the bouquet, whose flowers protruded over the quilted satin, was slightly agitated, and he noticed that smiles were exchanged, and men leant forward and whispered one to the other.

"Who is that charmingly dressed little woman in the box opposite to ours?" said Olive.

"Eh? Opposite to ours?"

"Yes; she is wearing black gloves, and is using her ivory opera-glass. I think she is looking across at us."

"Looking across at us?" said Braetoun, with a slight change in his voice. "Oh, yes, I see the one you mean—in mock pearls and the white ostrich-feather edging to her dress. H'm, some actress, I suppose."

Then Braetoun said something unpleasant respecting the lady's future—to himself—and a petillation of clapping ran through the house as the conductor entered, took his place, bowed, and turned back to business.

For almost directly after, the house lit up, the *bâton* was waved in the air, descended, and there was a musical crash, the bright, merry music rippled though the house, and for the next hour Olive sat light-hearted, and almost child-like,

Her eyes wandered here and there.

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"Don't think much of her, but her diamonds are lovely."

giving herself up to the full enjoyment of a scene that was perfectly new to her. Her attention was on the stage all through, and she saw nothing of the pair of bright eyes that hardly left her and her husband. It was nothing to her that they formed the subject of a good deal of conversation among *habitués* of the theatre, and that remarks flew fast at the wings whenever the various members of the company were off the stage.

For the times when Baby Lee was the great attraction at the Thespis were canvassed freely, and ladies who had been jealous of her success were not above meaningly alluding to the way in which some people came down in the world.

"My word!" said one sweet gushing creature, who generally occupied the front end of a line in the chorus when a stage picture was formed, "don't she look pleasant? She's been watching Lord Braetoun most ever since the curtain first went up; and when she hasn't been watching him she's been looking spiteful at his new wife. Don't think much of her, but her diamonds are lovely."

Allan Murray saw but little of the burlesque, heard scarcely anything of the music. He could not gaze at Braetoun's box, but he mentally saw its occupant all the time, and mingled with his depression there was a feeling of satisfaction, purely unselfish, for whenever he had glanced at Olive it was to see that she looked animated and happy, and kept turning to her husband to call his attention to something passing on the stage, while he sat *blasé* and discontented, longing for some excuse to get her away, but finding none.

The drop scene fell at the end of the first act, and there was the customary exodus from the stalls, whose occupants sought the buffet, corridors, and the boxes of friends, or changed places so as to engage in conversation, or discuss the qualities of the new piece.

It was in this change that Cyrus Daines came along the row of stalls to pass Murray, who fully expected to hear him say: "Come out for a cigarette?" But Daines merely nodded, and said something hurriedly about the way being so narrow.

"One moment," said Murray, as Daines passed him. "Who is in this box overhead?"

Daines looked at him curiously.

"Don't you know?" he replied in a low tone.

"How should I? I can't see from here."

"Braetoun's little girl—Baby Lee."

Daines passed on, and Murray sat back in his stall, with a choking sensation at his throat, and then glanced up at Braetoun's box, to see that its owner had left his seat, and that Olive was looking straight through her glass at the box opposite to her; but the next moment she had lowered it and was gazing straight at him.

As soon as Olive saw that Murray was looking at her, she put down her glass and greeted him with a smile, which he read aright, as it seemed to him that she was saying:

"Everybody is visiting friends; why don't you come and see me?"

He could not resist the desire to go round, and he left his seat to pass through the little crowd in the entries, and at last reached Braetoun's box, feeling glad that he had not encountered his patient on the way. For a hot feeling of anger was rising in his breast, with a very strong suspicion that he knew where Braetoun would be. And if, face to face there, Olive should see her husband in company with this woman, and ask him who she was—with that sweet ingenuous look in her eyes, what was he to say?

"So base—so cruel!" he thought. "I dare not go."

For a few moments he paused, hesitating. Then, as if attracted by a power he could not master, he turned the handle of the door and went in.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 6.

THERE were seventeen words mis-spelt in *Short Stories* dated August 8th. No competitor sent in the complete list. Those who forwarded the greatest number first were Mr. J. Burton, 102, Glenpark Road, Forest Gate, E., and Mr. W. Cheetham, 1, Belmont Villa, Victoria Road, Romford, Essex, between whom one guinea has been divided; while the provincial guinea goes to Mr. John G. Usher, Baltinglass, co. Wicklow.

POSTAL RATES.

SHORT STORIES will be sent direct from these offices, post free, to any country within the Postal Union, at the following rates, prepaid:

One Year	6s. 6d.
Half Year	3s. 3d.
Three Months	1s. 8d.

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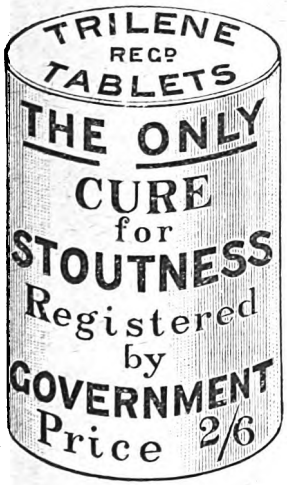
TRILENE TABLETS Regd.



For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."

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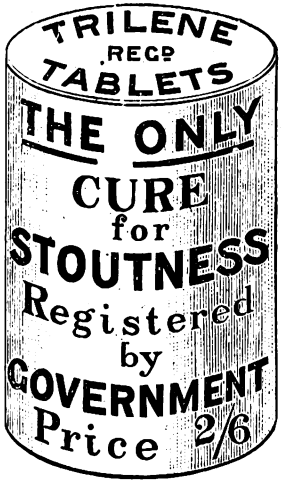

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87, Alexandra Road, Norwich.
"GENTLEMEN,—I have had some boxes of your Tablets for my wife, and she has derived great benefit from them.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Illustrated Family Novelist, November 30th, 1895, says: "A great many women who are plump by nature worry about their stoutness. However, there are some perfectly safe remedies for embonpoint, among them being the Trilene Tablets, which are not only safe, but absolutely beneficial to the general health, and speedily produce the desired effect."

"1, Letterstone Road, Fulham, S.W.
"SIRS,—I found myself decreased and better for your treatment, and can get about more freely.
"Yours sincerely, F. E. GODDEN."

"6, Brighton Terrace, Hull.
"MRS. JOHNSON has much pleasure in saying she has derived great benefit from your Tablets."

"3, Castle Road, Deal.
"MRS. J. PEARSON is glad to say she is much thinner."

Convalescent Home, New Brighton, Cheshire.
MISS S. J. PRITCHARD says: "They have done me good. I am 21lb. lighter already."

"Bretton West, near Wakefield.
"MISS L. LANGFIELD has taken a box of Tablets, and is already 7lb. lighter."

"Claremont House, Shrewsbury.
"DEAR SIRS,—I have nearly finished your Tablets, and cannot speak too highly of them. They do me good in many ways, being a valuable tonic and bracer up of the nervous system, and, being of a gouty tendency, they have also done me good in that way. I am very much thinner.
"Yours truly (MRS.) K. M. ANNAND."

25, Windsor Terrace, Penarth, Cardiff.
MISS M. FLAVELL says: "I have lost 2 stone, and am much better in health."

Extract from *Bury and Suffolk Times*, June 15th, 1894: "Miss Atherton sings and dances as piquantly as ever, and is a marvel of agility, considering how much flesh she has put on of late. Her friends should induce her to take a course of Trilene Tablets, about which I hear wonderful things. One portly acquaintance of my own by merely a few weeks' use of these little Tablets, has reduced his bulk perceptibly. I am assured the Tablets are harmless and tasteless, and that the Trilene Company in Finsbury Pavement, London, are doing an enormous and ever-increasing trade."

486, Market Street, Whitworth, near Rochdale.
MISS GRINDROD writes: "Have had one 2s. 6d. box of Trilene Tablets, and am 5lb. lighter."

2, Chariot Street, Hull.
MR. JUBB, Chemist, says: "My customers speak highly of your Tablets."

Windsor Hotel, Merthyr Vale, South Wales.
MR. J. THOMAS writes: "When I started the Tablets I weighed 17½ stone, and have got down to 14st. 9lb."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.
MR. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17 stone, was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15 stone."

Aspern, 29, King's Hall Road, Beckenham.
MISS S. WOODHOUSE writes: "I have much pleasure in stating that your Tablets are really a safe cure for stoutness; they have cured me, and I am a perfect figure now."

MRS. GIBBON, of Radford Cottage, Bitterne, says: "I have derived great benefit from your Tablets, especially abdominal."

131, Victoria Street, London, S.W.
MRS. ARTHUR WEGUELIN (the "Society" celebrity) writes: "By simply taking the Trilene regularly, and without change of diet, I have lost 1st. 4lb. in four weeks."

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Ladies' and Gents'. Low Prices. Best Materials. Finest Workmanship. Satisfaction Assured. Sent on Approval. Write for Lists.

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Send 4 Stamps and receive pair

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By a simple inexpensive self-treatment, effecting a rapid and permanent reduction without change in diet. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. G. A. BOYD, 14, York Buildings, Charing Cross, London.

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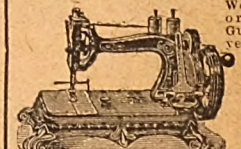

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

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1896 PROCLAMATION.

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6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
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SPECIAL OFFER.—3 Hearthrugs for 4s. 3d.; or 6 for 8s.; or 12 for 15s. 6d.

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Are an extraordinary revelation of low-priced excellence in an age where nothing ordinary will suffice.

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MODEL 458 is a charming Mode, consisting of very smart Bodice, prettily trimmed fine Military braid, Fancy Buttons Full Wide Skirt. Price **10/6** only. Carriage paid 9d. extra. **10/6**

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Made in The John Noble Cheviot Serge, with long full sleeves, saddle top, and pocket.

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An English Countess writes: *"Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."*

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

131, Victoria Street, London, S.W.—Mrs. ARTHUR WEGUELIN (the "Society" Celebrity) writes: "By simply taking the Trilene regularly, and without change of diet, I have lost 1st. 4lb. in 4 weeks."

Bretton West, near Wakefield.—"Miss L. LANGFIELD has taken a box of tablets, and is already 7lb. lighter."

Windsor Hotel, Merthyr Vale, South Wales.—Mr. J. THOMAS writes: "When I started the Tablets I weighed 17st., and have got down to 14st. 9lb."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.—Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 400.] For the Week ending August 29th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

"DID I see any fighting in Venezuela?" responded my brother, who had just returned from there, and about whose safety we had been very anxious during the last periodical revolution in that country of political unrest.

"Well, of a sort I saw plenty. It was fighting, but not war, as you would construe the term in the 42nd. If I could have had a handful of your men with me, I'd have made some of those cowardly Venezuelans sit up."

I looked at his strong, upright form, broad-shouldered and muscular, with a sigh of regret. He would have been as fine a soldier as any in the British Army. His whole heart and soul were in soldiering, not for the amusements attached to the life, but purely from the love of it, as a profession.

Unfortunately, however, at the time when he had to pass his competitive examination he failed in some subjects which I must own seemed very immaterial to the making of a good officer.

I, who am far less fitted than he, obtained my commission through a better knowledge of the art of spelling, and being more closely acquainted with the historical phases through which my country had passed in years gone by.

My brother being rejected as a servant in arms of the Queen, followed the example of many others, and travelled.

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America, both North and South, had the greatest fascination for him, and he happened to be up the country when one of the so-called revolutions broke out.

"Tell me about it," I said, as we settled down to a smoke over the fire after dinner.

He watched the feathery blue rings rise in the air and vanish, placed his feet on the fender, and looked steadfastly into the crimson glow.

I fancied from his expression he was recalling something unpleasant. I waited in silence for him to begin.

"I had been travelling, as you know," he said at last, "through many of the South American States, and had a very good knowledge of Spanish. I met with a fair number of adventures, but not until I reached one of the small towns in the interior of Venezuela did I take up arms. While staying there I came across some English miners, a class you find all over the world. There was plenty of good sport, and I got to know some of the most influential inhabitants. They are supposed to hate the English, which they do collectively, but their appreciation of the race is shown by their anxiety to get them to join any one party in a scrimmage with another.

"They know an Englishman can be relied upon, whereas their own leaders cannot, though at times they will fight like demons. The people of the district were suspected, and rightly, of organising a rising against

the government. So the latter thought it best to take the job off their hands, and send a force to quell the idea. On hearing this, a call to arms was made, and to my surprise a deputation waited upon me to request me to lend my services, and take a prominent position in the little army."

"That just suited you!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. The opportunity of getting some experience of real fighting was too much for me, and I consented!

"It didn't run to uniforms, but otherwise the equipment of our force was good.

"Drilling commenced, and in a few days we were able to move our body of men about in quite a respectable fashion. Intelligence soon came that the invading forces were at hand.

"A river divided them from us, along the banks of which I set out with a reconnoitring party. From observation and intelligence I discovered they did not exceed us in numbers, though no doubt they were far more efficient in the art of war. They encamped near the river, with the evident intention of bridging and crossing it. There was one thing to do, and one only to my mind. Attack them! The blow would be so thoroughly unexpected, that success seemed to me certain. I propounded my views, which were well received, and I was asked to carry out the attack.

"I knew the country fairly well, and arranged for the greater part of my force to cross at a ford some way above, and work round under cover of the dark.

"I determined to cross with them, having selected a picked body of a hundred strong, and take up a position under cover of the river bank.

"At daybreak our enemies would attack, when I hoped, with my men, to rush the camp. All went well as we took up our position unobserved, everything was quiet and orderly. As the first streak of dawn appeared, I hurriedly inspected my company, who were apparently ready for the fray, and nicely hidden from observation.

"As the first shot rang out on the still morning air, followed quickly by a volley, my little band rose. In accordance with my directions they started at a smart trot, without firing until they got to close quarters.

"Half the ground had been traversed, when a deadly fire from the camp poured into us, which we readily replied to.

"The bullets however kept whizzing in, and I felt suddenly that there was hesitation in my band.

"With a loud cry I dashed forward, yelling the charge, and rushing frantically into the camp. But I had not reckoned for a heavy entrenchment, which, however, I cleared only to be seized immediately, on my headlong fall the other side!

"I looked round for my men.

"Not one to be seen!

"The firing ceased. They had all bolted, right enough, too, since I had attacked an almost impregnable position. My men saw this long before my fatal leap, and also the rest of the army on the other side.

"The damage done to the foe was slight, but unfortunately for me their leader was shot.

"This incensed the soldiers beyond measure, as they surveyed their captive—a hated Englishman!

"The whole affair was laid at my door, and they clamoured loudly for my life. But the officer in charge placed me under arrest, saying he would attend to my case when the work of the day was over.

"There was a brick building in the camp, with two rooms belonging to some farmer, in one of which I was placed under strong guard.

"During the day the rebellion was quelled, and towards evening I was tried, and, no doubt very rightly, sentenced to be shot at daybreak.

"The officers, on the whole, behaved very well to me, ordering me to be supplied with food, coffee, and cigarettes.

"Gradually I began to realise the hopeless situation, seeing only too clearly my folly in taking up a cause, the merits of which I knew so little. Yet, even with the sentence of death hanging over me, the most depressing thought of all was the fact that I had made such a foolish mess of my military tactics.

"I ought not to have assumed such a position, and felt my conceit almost deserved the fate awaiting me. I really experienced at first some slight comfort in the fact that I was going to be put out of the world. At least I should be saved the derision and contempt of the men whom I had led into such a mad enterprise.

"I looked round my prison, a dull sensation of apathy at my heart. Escape through the windows seemed easy enough, but I knew too well what my reception would be without, for I could hear the steady tramp of sentinels. Even now in my dreams the regular fall of those feet outside my prison walls will wake me with a shudder.

"The thought of approaching death momentarily shaped itself more vividly in my mind. I tried to prepare for my end, but only the thought of that fatal leap and my ridiculous expedition rose to taunt me. There was no light, no consolation, no hope!

"Sounds in the adjoining room attracted my attention. It was carpentering—I listened curiously.

"When my coffee was brought in, I asked what was going on.

"The soldier, who was very communicative, told me they were putting the dead officer in a coffin, and as the custom is in hot climates, he would be buried that night.

"When again left alone, I looked at my coffee, but did not drink it. Though at first I said I felt comforted at the idea of death, I found myself clinging desperately to dear life with a wild longing.

"What if I tried the Monte Christo plan? But how would that save me? Better be shot than buried alive.

"All was still. I felt my body tremble and my pulses quicken.

"I crept stealthily across the room, and, stooping down, placed my ear to the door. Not a sound within, only grim death reigned in that silent chamber. I pushed the door open and looked through.

"There stood the coffin in solemn state, one or two forlorn looking candles guttering upon it, dimly lighting the bare walls, throwing queer shadows around.

"On the floor lay some carpenter's tools.

"A sudden thought flashed through my brain, one of daring possibilities. It seemed to brace me, and then intoxicate my mind, deadening fear, and awakening my crushed hopes.

"I placed my hand to my head, and staggered back against the door, for the room whirled round, and I seemed to discern the outlines of the coffin through a dense mist.

"Pulling myself together, I crept softly forward, and knelt down by the wooden box. What if this strange inspiration, this one last shot failed!

"I would not harbour the question, but forced it back as with eager fingers I unscrewed the coffin lid. I raised it gently, without a sound, and the livid face of the poor dead captain stared up into mine.

"To-morrow, if I could not save myself, I should be

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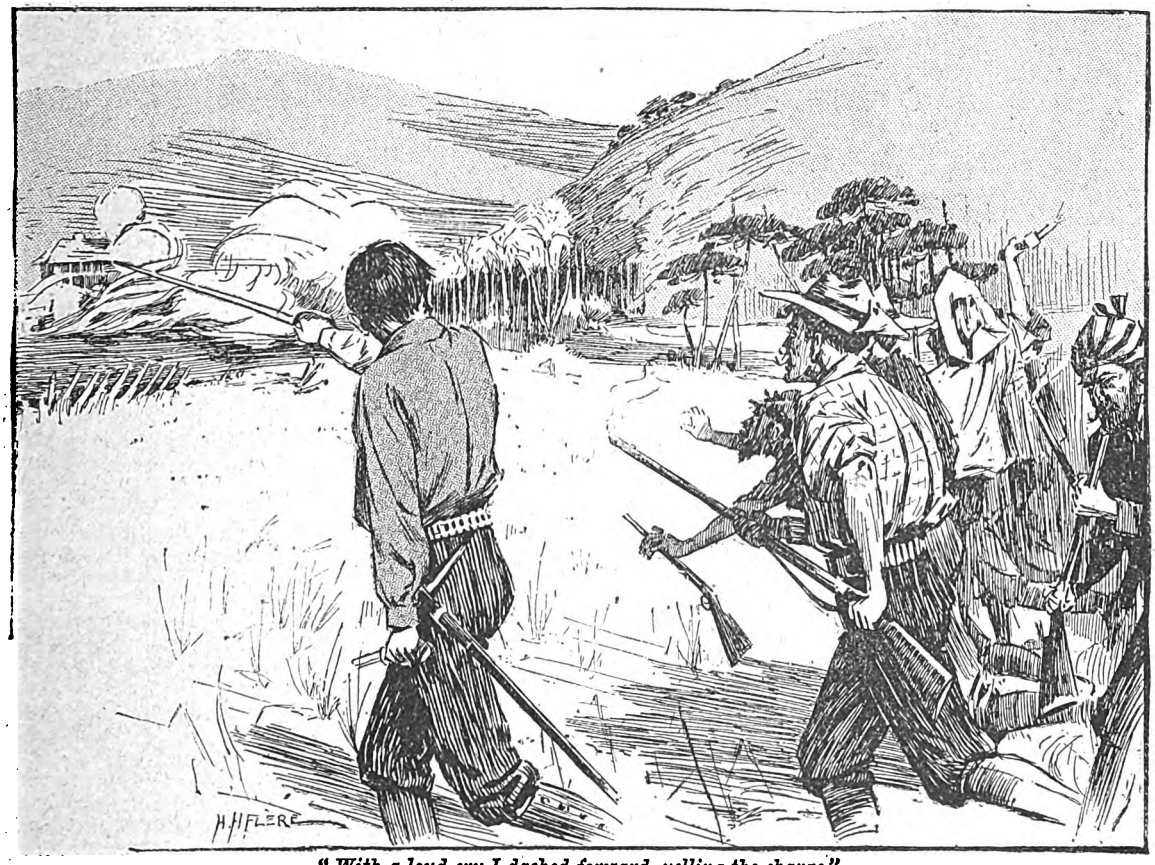
even as this lifeless clay, lying cold and stiff under the destroying volley.

"The haunting fear of the Eternal Unknown spurred me on to action. I was so full of life and activity, I *could* not die without a struggle. The sight of the corpse had a great effect upon me. The mystery of death was torture to my racking brain. Reverently but quickly I grasped the body in my arms, and lifting it from the rude shell, bore my ghastly burden to the adjoining room, where I laid it under the blanket that had been given to me.

"Then I returned and commenced operations, every moment fearing to be overheard.

"I took the candles off the nails in which they were



"With a loud cry I dashed forward, yelling the charge."

stuck, and turning over the coffin lid, fastened in several long screws, being careful they did not come through. Then tying some string round them, I made a handle, about where my hands would be when lying within. It only took a few minutes to fill up the old screw holes with tallow, and rub the tops with dust, to make a very fair resemblance to the heads of the screws which had gone. Hastily replacing the candles on the nails, and the lid over the lower part of the coffin, I crept in, and with my string handles drew it over me, holding it down firmly.

"My first feeling was one of suffocation, so unbearable that my scheme already seemed impossible. 'Should I have time to make an air-hole?' I thought, 'and would it be safe if I did?' I resolved to try, and pushing my lid down, reached a large gimlet, with which I bored some holes at the side.

"A tramping of feet, and I dropped the tool, drawing the lid to its proper place.

"As the door latch turned, my heart beat violently. Had they seen it move?

"With all my might I clung on to the lid, the muscles in my arms swelling, my teeth clenched, my breath coming quick and fast.

"That was the most agonising moment of my life, as I waited in dread suspense, all the vitality in my veins frozen with horror.

"The sound of a low, monotonous voice broke on my ear, the words brought the reality of my awful position vividly before me. The priest was blessing this mockery of death! As he ceased, the soldiers went to the door of the adjoining room. Would they discover the exchange? I heard it open and shut again, they were evidently satisfied I was asleep under my blanket. The coffin was raised, I still clung to the lid, fearing it would slip, but my grasp was so tight, that the only risk was in the string breaking.

"My feelings can be imagined, as they carried me on their shoulders, these strong men who were prepared to shoot me down like a dog at daybreak.

"I knew only too well what a wild plan I was pursuing. How mad this attempt to save myself would have seemed

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at any other time! But desperation and acute emergency will drive one to any lengths, and I had seen so much of the superstition of these people.

"So I clung to my wretched thread of hope, and prayed as I never did before! I did not know where I was being taken, but judging from the time it was out of the camp.

"The formula of this military night funeral was familiar to me. I should be set down at the side of the grave on the ropes that would lift and lower me, while the priest sprinkled some more holy water. Then the firing party would fire, and the earth be shovelled in.

"Before the steady march ceased, I raised my lid slightly to get a good breath of fresh air. Then an abrupt halt, and I was deposited with rather jerky motions on the ground.

"The crucial moment had arrived when a dash for freedom, life, and air, should save or end my existence! My last, my only chance, a final intreaty to the powers above, a bracing of the nerves, resolution, and then——

"I gripped my string handles tighter, and with one mighty effort dashed up the lid, shrieking wildly in Spanish: '*Io soy el espritu del su jefe, Escario!*' (I am the spirit of your leader, Escario.)

"The lid struck the men violently who stood beside the coffin, and strong soldiers as they were, for whom bullets had no terror, they started back cowering and white, consumed with superstitious dread at this weird resurrection.

"Whether they believed I was indeed their fallen chief, or a devil bursting from bonds, I know not, for in the twinkling of an eye I was away under cover of the night. Before they had time to consider, the phantom vanished, seizing the opportunity of a momentary panic.

"Thank Heaven there were no stars or moon, and if ever a man ran like the wind, I did that night."

"Dick," I cried, springing up and laying my hand on his shoulder, "old man, I congratulate you."

"Well it *was* a near shave, certainly. But fortune favoured me, and coming across some friendly miners, I lay *perdu* awhile, disguised as one of them. Eventually, as my presence proves, I got away, and I do not think that corner of the globe will ever see my face again."

W. G.

"I am the spirit of your leader, Escario!"

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The Stump of a Cigar.

I.

ALCIDES PAILLET, artist of the Latin Quarter, hurrying to an appointment with Georges Vaquier, a journalistic compatriot stopping at the Hotel de la Perle, Place de la Sorbonne, crossed the threshold, leapt the staircase, reached the third floor and knocked at door 39. No response.

"How queer!" said he. "Vaquier cannot have forgotten our rendez-vous, or can I be mistaken! This is certainly the address he gave me."

Just at that moment his eye caught sight of the key in the lock, left there by his friend, of course, expressly for him.

"Ah, 'twas all right then! Georges meant to return; while awaiting his coming he'd make himself at home."

And Paillet entered. Little curious by nature, it never occurred to him to notice the room or to remark a faint odour of patchouli that ought to have revealed to him the recent presence of a woman. Similar odours were not unusual in hotel apartments, and he crossed to the book-case where a file of books stood boldly exhibiting their backs.

"*Peste*," murmured he, running over the titles, "Georges grows frivolous of late! Formerly upon his shelves one found but volumes of jurisprudence, economy and statistics; now behold but novels and poems—'Faded Roses,' 'Always United,' 'Holes in the Moon,' etc. His Parisian sojourn has decidedly affected him. *N'importe!* we'll read awhile; here goes for 'Faded Roses!'"

And Paillet threw off his top-coat, drew from his pocket the pipe always carried with him, and was just going to light it when he saw displayed upon the mantelpiece a superb cigar, a splendid Londrés. Always thoughtful, Georges had remembered his weakness for this special brand. He took it, lighted it, rolled upon his tongue its delicious flavour, stirred up the fire a little, and contentedly plunged into his enormous heap of "Faded Roses," finding them so well suited to his taste that he gave no further thought to the delay of his friend till, arriving at the opening of the closing ode, he found some difficulty in continuing his reading.

He raised his head. Night had fallen; darkness had invaded the room. He rose, stretched himself, and wondering more than ever at Georges' absence, fished his note from his pocket, and began—to be sure he was right—to re-read its terms: "Sunday, January 14th, 2 p.m., Room 39, Hotel de la Perle, Place de la Sorbonne."

"No," said he, "I have not lost my wits, though Georges is not here. *Eh bien!* he breaks his word, and—I will stay here no longer posing like a fool!"

And so saying, Paillet threw down his cigar stump, long since burnt out, pulled on his coat again, and promptly departed, considering for a moment the advisability of leaving a note behind him registering his rage. A note? That would be very formal; a message with the *concierge* would do as well. But arriving at the lodge, the *concierge* too was out, not a servant to be found. Grumbling and vexed Paillet passed to the street and to the postal station of the Faubourg of St. Germain, to launch thence forthwith a furious telegram to his negligent friend Vaquier.

II.

MEANWHILE, as this little drama unrolled itself thus under the lone eye of Providence, a young and charming woman impatiently awaited at the Gare de l'Este the arrival of her husband, M. Claude Lamberte, domiciled with her at the Hotel de la Perle, Place de la Sorbonne. A country merchant, Lamberte came every winter, partly for business, partly for pleasure, to pass with his wife a month in Paris. To-day he had gone to lunch at Villemouble with a college chum, and his wife had profited by his absence to carry out a plan formed for a long time.

An uncle and aunt of hers lived in Paris, Rue de la Grosse-Pinte, whom certain transfers of property, insisted upon by her husband through a bit of temper, had thrown into comparative poverty. She had heard of it briefly, began at once to put aside all the economies and trifles she was able to spare, determined at the first chance that offered itself to carry them personally to her dearest relatives. That chance had come. Therefore towards two o'clock, her simple lunch and toilet finished, she had left her room, the key in the lock for the maid to arrange it, tossed her bundle into a passing *fiacre*, and departed upon her errand of affection for the Rue Grosse-Pinte. Her aunt was not at home, but the *concierge* received the bundle, and Madame Lamberte, her mind at ease, turned her steps towards the Gare de l'Este to meet her husband at five o'clock.

In fact at five minutes past five precisely the train rolled into the station. Claude sprang to the platform, kissed his wife tenderly, helped her to the carriage again, and the return was begun.

"And you had a good time, dearest," began his wife presently, a detail or two exchanged between them.

"I should say so!" Claude responded, "and grew ten years younger talking over old times and pranks, my dear. And you, Mignonne, what did you do?"

"Oh, I," said she, with a little white lie, fearing to anger him, "I stayed at home till four o'clock, then came out to meet you. It was truly a long, long day,

dearest, for a woman all alone, with no one she loved to speak to."

"Poor little darling," Claude murmured remorsefully, again embracing her fervently.

Indeed, so wrapped were they in the tenderness of this sweet reunion, that they arrived at their destination, passed into the hotel still affectionately arm-in-arm, and upstairs to room 39.

"Ah," sighed the merchant as they entered with a long relieved breath, "what a comfort to be out of that racket and hear ourselves speak once more! What say you to dining up here, Octavia, a regular bridal fête, like the lovers of other days, you know? Does the notion please you, little one?"

"Please me, Claude? How good you are!"

And Claude, under the inspiration of these tender memories and the pretty white throat of his wife, plainly visible through her half-opened corsage, felt himself seized with a renewal of love and admiration as ardent as in the first hours of the honeymoon.

Suddenly bustling about the room with his loverlike air, at once sentimental and rakish, he crossed, I know not under what impulse, towards the mantelpiece. A strong odour of tobacco smoke greeted his nostrils. He stopped, sniffed, wheeled round.

"Octavia," said he, "did you tell me that you were alone here all day long?"

"Absolutely alone."

"But someone has been smoking here?"

"Impossible."

"Smell for yourself, then: the odour is strong enough."

"True, I smell it, too. Where can it come from?" cried she wonderingly. "Perhaps——"

"Well, what else?"

"It was the bell-boy, perhaps."

"Isadore? He never smokes; he has often told me so when I have offered him cigarettes. Therefore——"

"Therefore, Claude," stammered Octavia, dazed by the mystery, "what do you mean by that? What do you want me to tell you?"

"You should know, Octavia," Claude answered sternly, assailed by cruel thoughts, and quick to pass from one extreme to another, "if, as you say, you have been here all day alone. Speak! speak!" he thundered, "where does that odour come from?"

"I will see, I will go at once and inquire, Claude——"

"No, not a step. You would still deceive me. You have received someone here; this odour could be neither chance nor fancy. The man—his name—who is he, I say?"

"No one—no one, Claude; on my soul, no one!"

"And I say, yes! Quick, answer me—his name, I tell you!"

And Octavia, in the terror that her husband's fury caused her, determined to cut the knot with a second lie.

"Please, please, Claude," cried she pleadingly, "don't be vexed with me. That odour—so little that I was sure that it would be gone by now—I did not mean to deceive you—that odour was through me. I—I disobeyed you, Claude. I smoked a cigarette to-day!"

"What? When I have positively forbidden you to?"

"Yes, Claude, but it was such a little one, and I did not think how wrong it was."

She clasped his hand and leant against him, and looked so pretty, so truly repentant for the sin she had committed, that Claude, in spite of himself, was vanquished by her gentleness.

"Well, all right, said he, "this once I pardon your levity and disregard of my wishes, but—do not do it again, Octavia!"

"Never, never," affirmed she, craftily offering herself to his kisses, and the trouble for the moment blew over by Octavia's returning to the cares of her toilet, a little delayed by this stormy episode. As for Claude, good soul, he already deplored his hasty suspicions. What had possessed him? His wife was the best, the most honest of women. How wrong he had been to wound her so. And really, after all, what harm had there been in her tasting a little of forbidden fruit?

Pacing back and forth while he awaited her dressing, reflecting thus, his foot struck something on the floor that rolled. He stooped, picked it up. Impossible! Could he believe his own eyes? That which he had in his hand—the *corps du délit*, the clinching proof of his wife's brazen treachery—was the stump of a cigar. He had not been wrong, then. She had deceived him! He was betrayed like other husbands.

"*Eh bien*, dearest," murmured just then a soft voice behind him, "hast thou no more to say, then, to thy little Octavia?"

The spell that bound him relaxed with the sound of that siren voice. No more to say to her, with every nerve of his body tense with fury? One leap took him beside her.

"See it—see it!" he cried. "Behold the 'cigarette'; such a little one, too, that made that smoke a while ago!"

Octavia stared, uncomprehending.

"See it—see it!" repeated he, shaking it and brandishing it before her eyes, "the stump of a cigar, hardly cold, here on my floor! Wretch! Answer, I say. Who—has—been—here—since I've been gone?"

"No one—no one, Claude. Ask the *concierge*."

"*Concierges* are easily corrupted."

"You believe me a liar, then, Claude?"

"I know that you are one!" and he caught her by the shoulder and crushed her to her knees, the better, perhaps, to realise her crime. She struggled, writhed in his grasp; his clutch was iron. Octavia decided it was wise to retract.

"Claude," said she solemnly, with appealing eyes, "listen one moment, and I will tell you the truth."

"You have not told the truth, then?"

"No."

"How, then, can I believe what you say?"

His wife lifted her arms upward.

"As Heaven is my witness," said she, "it is the truth I tell you now, I was not here this afternoon——"

This was too much. Claude raised his hand, and Octavia dodged, wrenched herself free, and fled from the room.

III.

SAFE in the corridor, without thought of refuge, she began to descend the stairs. The gloom and silence of the house in that mid-hour of struggle between twilight and night somewhat calmed and brought her to her senses. Where was she going when she reached the bottom, or what pretext to give the *concierge* or servants for her bonnetless head, half-buttoned *corsage*, and face pale with worry? Go back? Never! Go on? How could she? Even now someone was coming, a step near at hand, and the door beside her, opening on the landing immediately beneath her own, brusquely flew

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back, and a head, curious, interested, peered into the passage.

A young and handsome head, too, that of a gentleman, like herself, recently arrived in Paris, whose name she did not know, but with whom she and her husband had several times exchanged a word or two as they met on the stairs. Always respectful and courteous, she had begun to look upon him almost as an old acquaintance. He stared, started, recognised the pretty lady and neighbour, whose name he did not know either, and advanced to meet her.

"You are looking for a servant, madame?" said he.

The cue was given; Octavia seized it.

"Yes, monsieur, a servant, and was debating whether to go up or down. I desired some matches, you know."

"Ah, I can aid you, then; my box is full and at your service, madame. But step inside, please, the hall is so cold," and Vaquier—for Vaquier it was—drew back to allow her to pass. Octavia, confused, moved forward a step or two and began to explain:

"Her husband the merchant—monsieur remembered him—had gone for the day with a friend to Villemouble. She was alone, her room dull and dark, and"—she smiled enchantingly—"monsieur would understand, she had always been so afraid of the dark."

"And I, though not afraid, madame," Vaquier politely answered, "was dull and lonely also; a friend that I expected did not arrive. It was he that I thought I heard, when—luckily for me—I came to the door," and Vaquier's eyes completed the sentence that his lips dared not frame.

"You are alone, then, monsieur?" Octavia questioned timidly, embarrassed for a response and feeling it safer to confine herself to a *rôle* of catechising.

"Alas, yes, madame, and puzzled I am by it, too."

Vaquier assented again. "Alcides Paillet is usually the most punctual of men. But, as to-day, madame, like your husband, he plays the truant, and since Providence has thrown us together, and both of us are so dull and lonely, perhaps you will deign to pass the evening in my company? Count upon me for every service, madame, and"—Vaquier boldly burnt his ships behind him—"what restaurant would you prefer?"

Poor little Octavia, swamped in a sea from which there seemed no issue!

"Monsieur, monsieur," stammered she, "you go too fast. I would not dare to leave the hotel."

"You will dine here, then, in my modest chamber?" demanded Vaquier, more and more pluming himself upon the alms Heaven had vouchsafed his loneliness.

A rap at the door saved Octavia a reply.

"Your friend, or maybe my husband, monsieur!" she cried, in consternation.

Before Vaquier could answer, two more imperative strokes drew him from his indecision and he opened—to a telegraph boy, presenting the blue envelope of an electric message. He ran his eye over it, then, wonderingly, read it aloud:

"What the dickens, Georges, my friend," it said, "do you mean by breaking the appointment given me to-day? I came at two promptly, found the key in the door, and, believing you only a moment absent, entered, smoked a cigar, devoured an entire volume of verse, and then, as night had come, though you had not, departed furious, and await an explanation.—Indignantly, PAILLET."

Aictavo graspn wofradr tiwh a tillte ryc.

"Monsieur, allow me. I'll return it immediately."

And she was gone, the telegram with her, leaving the dumstruck journalist staring. To await a friend three hours, then be taxed with discourtesy; to receive a lady and a tacit promise of some hours more of her agreeable society and see her suddenly disappear—it was enough to make even a journalist stare.

IV.

MEANWHILE, just above him, Octavia, proof in hand, was telling her husband everything, from the secret trip to the Rue Grosse-Pinte to the filching of the telegram. The cigar stump mystery was a mystery no longer; the painter had simply gone a floor too high and taken the merchant's room for the room of the journalist. Claude's brow shaded a little as he heard the details, but he, too, had his lesson, and he decided to be generous.

"My dear," said he, "since you wish it so much, see your people whenever you like, and it's high time, I take it, to restore the message to its rightful owner. That gentleman is the cause of our reconciliation; we'll have him up here to share our little dinner."

Which accounts for the exchange of characters that fifteen minutes later made Vaquier the guest instead of the host, and also for the absence of his contemplated dessert—from the rosy lips that smiled at him now across a steaming dish of Chateaubriand's fillets.

HONOR LUCELLE.

THERE IS SOMETHING - -
- - - of More than Ordinary Interest
in
This Week's Number of HOME NOTES.

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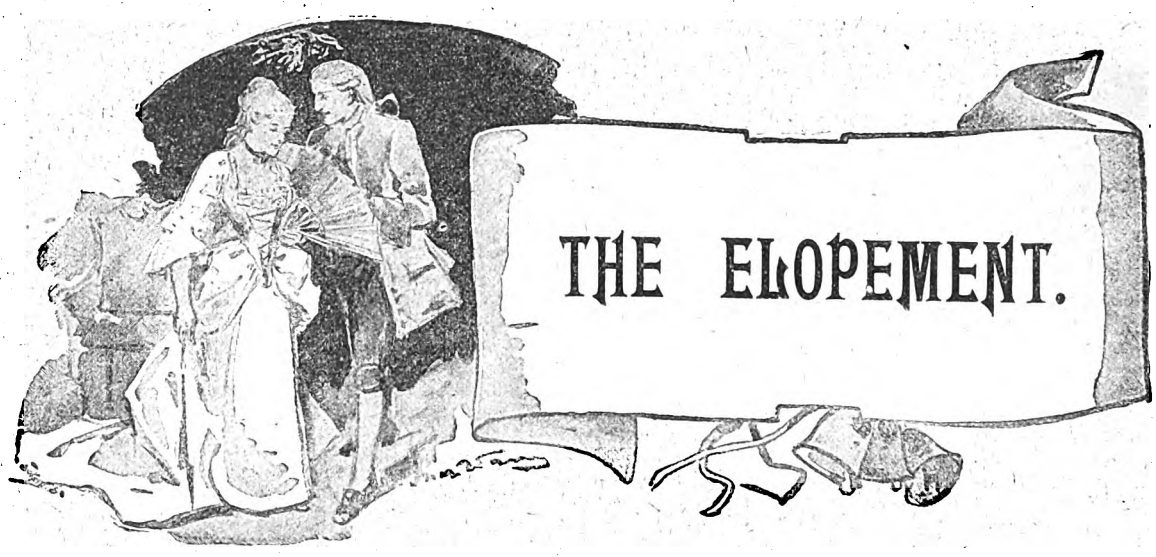

THE ELOPEMENT.

A WOMAN sat on a stool before the fire, shielding her face from the heat with a theatre programme, and glancing up inquiringly at a man who leant with his elbow on the mantelpiece. The latter looked as though he were dreamily considering such fantastic pictures as might have been foreshadowed by the calculations of the future, in which he appeared to be engrossed. Both were in evening dress, and a cold supper was on the table.

The room, which had the characteristic aspect of a sample show-room, obviously formed one of an ordinary suite in a large metropolitan hotel. It led directly into a bedroom beyond which was a small dressing-room. It was, as such apartments invariably are, extremely handsome and uncomfortable, recalling no domestic association to any but royal personages, who habitually exist in the frigid and candid exposure that seems to pervade the most private recesses of palaces, whether of princes or licensed for public entertainment.

The occupants of the room presented all the symptoms of having just returned from a problem play. Their faces wore an expression of such profound gloom and anxiety as could only have been induced by the hopeless entanglement of ideas in which contemporary genius delights to involve the perceptions of inferior minds.

Presently the woman took her eyes from the man's face, and, dropping her extemporised fan, stared earnestly into the fire, which was dancing such a measure as alternately left her in a black shadow, and then played brightly on her white neck and shoulders, until, on reaching her eyes, it sank back as though dismayed at the prospect of any conflict with their fierce lustre and sparkling vehemence. She was quite young, of dark, almost southern complexion, and her hair, which was of rich dusky brown, flashed here and there with changing tints of gold.

He, too, was a pleasing figure, with light curly hair and close-clipped beard, sharply-cut features, and eyes of that deep transparent blue very frequently accompanying a spiritual sensibility to nervous influences and suggesting by their liquid eloquence that their possessor through their cerulean medium can see farther into the mysteries of the invisible than those favoured with more ordinary, if equally serviceable optical provision.

The woman suddenly said without looking up:

"Have you got it?"

"Got what?"

"The thing—the pistol?"

"Yes, it's in the bag, but we shan't want it."

"Why not?"

"Because if your love for me is not great enough to make you wish to live, it is not worth the sacrifice of two lives."

"Why two?"

"You don't suppose I could live without you afterwards, do you?"

"Why not? You don't hold the same views of social life and its obligations as I do. I wish to belong to you because I love you more than life, and feel that it would be worthy any sacrifice; but I also have a conscience—however artificial you say its injunctions are—and it tells me that I may be wrong to give up all else for you, yet my sin can be compounded for, like everything else in this world, at a price. I have told you what that price is, and I think it cheap. Can you fancy me and scandal in company together, even with you to stand between us and blind me with the garlands of a lover's springtime? You know I could not bear it. What a coward you are! Why did you agree to my conditions if you had made up your mind to draw back at the last moment?"

"I don't think I am a coward, but I didn't quite understand your meaning. I thought you only wanted the revolver as a protection against *him*."

"Him! Why the pitiful scoundrel isn't worth good honest powder and lead. He's fit only to be drowned in a butt of brandy, or flogged with the stick he keeps to ill-use his wife with! Do you know that he had hit me—beaten me like a dog?"

"I'm not surprised—what for?"

"Because—I can't tell you why, but it's true."

The man shrugged his shoulders as though it didn't matter much, and then said, rather wearily, as he glanced at a small bag which lay among some rugs upon the sofa.

"Anyhow, we shan't want it. I am not such an infamous blackguard as to become a woman's lover and murderer on the same night!"

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"But I don't expect *you* to do it," she persisted; "you can go away somewhere and need never come back. You know I understand all kinds of shooting things. Why I can hit bottles twenty yards away! How could I miss my heart when it shall have grown so big with love? Come, Harold!" she added, going close up to him and laying her hand on his shoulder, "you're not going to play me false, are you? You swore that if what I wished could be done by human hands, you would do it. Has your love been all a pretence, incapable of any sacrifice? Can't you realise that I love you much more than I value life, and that, as death must come some day, I wish to die to-morrow with your kisses warm upon my lips. Come! Be my lover now and forget to-morrow!"

She twined her arms about him, and kissed his mouth and neck with passionate tenderness. Like a man in a dream he held her to his breast, closer and closer.

She broke from him with a low, soft laugh of triumph and taking a bottle of champagne from the table, knocked off its head with a knife and poured out two foaming glasses. She gave one to her companion, who seemed too dazed to move, and then, holding up the other, cried:

"Come! let us drink to the union of life's two unconquerable forces, love and death! Good luck to them both!"

When they had drained their glasses, she flung hers down upon the tiled hearth, where it broke into a hundred fragments; his dropped from his hand on the carpet and remained unbroken.

The woman went quickly towards the adjoining room, the man stood for a moment or two motionless, then he started, and, going quietly to the little bag, drew out a revolver and slipped it into the pocket of his overcoat, which, with his hat, he next put on; also adjusting a silk scarf round his neck with a nice precision as to the arrangement of its folds. He picked up the programme from the floor and wrote upon it in pencil: "I find I can't do it after all. Good-bye. Don't bother, I'll make it all right downstairs. Send my things to club to-morrow and then go home."

He stuck the paper in the glass over the fireplace, and, snatching a long, black glove from the table, noiselessly left the room.

It was barely 11.30 o'clock, and as the office of the hotel was still open he stopped and paid his bill, telling the clerk to include the cost of a broken wine-glass and next morning's breakfast, for which he ordered a devilled sole. Then he lit a cigar and sauntered across Trafalgar Square.

He went into a club in Pall Mall, of which he was a member, and sat moodily in the smoking-room. Even men who knew him well, after looking in his face, passed him without a word; there was that in his eyes which froze the commonplace greetings on their lips, and which long afterwards they recalled and talked of.

At about three o'clock he went out again, and walked slowly and thoughtfully in a northerly direction. The streets were now quiet and deserted, and as he passed by, several policemen eyed him queerly, and one asked him, respectfully, whether he was all right. He nodded and went on.

Though it was still dark there were signs in the east of the approaching dawn as he emerged on the suburban heath to which he had been steadily advancing. He went straight to the trunk of a tree which lay where it had fallen in a great storm. For many years it had formed a seat beneath a noble elm, standing on the crown of a little grassy knoll that sloped down to one of the bye-roads of the common. In summertime it was a favourite retreat for simple lovers, and many hearts had beat faster and many lips had sealed their vows of truth from the encouragement of its grave repose.

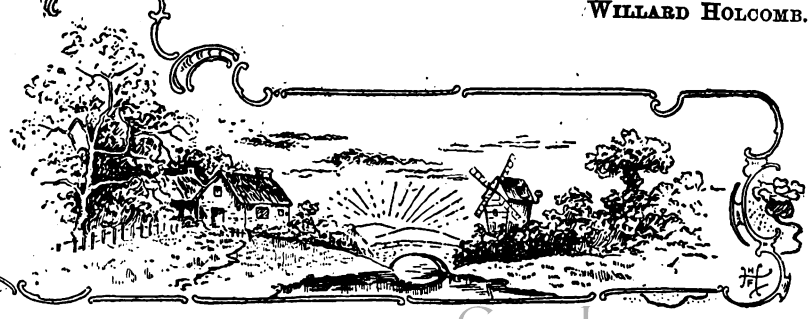
Here he sat down and lit another cigar, the last, in his case. As he finished it the sun was just beginning to glimmer on the horizon; the grey twilight grew paler and more transparent, until the stars swung themselves into other hemispheres, and little birds, roosting over his head, fluttered their stiffened feathers and chirruped a sleepy welcome to their ascending providence.

He took the long, black glove from his pocket and examined it curiously. He tried to pull it on to his hand, but found it would only admit three fingers. It was the left, and on it he could trace the mark of a wedding ring. He kissed it in a sudden frenzy of passion, and, as he did so, caught the faint aroma of the delicate arm that had so lately worn it. For an instant the rush of emotion to his external senses completely unmanned him, as he covered his face in his hands, and his whole frame shook in an agonising endeavour to control himself.

He was soon quite calm again, and, after kissing the glove once more, he carefully hid it under the roots of the tree behind him. Then he sat down again and shot himself through the heart.

WILLARD HOLCOMB.

A good chance is offered on page 279 of securing a money prize if you have a few moments to spare.



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THE MORTAL "TACWIN"

[*The Mohammedan religion teaches that there is a race of demi-spirits, winged females of beautiful forms, who watch over and defend mortals from all harm. These marvellous beings are called "Tacwins," or Fates, and one is assigned to guide, counsel, comfort and direct every human being.*]

EDWARD MANCHESTER and I were boys together. We fished in the same desk at school, and climbed the old Devonshire hills in company. The current of our youthful lives ran in the same channel, until when, standing at the portals of early manhood, our paths widely diverged. Following the guidance of his ambition, he became a printer's apprentice, drifted into editorial work, and finally went to Glasgow. It was then that I lost all trace of him. I entered a commercial groove and became an agent for a firm of engine builders.

So it happened that after fifteen years' separation we met again at Cape Town whither I had been ordered on duty. Of course our boyhood's friendship was renewed. He was now the editor and publisher of a prosperous journal, and the same hale and hearty good fellow of my early association. To his hospitable home I was invited, and it was the happiest, cheeriest fireside at which I was ever privileged to sit.

His wife, who was at least ten years his junior, was a woman of rare mental qualifications, and her assistance to him in his profession, and likeness of spirit, had brought the pair into a perfect harmony which was most pleasing to observe. Sitting in his library one evening, our conversation turned upon the subject of dreams. I doubted whether they were in any degree prophetic, and maintained with ardour the opinion that dreams were simply due to a disordered nervous system, citing many learned psychologists in support of my theory.

"You may not believe me," said my friend, "but, nevertheless, I know that dreams are sometimes forecasts of things to occur. I say I know this to be true, because the most important event of my life was brought to pass through the influence of a dream. It is perhaps true that coarse natures do not 'entertain angels unawares' when sleep hovers over them and enchains their senses, but there are fine organisations possessed of a sixth sense, and that extraordinary attribute is only awakened when all the others are in repose."

"That is a novel idea," I replied, "and I do not care to accept it as true without definite and convincing proof. However, what was your dream? After I have heard it related and am informed what came of it, perhaps I may become a convert to your new philosophy."

Knocking the ashes from his cigar and settling himself comfortably in his easy-chair, my friend proceeded to relate the following extraordinary incident:

"Some years ago I was employed on the reporting staff of a Yorkshire newspaper. It was uphill work, and my salary was not munificent. In fact, there were frequently times when the ends utterly and positively refused to meet. One night I repaired to my room a good deal out of humour with myself and the world. Like most other newspaper men, I had grown cynical, so plainly were the shams and deceits of humanity held up to my view in the course of my daily tasks. It was in November, and a chill wind blew. I stirred the fire, and sat down to commune with myself. The blaze dispersed a radiant heat; a sense of warmth and comfort stole over my heart and brain, and after a little I fell fast asleep. I say fast asleep, and yet I hardly believe that was my actual condition, for in all my slumber it seemed to me that I was possessed of every faculty.

"I was transported to Arabia. The sun was sinking behind a typical Eastern city, and its fading glories

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"Whither dost thou go, mortal?" she inquired.

lighted up the domes and minarets of many an imposing mosque. I was in trouble as to the course I should pursue. The people were all strange and forbidding in appearance, and uttered not a word as they strode on, with staves in their hands, towards the city, while, in the opposite direction to that in which my course seemed to lie, reposed the apparently unending, drifted sands of the desert. From the city a perfume as of sweet spices was wafted, while from the desert a hot and withering blast assailed me with its scorching breath.

"Suddenly a woman stood beside me. I could not tell from what quarter she had approached. She was clad in the garb of an Arabian maiden, her face artfully concealed beneath a turban, from which depended a heavy veil. She spoke to me—I have never heard but one other voice so sweet and musical—and addressed me in my native tongue.

"'Whither dost thou go, mortal?' she inquired.

"'In truth I do not know,' was my response. 'Duty seems to demand that I should cross the desert waste before me, but my way is not plain, neither do I believe I shall survive the trials and fatigue of the journey.s Inclination impels me towards the city, where all i repose, and where the most luscious fruit tempts my eyes, and the perfume of rare exotics is grateful to my senses.'

"'Touch them not. The fruit is the apple of Sodom, and is as ashes upon the tongue. The odours which seem so delicious and entrancing are deadly poisons; whoever breathes them is condemned to for ever wear a heart of stone. Follow me, and I will lead you to a haven of safety, for has not Allah intrusted you to my care? Doubt not my sincerity, for if you do so you will fall and faint by the way.'

"'And who are you, good lady? How can you resist the deadly perils of the trackless desert? If I trust you, what assurance have I that you will not lead me forth to die and be for ever lost in the shifting sands?'

"'Ask your own heart and be mindful of its dictates. I cannot deceive you if I would, for Allah has created me to keep watch and guard over you.'

"I was convinced that the maiden spoke truly. Turning to my veiled companion, after one last glance towards the city, I said:

"'Lead on. I will follow you without reserve. I put my trust in you, though the way appears difficult, and the end is as closely veiled in obscurity and doubt as are your features hidden from my sight.'

"She turned and walked fleetly across the desert, and soon the blissful city was lost from view below the horizon, and all around us lay the silent, merciless sands. Day after day, night after night we plodded on. Sometimes an awful sense of weariness oppressed me; my feet sank to the ankles in the remorseless, yielding sands; the intense heat shrivelled my skin and parched my lips. But my companion was never weary and paused not. If I turned laggard, she prompted me to greater exertion with the words:

"'Even the desert has an end. Yonder lies your way. The troubles you now endure are but blessings in disguise. At the end there is eternal peace and a laurel wreath for your brow. Would you fail now, after you have suffered so much?'

"At each sound of her voice my faith was renewed as if by magic, and my strength came back to me. It seemed to me that months had been consumed in our journey when at last we attained the banks of a limpid stream. Beyond it was a stretch of palms and cedars, intermingled with luxurious plants and the most exquisite of flowers.

"'You have attained the reward of your sufferings,' said my guide. 'Here at last is rest and peace. All your journeyings are at an end and now comes your reward. Henceforth you will never know a want, but pass your remaining days on earth in doing good to your fellows. Our paths lie a little apart from this time, but I will watch over you. A sense of my presence will always be vouchsafed to you, and in paradise we shall be reunited.'

"'But,' I implored, 'why must you leave me? You have been my good angel, my guide, my saviour in all the trials which have beset my path. Remain ever at my side, for I may fail yet without your aid.'

"'I would that it might be so; but I fear it cannot. Be patient. In another state of existence we cannot be parted.'

"'Then let me see your face once before we part. Your voice has sustained me—to look upon your features would be far greater bliss.'

"'Know you not that the face of an Arab maiden is ever veiled? Even so it is with the angels when in human company. If you should but look into my eyes I should become human like yourself; then our companionship could never end.'

"'And that is my chief desire,' was my response, and

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seizing her veil I tore it from her face. It was not a countenance of rare beauty, as the world ordinarily judges the blandishments of women, but it was pure, and sweet, and true. It touched my heart as never had woman's face appealed to it before. The great, soulful eyes looked steadfastly into my own.

"'You have found me after years of vain searching, and released me from my bondage. Henceforth I am with you to the end of my life. For you was I created, and faithful to you will I remain until death, and even the grave shall not hide us from each other.'

"I awoke. The fire had died away to embers, and the room was growing cold. Long I marvelled what such a dream could portend. Weeks rolled by and the face of the Arabian maiden was ever before me. The months passed into years, and still every lineament of those angelic features, and the expression of the deep, soulful eyes remained implanted in my memory. Half unconsciously I scanned the faces of thousands in the busy streets, but among all the hurrying throng that face was never encountered. Still I was impressed that one day I should find it. I persevered in my profession, and, when downcast by adverse fortunes, that silent face strengthened me, as it had in my dream of the journey across the desert."

I had become intensely interested, for my friend was an excellent story-teller. At this point he paused. "Well," said I inquiringly, "what came of it?"

"Two years ago," he continued, "I came again to Cape Town. One day, shortly after my arrival, I was standing at a street corner, waiting for a tram, and in the meantime turned and carelessly glanced at a case of photographs displayed at the foot of a flight of stairs leading to an artist's studio. I gave a start as my gaze rested upon one face. The deep, dark eyes looking into mine; the regular features, the very folds of the hair, caught up gracefully over the high, intellectual forehead, were those of the maiden of my dream.

"I lost all interest in the tram, and hastened up the stairway to the studio. The photographer evidently considered me an escaped lunatic.

"'You have a picture in your case below—whose is it?' I inquired nervously.

"'A picture. Why, there are two hundred. How should I know which one you mean?'

"'Very true, I did not think of that. But, pardon me, sir, one of those photographs reminds me most forcibly of an absent friend whom I greatly desire to find. Will you be kind enough to lend me your aid in the matter?'

"'Certainly sir. Your manner, when you first came in, led me to doubt your sanity. However, I am now reassured, and shall be most happy to serve you.' His kindness availed little. The photographer could not tell to whom the picture belonged. He concluded that it must be the order of a transient visitor to the city, the negative had been destroyed, and so I departed in a more disturbed condition of mind than before. I had intended to pursue my profession in South Africa as close attention to work had produced a pulmonary complaint, from which in this mild climate I hoped to obtain relief, but all my energies were now directed towards finding the original of the haunting, evasive

"Pardon me, but we have met before."

photograph. I secured an engagement upon the staff of a daily newspaper. Wherever I went—in church, theatre, or through the streets—my whole soul was absorbed in searching for what a majority of persons would call an illusion.

"In the fulfilment of my duties I was sent to Pretoria, to the house of a wealthy mine-owner for the purpose of an interview. This gentleman kindly invited me to remain the night in his house. During the evening several friends strolled in and among them was a young woman, who, in some mysterious way, did not impress me as a stranger. As she turned her face towards mine, our eyes met.

"I started back in astonishment. I had met the lady of my dream.

"'Pardon me, but we have met before, I believe,' I said, half apologetically, as soon as I could collect my scattered senses.

"'I do not know, sir, there is certainly a familiar tone in your voice.' She spoke in the same sweet and bewitching tones so deeply fixed in my memory. In my confusion, I quickly added:

"'It must have been in Arabia.'

"The eyebrows were arched in surprise. 'I think not, sir—I have never travelled in the East.'

"Well, to cut my story short, a lasting friendship was formed then and there. You have met Mrs. Manchester. She has proved all that my dream foretold. It is true that she has no recollection of having been my companion in the desert sands of Arabia, but I am none the less convinced that she is the 'Taowin' from whose lovely face I snatched the veil."

Grace Hawden.

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CHICHI.

CHICHI was unhappy—a most unprecedented thing, for Chichi ordinarily was but a synonym for sunshine. Her red lips drooped mournfully, and two great tears fell from the velvet depths of her dark eyes, as she swayed gently to and fro in her hammock, swung beneath the pepper trees.

What cared she that the Mexican sky, blue and cloudless, stretched over her like a benediction? What cared she that the hot sun, glinting between the feathery branches, fell on her uncovered head, bringing out the golden strands of her dark hair? That the birds called to her merrily? That down in the city all was gay with flags, and it was the first day of La Fiesta? Others might go to join the festivities and view the procession; but she? No! For the first time in her short, happy life Chichi was tasting the bitter cup of sorrow. And why? Any one of her companions could have told you. All because of the "White Señorita."

She was beautiful as an angel that Chichi admitted—in her white gown, her hair shining like gold, and her eyes blue as the sky. But could she dance the fandango, or throw the golden ball with that inimitable grace which never failed to win for Chichi enthusiastic bravas? Haughty and dignified as a queen was the "White Señorita." But could she stand as steadily as Chichi in the little car drawn by the milk-white horses, and smile coquettishly as the people deluged her with the carnival roses?

Yet they had made her queen of the *fiesta*, and Chichi, who had held that honour for four years, had gracefully yielded, for the "White Señorita" was a stranger among them, and a guest, and it was but courteous that this favour should be shown her. This was not the cause of her trouble; it was that José should forsake her—José, who had sung under her window in the soft moonlit nights; José, who had lain at her feet, through the hot Mexican noons, when even the birds were silent and the only sound was the rustling of the palm leaves, as some faint breeze stirred them to reluctant life, whispering to her willing ears his ardent words of love. That José, who had proclaimed her as his *inamorata* before them all at the last bull-fight, should forget her, and bow before the cold beauty of the "White Señorita."

She would let him go, the false one! There were plenty of *cavalleros* who would be glad of her favour. To-night would be the masked ball. She would not stay at home and weep; she would go and dance, the gayest of the gay. José should repent his perfidy—there were many who would die for her if need be. Someone should avenge her wrongs, and the "White Señorita," the stranger who had usurped her rights, should see whether it could be done with impunity! Her eyes blazed, and she smiled half savagely, then her pretty head drooped thoughtfully. She was plotting her revenge.

Down in the city, where all was gay, time flew on silver wings. To Maud Fairchild, the young English girl who had come to this summer land that her fast failing health might be benefited, all seemed like a dream. To the eyes of the dark-skinned Mexicans her fair loveliness seemed doubly beautiful, and from the first day of her arrival she had been called the "White Señorita."

They looked upon her with an admiration which was almost awe. When they had offered to make her queen of their festival she accepted the honour, as it was intended she should, as the highest compliment they could pay, and was enjoying the novel situation with a zest which brought the soft colour to her usually pale cheeks.

To José, who kept closely by her side, she looked like an angel, and yet in spite of the fact that she smiled half doubtfully in answer to his burning glances and impassioned words, which she only half understood, he was not as supremely happy as the occasion seemed to warrant.

He welcomed the evening which came at last, for it closed the festivities with a dance, at which the reproachful faces would be hidden behind masks, and his movements undetected. But instead of relief this brought him only a new reason for discomfort. Another *cavallero* kept persistently by his lady's side, and seemed determined to engross her attention.

Not a movement of the graceful figure did he lose, but watched him gloomily, until a familiar gesture or two suggested a solution of the mystery which closer observation confirmed. It was Gue, the brother of Chichi, who was seeking a quarrel in order to avenge this discourtesy shown his sister. José ground his teeth furiously. Should he be outwitted by a mere boy? Chafing under the various discomforts of the day, augmented by this last insult, he determined to show them that José de Ayala was not to be trifled with.

He stepped forward to where the couple were standing at one side of the room engaged in earnest conversation.

"If the señorita will permit me," he said, "I would remind her that she has chosen me for her *cavallero*."

The lady looked up a little bewildered, while her attendant drew her hand more closely within his arm and laughed scornfully.

"One does not need to keep a promise made to one so false as Don José," he answered. José's face grew livid behind his mask.

"Señor," he said huskily, "as a gentleman of Mexico, I demand satisfaction."

The other laughed again. "Take it," he answered, and stepping back a little, he struck him lightly on the face.

The next instant the dagger of José was buried in the heart of his assailant, who had not touched his own jewelled weapon, and who fell forward without a word.

Alarmed by the cries of Miss Fairchild, the merry-makers hurried to the spot, and in their gay dresses pressed around José, who had torn his mask from his face, and, kneeling on the ground, was supporting the lifeless figure of the young man, whose mask had also fallen. As the "White Señorita" knelt beside him, trying with frantic hands to staunch his life's blood he opened his eyes, and heedless of the crowd around or the little white hands that were pressed against his heart, he looked up into the eyes of José.

"It would have been kinder, *querido*," he said, smiling faintly, "had you done it first. *Adios!*"

José did not answer. Horrified and despairing, he was looking down into the white face, not of Gue, but—Chichi!

BEATRICE DE LUNA.

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HIGH PLAY.

A COMEDY OFF THE STAGE.

By George Manville Fenn.

SUMMARY.

The story opens with an interview between Lady Braetoun and her son Roderick, in which she endeavours to induce him to give up "Baby" Lee, a chorus girl, and marry Olive, Isaac Emsworth's heiress. Emsworth takes Olive to consult Dr. Murray, who advises a voyage to South Africa in the *Greyberg*, in which he also is going. Roderick, who is friendly with Murray, comes for advice on the terribly bad condition of his health, and the Doctor recommends a trip in the same boat. "Baby" Lee, on being discarded, seeks means of revenging herself on Olive. Roderick, after his marriage, enters into an agreement with one Daines to pay ten thousand pounds if the latter will marry "Baby" Lee.

CHAPTER XII.

Dr. Murray's Suspicions.

As Murray entered Braetoun's box unheard by its occupant, his first glance was opposite to where Lucy was seated with her glass fixed upon Olive, evidently watching her every movement.

As Murray halted for a few moments in the doorway, he saw Lucy turn her head, as if to speak to someone nearly hidden behind her, and with whom she appeared to be carrying on an eager conversation, but only to turn and use her glass again upon Olive.

"The scoundrel," thought Murray. "How can a man act like that?"

Then all thought of Braetoun passed away, for Olive turned, saw him, held out her hand, and pointed to the chair by her side.

"I am so glad to see you," she cried. "I never thought that you could care for such frivolous amusements."

"I do not," he said; "but I came. Do you?"

"Oh yes, I like to see this once. Roderick wanted me to come. It is so bright and pretty, but I should not care to come often. I like the music though; it seems so merry and sparkling. Did you meet Roderick?"

"No."

"I almost wonder you did not. He said he would see you, and that he was going to have a cigarette."

Murray's brow clouded over a little. He was not surprised that he had not seen Braetoun, and he glanced involuntarily across the theatre again, to see that Lucy was talking with animation to someone invisible saving his white gloves and shirt front, for he kept well behind the curtain and the lady's chair.

"How pretty a theatre looks all lit up like this," continued Olive. "I wish my father had come; I tried so hard to persuade him."

"I can hardly realise his coming to such a place," said Murray, with a grave smile.

"But yet you came," she replied merrily. "I think it's quite right though. My father works far too hard, and I'm sure you do, Doctor. Always dealing with people's troubles. Oh, it's quite right for you to take a little amusement."

"But is this amusement?" he said drily.

"Oh, I suppose so. The people here seem to think it is."

"Then, you really do not think so?" he said earnestly.

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"I've been laughing a great deal," she replied, "but I do begin to feel a little ashamed of it, and I don't think I shall come very often—unless Roderick wants me to. Do stop till he comes back, and I want you to look at him. It's our secret, mind: I shouldn't like him to think I said such a thing to you, but I am a little uneasy about him. He has been so unwell. I want you to notice how he is, and if you don't think he is as well as he should be, to make him come and see you."

"I will," said Murray, whose eyes were fixed upon Lucy.

"Ah, you are looking at that lady in the box opposite. She is so pretty, Doctor Murray; I looked at her through the glass. She is charming. Quite girl-like, and exquisitely dressed, but she is so rude. She has been staring at my diamonds all the evening."

"At your diamonds," said Murray thoughtfully; "but perhaps she thought you were rude for looking at her."

"Oh, that's cruel. I haven't been, indeed. I only just peeped at her twice, but she has been regularly watching me."

"Envious perhaps. Some ladies worship diamonds."

The dimly seen figure behind the chair.

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"I don't. They fidget me. They are presents, and I am always so glad to have them off, so as to be sure that I have not lost any."

"Braetoun is coming back," said Murray. "The curtain will be up directly."

"Of course; he can't be long."

But though the conductor was back in his place, and watching for a hint from the prompter, there was no movement made in the opposite box, and as Murray furtively glanced there from time to time, he only made out that one of the white gloves was resting on the lady's chair.

"I asked Roderick if he knew who the lady opposite was, and he said he thought she was an actress, but she does not look like one—at least, I should not think she does."

"Jealous," thought Murray, without heeding the remark, for he was watching Lucy. "Could she have known that Braetoun had taken this box? Easily, I suppose. He ought to have taken his wife away at once. To go there is unpardonable. Poor girl!"

He was gazing hard now at the dimly seen figure behind the chair opposite to her when the drop scene began to rise for the second act, and he started from his seat and stared aghast at Braetoun, who had come silently into the box.

"No, no; sit down, old man, plenty of room. I'll take this chair behind little wifey," said Braetoun, as Murray vacated the place he had occupied.

"Yes, yes, do pray stay, Doctor," cried Olive eagerly, and her eyes seconded the words of her prayer.

"Want to talk to you after the next act. Will you sit down, or am I to make you? Hush! Silence! the people are looking."

Braetoun followed up his order with a push, and Murray subsided into his seat, after giving his old school-fellow a merry threatening look.

For he felt as if a great load had been taken off his breast, and there was a secret desire to reach back his right hand, grip Braetoun's hand and press it warmly by way of penance for the cruel, disloyal thoughts to which he had given way. For there was the dimly seen figure still behind Lucy Lee's chair, and she was turning her head to speak to whoever it was again.

It was to Murray as if a dark cloud had passed away from the front of the house, his breast was lightened, and in a few minutes he was laughing with his companions at the nonsense dressed up for their benefit, and seemed happier than he had felt for weeks. For there was something more than enjoyable in sitting there, turning from time to time to talk to the bright, happy woman at his side, whose girlish, innocent ways were so fresh and *naïve*, and who seemed happiest when those with her found most pleasure in the scene.

"Roddie," she whispered at last, "did you ever see anything so rude before? Do look at that lady opposite—but she can't be a lady, or she would not stare at me so."

"Silly little bird!" said Braetoun playfully from where he sat, well behind the curtain, and Murray listened intently. "Looking at you! Pooh! Nonsense! She's watching the noble-looking doctor. A little *éprise*. I say, Olive, isn't it shocking? You and I come here on the sly in reckless dissipation, and here we find the solemn, fashionable physician taking his relaxation too, and being ogled by one of the prettiest women in the house. You wouldn't have thought it of him, now, would you?"

"I shouldn't have thought it of him," said Olive, smiling ingenuously at their companion, "and I don't think it of him. I know better. She was watching me long before you came, Doctor Murray."

Murray smiled his thanks, and as soon as the drop scene fell he went back to his place, Braetoun at a look following him out.

Murray was half disposed to allude to Lucy's presence, and merely to suggest that his friend should take care and be well on his guard against any rencontre with the jealous-looking little body opposite; but he felt that he had already, in his solicitude for Olive's peace of mind, so gravely misjudged his friend that he merely shook hands and said:

"You don't look quite up to the mark, Roderick, my son. Give me a look in soon."

Five minutes later he was in his place again listening to the murmur of conversation in the box over his head, and now for the first time he noticed that Cyrus Daines had not returned to his place.

"Ha!" he muttered, "how prone one is to misjudge people. It must be he all the time. Poor Braetoun! How happy she seems."

He was looking up at Olive as he said these words, and saw that she was leaning back with her head half turned so as to gaze back at her husband, who had not changed his seat.

Caught up the bottle . . . and handed it to her.

"How beautiful she is," thought Murray as he gazed at the curve of the white throat and neck and the snowy bosom upon which the diamonds were sparkling, and then he started and frowned, for a low, angry little laugh came from the box overhead, and he knew in his heart that it was in derision of the picture visible in the opposite box.

CHAPTER XIII.

What a Spiteful Woman Will.

Allan Murray was quite correct in his surmise: the derisive spiteful laugh was directed at the little domestic scene taking place in the box opposite, and Lucy raised her opera glass, and looked on till Braetoun writhed in his impotent anger, and but for the fact that he was seated behind his wife, he would have been unable to hide his scowling countenance from her. As it was, she felt startled by the imperious way in which he told her to look at the stage, and the progress of the third act.

"I'll get her away early," he muttered, but he altered his mind directly, for he felt certain that as soon as Lucy saw them prepare to leave the box she would leave hers, and wait to encounter them, and perhaps make a scene.

"Why doesn't that little cad do something to stop her?" he muttered. "He's in the box with her still. I believe he's fighting with her instead of against."

He was quite right. Cyrus Daines was in the box which, out of compliment the lessee had sent to the little favourite who had so often brought good fortune to his house, and Lucy had gloried in the chance of confronting the man who had forsaken her, and having a long look at his wife. It was the opportunity for which she had been waiting, and she had worked herself up into a fit of desperation before she started for the theatre, and somehow the excitement she felt had lent a peculiar charm to her *petite* beauty, with the result that those who knew her well by sight declared that she had never looked so attractive before.

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"Why, it's some acid—vitriol!"

Cyrus Daines had shared the opinion of the admirers, and with an unwonted feeling of excitement he sat through the first act, and then made his way to her box, but found the door closed, and as there was no answer to his light tap he waited till the box-keeper came round, and told him to open the door.

"Beg pardon, sir; Miss Lee said she would not see any visitors to-night," said the man.

"Exactly," said Daines, as he slipped something into the man's hand, "but she will see me."

Daines's face was familiar to the box-keeper as a friend of Lord Braetoun, and without making any further opposition, he unclosed the door, and Daines slipped in at once and closed it after him.

She turned sharply:

"Who's that? I said I would not see anyone."

There was an autocratic sound in her words, but she had reigned queen in that house for a whole year.

"It is only I, Lucy," he said softly.

"Yes, it is always only you," she cried pettishly. "Why have you come?"

"Because I wanted to be near you and talk to you."

"Then I don't want you, so please to go."

"I can't go, dear; pray let me stay," he whispered.

"Mr. Daines, if you ever dare to speak to me again like that, it is the last time you will ever have the opportunity of saying a word, here or anywhere else."

"I apologise humbly," he whispered. "It was only because I loved you. The word slipped out."

"Then please don't love me. There isn't such a thing as love—nothing but hatred."

"And malice," said Daines to himself.

"Look at that—look at your dear friend and that silly chit of a girl he calls his wife. Wait till she finds him out. Sitting there, turning to make eyes at him every moment, and before me. Oh, it's sickening!"

Daines was silent, feeling that it was the best policy if he wished to stay; and he stood behind her chair, waiting for her to speak again; but for a long space she was silent, spending her time in using her glass constantly to watch the opposite box, but rarely glancing at the stage.

"She'll begin talking after a time," thought Daines, and he stood watching Braetoun from the obscurity of the box, and thinking how he had better proceed so as to prevent there being a scene.

For from Lucy's manner he felt pretty well convinced that if the two parties met there would be an outburst of some kind; but he was not prepared to find so volcanic a nature as he was discovering in the little fragile-looking girl with her sweet innocent-looking features.

Daines was right; she leant back at last to talk to him, glad of the opportunity to speak out to one who knew all her trouble, and from that moment she began to show how she had been worked up to the present pitch, and how she was striving to keep her anger at white heat.

"Oh, it is unbearable," she said at last, in an angry whisper. "Is he parading that woman here on purpose to insult me?"

"Surely not. Braetoun would not be guilty of such an act of cruelty."

Lucy turned herself half round and looked at him mockingly.

"Roderick's friend speaking?" she said.

"No, I am not his friend. I consider that he has behaved too ill to you to be a friend of mine."

"How nice," she said, with a little laugh. "What a child you must think me, Mr. Daines."

"I was neither flattering nor trying to deceive you, Lucy," he said softly.

"No, you never did," she said with a flippant laugh.

"Yes, I have, often. Talked nonsense by the yard, but it was before I knew you for what you are."

"No, nor that tack won't do," she said shortly. "I'm sharp enough to read you, Mr. Cyrus Daines."

"No," he said quietly; "not yet, but you will understand me some day, I hope."

"Perhaps. I am at school yet, learning what men are."

"We are a bad lot, I'm afraid."

"Very," said Lucy drily. "Don't try to cheat me with any more of that kind of talk, Mr. Daines, because it is insulting me."

"God knows I would not insult you, Lucy," he said earnestly. "That's not like the little girl whom Braetoun introduced me to."

"And that's not like the sharp-tongued, chaffing Mr. Daines he introduced me to."

"Circumstances have altered me," he said.

"And so they have me," she said vindictively. "What woman could bear to see her sitting there like that, in her diamonds and dainty dress? Oh, I could kill her!"

"No, you could not."

"What! I could, without mercy, as I would any other thing that turned and stung me to get me out of her way."

"Be just to her," said Daines. "She is innocent and good enough."

"There you go," she cried, in a fierce whisper, and she flashed her eyes upon him. "Innocent and good enough—throw that in my teeth—I tried to be innocent and good

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to him. Why can't I be innocent and good? His wife—oh, it makes me mad!"

"I know you were innocent and good enough to him," whispered Daines, "and how good and loving you can be."

"Sitting there mocking me with his wife—his wife!"

"Well, why cannot you come here as someone's wife? Young, clever, beautiful."

"Ha! ha! Go on: flatter away. Who'd marry me?"

"I would; on my soul, I would," he whispered, as he sank in the chair behind her, and the house burst into a roar of laughter, succeeded by a thunder of applause—plaudits continued till the conductor lowered his *bâton*, and the leading lady came back to the front, to repeat the song and dance which had given so much satisfaction.

"You would?" she said softly, and she turned slowly round and looked him full in the eyes.

"Yes, to-morrow, as soon as the marriage could take place," he whispered passionately, "for I love you, Lucy, with all my heart."

"I shall end by believing that you are in earnest, Mr. Daines," she said lightly.

"You believe me now?" he continued.

"Isn't it a strange place to talk to me like that?"

"What is the place to me?" he said. "You are here, so close to me that I could touch you—if I dared."

"And you daren't," she said mockingly.

"I dare not. A few months ago I dared, and, but for a feeling that it wouldn't be square to Braetoun, I could have caught you in my arms and kissed you, because I did not love you. But now that I have found what a true, good little woman you are, I dare not do more than take your hand and kiss your fingers as respectfully as I would those of any lady in the land."

She uttered a little sigh, and her hand, as she sat half turned to him, was slowly pressed into his, and he bent down and softly held it to his lips.

"Thank you, Mr. Daines," she said, as she withdrew it. "I think I do believe, but it can never be. I'm not the girl I was, and you can't understand. I suppose I'm very wicked, but I never thought I was. I only feel one thing now, and that is, that I am Roderick Braetoun's wife, in spite of that woman sitting by him in her diamonds. He is my husband, and I can never even think of anyone again, wicked as I am. No, I'm not the girl you fancy, for he has worked up everything that was bad and evil in me, till he has made me what I feel I am to-night, ready to kill her, ready to do anything to wring his heart with agony, as he has wrung mine—I hate them."

"You will not do that; you will forgive him. You have nothing to forgive in her," whispered Daines, as she turned away from him now, and sat watching the opposite box.

"Never. Look at him with his friend there. A coward. He has kept him there so as to have an excuse for sneaking behind his wife. I saw through the whole manœuvre when the other wanted to go. I hate him, too. He sent Rod abroad for his health. Tore him away from me, and was the beginning of all this trouble. If it hadn't been for him Rod would never have seen that wretched girl, and thrown me over. Look at Rod now; I'm making him shrink so that he hardly dare stay in the house. There, you had better go and leave me; I'm not fit to have anyone near me now."

"Hush, hush! Be calm."

"Calm! with him sitting before me like that! Why, I feel as if I could get up and shout at them both; but if I did, the fools in the house who knew me would say I was acting again, and laugh. Ha, ha, ha! what a burlesque life is, Mr. Daines, isn't it?"

With the feeling growing stronger upon him that he must stay if he wished to prevent his companion from performing some mad act, Daines resisted all her efforts to get rid of him, and by degrees, towards the end of the piece, she seemed to grow calmer, saying no more about the occupants of the box opposite, but talking to him of the piece, and the various actresses whom she knew, praising and blaming their performance with a critical ability that pleased him more and more. But nearly all the time he noted that she kept on watching the box.

"There," she said at last; "it's nearly over, and I shall be glad to get back to auntie, and go to bed and forget all about it."

"That's wise," he said earnestly.

"Very well, then as you see I've grown wise," she said coldly, "please to say good-night and go."

"Let me see you home."

"No, thank you; it's only a couple of hundred yards, and I'll go by myself."

"I may come and see you to-morrow?"

"No. Please to go, Mr. Daines—if you have all the respect for me that you have tried to make me believe, you will do as I ask you and go at once."

"Yes," he said gravely, "you are right. I will go. Good-night."

He held out his gloved hand and she held out hers with a quick jerk, and a large square cut-glass bottle fell on the floor heavily.

"What's that?" he said sharply.

"Scent—scent," she cried. "The bottle. He gave it to me," she whispered excitedly. "Don't touch it. Is the stopper out?"

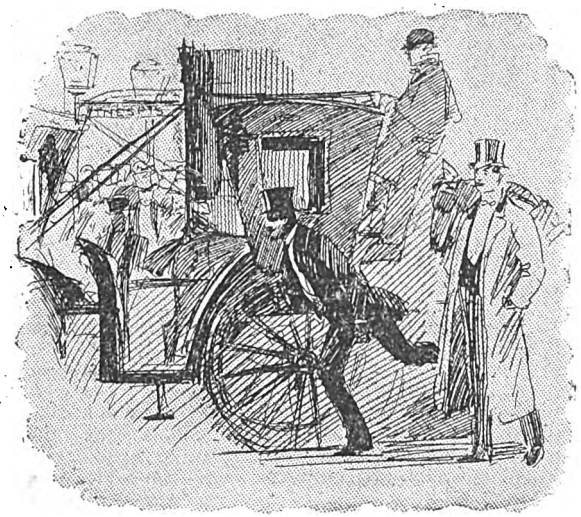
Her words were too late, for Daines had caught up the bottle, pressed the stopper back, and handed it to her.

"Very little spilt," he said.

"Oh," she said, with a stifled sob. "Quick! Go now. Good-night. No, don't shake hands."

He stood for a few moments, thinking how strange she was as she turned her back and sat gazing across the house. Then, with a sigh, he took his light overcoat and crush hat from a chair, and passed out, closing the door after him, while the music of the concluding scene of the burlesque suggested that the piece was nearly over.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I would marry her to-morrow if she would say 'Yes.' Poor little lassie! How much there is in her that is good and true! That was not her to-night.



Round to the main entrance.

The sight of him with his wife maddened her, but she has grown calmer now."

He went down to the thickly draped doorway leading into the stalls, and stood thoughtfully gazing at the finale of the piece. Braetoun and his wife were still in their box, standing. Murray had left them just before the curtain began to fall amidst a storm of plaudits.

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He forced his way to her side.

Then, as the applause was thundered forth, he saw Braetoun hurry his wife out of the box.

"That's right," muttered Daines. "Wise of you to get away. She won't meet them now. Good thing I was with her; it did calm her down. Poor girl, what a crucial position! I don't wonder at her fit of jealous rage. She must be beginning to feel guided a little by what I say. What a burlesque life is, she said. Poor little lassie! it is sometimes."

And all the while there were calls for the company, the throwing of bouquets, and Daines tried to see whether Lucy threw hers on to the stage as a compliment to old friends.

A large one did fall from overhead which seemed to be hers; but he had thought so much of her when in that box that he had paid little heed to the flowers, or he would have known that it was not—in fact, Lucy had left her box before the Braetouns

"Author! Author!" rang out, amidst a tremendous burst of plaudits, and that gentleman in black came forward to make his bow, just as someone behind pressed Daines' arm.

"Let me pass," said a familiar voice; "I have left my overcoat in the stall."

"One moment," said Daines, "or Jerdyne will be off. Let's give him a help. By Jove, how my hands smart!"

He thrust the Gibus under his arm, and raised his hands to clap.

"What's the matter with your gloves?" said Murray in a sharp whisper.

"Eh, matter?—why, they're all black!"

"Black! They're burning, man! What have you been doing? Where have you been? Why, it's some acid—vitriol!"

Daines turned upon him with a look of horror on his ghastly face, as the people were crowding out into the lobby, then turned and tried to rush upstairs, with a strange singing in his ears.

Lucy's words of hate—her rage against those who had been seated before her—the bottle she had dropped, and which he had raised to replace the stopper—scent? There was no odour.

"And I left her half mad like that! She cheated me! Great heavens, if they meet! What is she going to do?"

As he strove to get up into the vestibule the answer came in a vision of horror, in which he saw Olive, Lady Braetoun, the bright, girlish young wife, in her diamonds, leaning proudly on her husband's arm, and Lucy, his cast-off mistress, waiting somewhere for him in the crowd at the top of the stairs—that crowd so rapidly increasing that he could hardly stir—and, half hysterical with horror, he felt as if he could shriek aloud.

"Steady, sir, please. It is of no use to crowd," said a gentleman sternly, as Daines strove to force his way along. "Ladies, sir, ladies! Stop: you shall not pass like that."

"For heaven's sake, let me go—I must—it is a case of life and death," panted Daines, and he was allowed to pass, but the difficulties increased, and as he strove to get to the principal entrance he was forced into the stream passing to one of the extra exits, opened only at the close of the performance. This would, he knew, take him into one of the side streets some distance from the front, but there was no help for it, and trembling with excitement, his head completely in a whirl, he had all he could do to get out. This achieved, he was in another crowd, and ran round to the main entrance, from which the principal stream of people was pouring out.

Everyone seemed to be fighting against him. The great staircase was blocked by those descending, and the sides thronged with servants on the watch for their people, many of whom were hanging back till their carriages were brought up, and the perspiration streamed down Daines' face as he strove to mount.

At the first broad landing the throng was so thick above him, that he felt certain that the people were gathered round the scene of a terrible catastrophe, and his heart nearly stood still.

At last he caught sight of her at the top of the staircase on his left. She was close against the wall, with a police officer by her side.

Cyrus Daines' brain was pretty active, though his body was approaching the state of utter exhaustion, as he mounted the last few stairs. He could see Lucy's face now, apparently with the features set in solid despair, and her eyes fixed and staring over his head down towards the door.

"Too late," he muttered, and without heeding the people about her, he forced his way to her side.

(To be continued.)

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY NO. 6.]

THE PERFECT LOVE OF A GOOD WOMAN.

"OUR love is perfect, if ever love was," the man of our story would say to the girl a hundred times. She would nestle closer to him, and he would take her in his arms, and the love would shine from her eyes. They had been very happy, these two, but now the Great Wheel of Fate had turned its ugly side towards them, and they must part. The man was to go away to the great land across the water, there to earn fame and wealth, and to make a home for his love. She was to stay behind and wait for him.

And now their last day together had come. They left their dingy lodgings early in the morning, and walking to the station, they took a train away from the Great Black City, down into the green country. It was a lovely day early in July; the sun was shining brightly down from a cloudless sky, as they left the little way-side station, and went to the fields. They walked on the newly-cut, sun-browned hay. They turned it over with their feet, and a sweet scent came up from the fresh, green grass beneath.

They did not say much; only the man's face was very pale, and every now and again the tears sprang into the girl's eyes. Occasionally their hands would seek each other in sympathy, and then the man would take the girl's soft fingers in his own great, strong ones and gently stroke and fondle them.

The world seemed very happy that day. The sun was shining so brightly, the birds sang so merrily, and whistled to each other in the trees, while the swallows flew about in graceful curves, twittering playfully. In the next field a carter was calling to his horses as they pulled at the rake, while the regular "click" of the machine, as the hay dropped down in bundles from it, came floating over the hedge.

Thus they wandered about the live-long morning in the sweet-scented meadows. Then, when they grew tired, they turned aside into a wooded, green-grassed glen, where the tall pines grew straight out from the soft soil, and where rocks were to be found, and where a gurgling stream went splashing down at the foot of the little valley. Here they found a shady resting place, and unstrapping the small luncheon basket that they had brought, they spread out their feast, and made a pretence of eating. They uncorked a small bottle of champagne, and with this they each pledged the health of the other, for joy, and happiness, and good luck.

Afterwards they washed the plates in the stream, and the girl packed up. The man stood above her, looking down on the worn-out little hat that he loved so well, on the shabby coat and the faded skirt, and on the little black shoes and stockings which tried so hard to look bright and new. The girl knew that his loving, earnest glance was resting upon her, and there was a flush on her cheeks, and tears in her eyes as she gazed up at the sad, handsome face above her.

When the packing was finished they sat down together again, and there, beneath the waving trees, by the splashing stream, they made their vows. They whispered sweet words to each other, and talked of the future. But these things are not for other ears.

So the man went away.

Five years later he wrote this letter:

"MY DARLING LITTLE GIRL,—All is ready, everything is prepared for you, come out to me at once. At last I shall meet you again. Every moment of the past five years I have yearned for this time. Sleeping and waking I have thought of nothing but you. And now the time has come. I only want you—I would to heaven that I could have written before. Three weeks ago I was starving—I had not a penny in the world. But this is a wonderful land, and my old luck came back to me, and then, as they say out here, 'I struck it rich.' So come out to me, at once, my darling, I will tell you all when I see you. I cannot write much now. Do you remember when we worked together in that dingy warehouse. How sad it all was, and yet, even then, we were very happy. But we shall be a thousand times happier now, after these five long years of weary waiting.—Your own Boy."

P.S.—Notes inclosed.

The girl was sitting alone in a little room at the top of a big tenement building when the postman brought her this letter. She opened it eagerly, and the notes fluttered down on the floor. Putting the letter on one side, she stooped hastily down to collect them. She counted them up, and then she kissed the thin pieces of paper, and, going to the door, called loudly for her landlady. She paid her bill, and, telling the good woman that she might keep the few belongings that she left behind her, she went hastily down the steps, and hailing a cab, drove rapidly away from the slums, and presently sprang out at the door of a fashionable costumiers. Here she ordered an extravagant outfit. After that she drove to an hotel, and it was not until she sank down in an easy chair, after having finished a sumptuous lunch, that she thought of her lover's letter. She read it through, and then put it lightly on one side.

"Hasty boy," she said, "how eager he his."

Looking up the steamers, she found that there was one which left for America the next day. She turned over the page, and settled to take a boat which went three days later.

"I must enjoy myself here, now that I have the chance," she said to herself.

Her lover on the other side of the Atlantic watched impatiently every liner that came in. One day, when he was at his post as usual, his eye was attracted by the magnificent dress which a woman, who was standing near, was wearing. Suddenly he started eagerly forward—how well he knew every line of that face and figure. It was absurd of him to have supposed that she would have come out in the little worn hat, and the shabby coat.

At that moment the girl turned round. Her eyes met his but she did not appear to notice him. The man restrained himself, and then the girl, in all her finery, swept past him. He followed slowly, with a strange sinking at his heart, and presently saw her enter a carriage.

He motioned the driver to stop, and then with renewed hope, and with a smile on his face, he sprang on the step and stood before her.

The girl looked at him for a moment, and then drew back, and called to the driver to proceed.

"It is something like him," she was saying to herself, "but it is not the same man. My boy was tall and clean shaven and straight as an arrow. Bah! I could never love a man like that. How rugged looking he was!"

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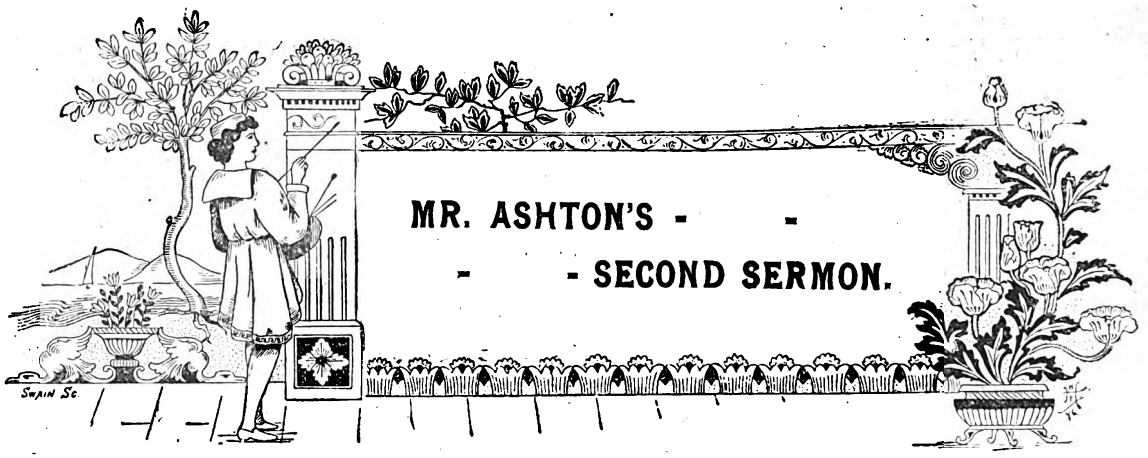

MR. ASHTON'S - - - - SECOND SERMON.

Her bold, black eyes stared at him as he went by the open bar-room door. She stood on the threshold, and Mr. Ashton flushed at her smile as he passed. She had long since ceased to blush, others might do it for her, but she was in no wise ashamed of her appearance. Strangely out of place she looked in the garish light, laughing and joking with the rough men near her. Such a girlish embodiment of the vice he was seeking the young minister was not prepared to behold. The heavy-footed, coarse-faced men, smoking strong-smelling pipes and sickening cigars, the imitation dandies, with swaggering gait and flaring neckties, they seemed to belong to the vicious place. But the girl, with her handsome face, plump arms and shoulders, bare as if she were in a ballroom, and her scanty pink dress barely reaching to her knees, she was startlingly incongruous. So young, so pretty, so hardened, going down so swiftly to the gates of hell! Ah, it was pitiful.

The Rev. Edward Ashton sighed compassionately as he went into the hall adjoining the bar-room. A few lamps ranged along the walls shone dully through a blue haze of tobacco smoke. Long, wooden settees covered the floor, which was dirty and uncarpeted. It was Saturday night, and a larger number than usual of men and youths lounged upon the seats or gathered in groups about the hall, across the rear end of which extended a stage, with footlights and curtain. A low, dingy-white gallery, connecting with the stage and running half-way round the room, was divided into a dozen or more little stalls, called "wine-rooms." In them, certain moneyed and reckless patrons of the place could sit at their ease while drinking and viewing the stage and scene below, or they could, with curtains, screen themselves completely from the public gaze, as they preferred.

His first sermon, delivered the Sunday before, had made a profound impression. It had set all the better portion of the community to talking about this plague spot. The Mirror printed the sermon in full, with warm editorial indorsement. It applauded his earnest, fiery declaration that he would not, could not, discuss dogmas and creeds living or dead, till he had done his best to start a crusade against the pestilential sin at their very doors. Until this foul snare—which was set before their eyes openly, but into which even the boys from his Sunday-school were blindly walking—until this was destroyed, there was no higher or holier duty to perform, no more vital theme to dwell upon. It was a strong stirring blast from a mail-clad warrior, who did not seek in distant lands for the foe in his own house.

With the crusading spirit strong within him, Mr. Ashton, in the midst of his preparation of his second sermon, determined to slip out of his study quietly and see the monster of vice with his own eyes. Then, returning with its hideous visage still fresh in mind, he could vividly describe it on the morrow.

So, taking a seat well up to the stage, for he was rather near-sighted, he looked about him. It could scarcely be pharisaical, he thought, with a shudder of disgust, to thank the Lord that he was not as some other men were—such as those around him. What enjoyment could they get out of such repulsive places? The foul air was hot and nauseating. Already he felt slightly feverish, and his head was beginning to throb. There was none of the glitter and glare which he had expected to find. But, of course, it was early yet; he would wait as best he could for the curtain to rise.

The whining of a fiddle, followed by the clamour of a small orchestra, interrupted his thoughts, and presently up went the lights and the curtain. It was a variety performance, somewhat above the average. Mr. Ashton was forced to confess to himself that the stage performance was a deal more innocent than the surroundings. To be sure, some of the actresses appeared in tights, and all of them wore abbreviated skirts, but so, he knew, did actresses occasionally in theatres and opera-houses of the higher respectability. Stamp out the bar and wine-rooms, and there would be nothing so very debasing about the resort he decided. And after that he made no more mental memoranda. For upon the stage came one who instantly caught and held his serious, short-sighted eyes as none had done before. He leant forward breathlessly, his heart beating like a sledge-hammer, a scarlet line on either cheek. The voluptuous form, so freely displayed, did not affect him in the least, but the face—the face! he could see nothing else.

It thrilled him with a nameless ecstasy, the arch glance from the sparkling eyes, the pouting red lips, the curves of chin and cheek guiltless of paint, it was to him no gaudy dancer, but a living picture, suddenly advancing from out of a hidden nook of a half-forgotten time. Who—who was she? Of whom did she so vividly remind him? He caught up his flimsy programme: "Belle la Reine, the famous Queen of the variety stage." It was a lie. She was not a creature of that sort. Did she look at him then? Did she know him, though he could not recognise her? His hands grew moist as he twisted the

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programme round them nervously. She sang to him alone, of that he was positive, and if he could have seen himself as she saw him, his clear-cut intellectual face standing out in sharp contrast to the heavy features around him, he might not have wondered that she looked at him as she did.

Her dancing, though graceful, annoyed him; her songs he did not hear, except one that told of bygone love, *that* stirred him strangely. She seemed to talk to him with her eyes, and held him spellbound. But it could not last for ever. She vanished the way she had come, and with a choking gasp he realised that she was gone. For him the lights were out, the performance ended. He sat dazed for a few minutes, and then, grasping his hat, was about to leave his seat, having seen much more than he came to see, when a boy touched his elbow and handed him a slip of paper. Seeming intuitively to know what it meant, he unfolded the note and read at a glance:

"An old friend would like to see you. Follow the boy."

He was comparatively a stranger in the city, probably nobody in the hall knew him. But he did not stop to reason. Certainly he could not be blamed for following the boy to see an old friend. He had no thought of turning back even when his small guide led him into the low gallery, by way of the side-door near the stage. Before he fully realised where he was, he stood in one of the dimly-lit wine-rooms, alone with the queen of the variety stage. She sat with her back to the audience-room below, between which and her snowy shoulders was a dingy curtain. Still arrayed in her scanty dancing attire, her dainty, silvery shoes elevated to the edge of a round table upon which were bottles and glasses, she coolly surveyed him.

"You wished to see me?" he said hesitatingly, advancing a step.

"Certainly," she replied, taking her feet off the table and rising; "but I don't want to see you as white as a ghost. What is the matter?"

"It is the foul air below. I am not used to it, and I have had a few dizzy spells lately," he murmured unsteadily, leaning on the table as, for an instant, even she seemed blurred and far-away looking.

She came to him at once, took his hat from his nerveless hand, and ran her cool fingers soothingly over his aching forehead.

"Here, down with this and you'll feel better," she said, pouring out some liquor from one of the bottles. He recoiled with a shudder, put the glass from his lips, and stepped back.

"You mistake," he said gravely; "I am not a frequenter of this place—I am a clergyman."

"As if I didn't know you," she laughed gaily; "and to think you don't know *me!* Don't you really recognise me? Come, look at me, once, good and hard, and see if I am not an old friend."

She poised airily before him, and then, as he still seemed puzzled, she said softly:

"Ned!"

A flame of red shot across the Rev. Edward Ashton's pallid face.

"Olive! Olive Faveur! My God! is it *you?*" he whispered, and sank into a chair by the table, staring at her dumbly, she still smiling. The minister was a young man, but his heart had once been wrung by this same fair woman. No, not the same. That was years ago, and she was then not as she must be now. Equally enthralling she had been to him then, though! and most terribly had she disappointed both him and all her friends. She it was who had turned his life-course. In the bitterness of his sorrow over her mad conduct he had set his face heavenward. And he had not known her that night till then!

There is an excellent story by Mr. George Griffith just commenced in "Pearson's Weekly." It is entitled, "Briton or Boer?" and deals with the fight for supremacy in South Africa.

She saw that he was profoundly moved, but she did not know how fiercely he was trying to crush back the feeling which burnt in his eyes as he looked at her.

Perching on the table, she caught hold of his hand and began to talk to him of old times. But he did not listen to her. He was conscious of the squealing of the orchestra violins, the stamping of heavy feet, and the tomfoolery upon the stage. In the adjoining stall he heard a drunken man trying to sing a ribald song with a woman, who was laughing at the maudlin attempt. Presently, though soft fingers held his own and a fascinating face was close to his, though satiny shoulders were so near him—presently he would rise and put Satan from him.

But he could not do it instantly. She was so frankly joyous, so merrily bewitching, not a repellent line from her laughing eyes to the tiny shoes whose heels she was knocking together as she sat before him. With an inward wrench he shut his eyes, and was about to stand erect and forbidding, when he was shocked by a chuckling laugh behind him. Withdrawing his hand from hers, as if from the touch of fire, he turned his head with a guilty flush. A man in a flaxen wig and comedian's stage-garb, stood in the curtained doorway.

"I know that they're guilty; but oh, they're *so* sly!" laughed the intruder, repeating a line of a topical song he had just been singing on the stage, and bowing low, he disappeared.

Mr. Ashton reached for his hat, the flush dying out of his face and leaving it very pale. But she put out her hand restrainingly, a quick glitter of anger melting to tenderness in her marvellously expressive eyes.

"It's only Jack," she said hastily; "don't mind him nor his impertinence."

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"Jack?" questioned Mr. Ashton hoarsely, wavering again under her glance.

"Yes," she said carelessly; "but he never troubles me. I do as I please in all things. You needn't think of retreating now, though. He has caught you, fairly or unfairly. If you went now he would be sure to have it in the morning papers, and make a few shillings out of the scandal, don't you see. But if you will bide a wee, and be sociable and sensible, I'll answer for it that not a whisper from him gets to the sensitive ears of your goody-goody friends."

Each word sank like burning acid deep into the young minister's heart. His face grew ghastly, and the little red-curtained stall swam round and round, the bright creature leaning towards him seemed to be receding in a luminous mist.

"Olive, Olive!" he gasped, reaching out wildly towards her.

"My poor old puritan Ned," she said softly, sinking on her knees before him; "let this and me cheer you. For once forget everything but that you and I are here; neither of us will ever be here again, and never again, perhaps, will be together. Drown care and enjoy yourself, Ned, dear old boy."

She lifted the glass he had once rejected to his lips. He, this time, clutched it, and, though it was not wine, but a far stronger liquor, he drank it to the last drops as if it were cooling water.

* * * * *

In the grey of the Sunday morning, while the town was still slumbering, a tall, black-coated priestly figure stole homeward like a belated night-thief. Snow had fallen during the darkness, and the wide street of the town was smooth and trackless, white and soft as wool beneath his hurrying feet. His footprints, showing a black trail behind him on the stones, seemed to his feverish eyes to mark the passage of a foul thing over the dazzling purity, each step defiling the spotless way. Reaching his residence, he let himself in with his latch-key, and, in another minute, noiseless as a burglar, he was hidden in his study.

Brazen bells clanged out in the crisp wintry air, calling to church the just and the unjust, earthly saints and human sinners. The broad streets, housetops, and fences gleamed in the sun, each evenly incrusted with frozen jewels by the gentle snowfall. The ringing laughter of boys snowballing one another by the kerb-stones, mingled with the music of the bells.

Ladies in furs and silks, gentlemen in overcoats and broadcloth, followed the soft-footed ushers up the richly-carpeted aisles to the luxurious pews. Flowers rare and costly were before the pulpit, and added to their fragrance were the delicate perfumes from numerous fairer roses in the shape of the city's most beautiful daughters. The pews were filled to the last one. It was a great congregation—the greatest the church had ever held. So the reporter decided, as he sharpened his pencils and noted the prominent men present, from the mayor down.

The fame of the young minister's eloquence had gathered together all of the city's leaders to listen to his second sermon. But he was late in appearing. Minute after minute went by, the organ ceased to sound and then began again. The official chief of the church's laymen grew uneasy. It would be a great pity to disappoint such a splendid assembly by an untimely sick-headache. He did not know that the young minister might even then be working at his sermon, with flaming eyes and trembling fingers, trying to make up for lost time. But he did know that the Rev. Mr. Ashton had not looked over strong. Finally, he slipped into his overcoat and went out in search of the tardy preacher. It was but a few steps to the pastor's residence.

"Mr. Ashton, I think, is still in his study," said the housekeeper; "I have not seen him this morning."

"But it is late," protested the churchman in soft indignation at such thoughtlessness. Eloquence was not punctuality, and there were the mayor and the highest people in the city kept waiting. He tapped sharply at the study-door, then he called and shook the knob. Then, finding the door locked, and being assured by the now alarmed housekeeper that the minister must be there, he, being a strong man, and by this time excited, burst the lock and flung open the door.

In the chilly study, darkened by the drawn curtains at the windows, nothing but cold ashes in the grate, the minister lay sleeping his last sleep. Drawn up to his writing-table upon a lounge was extended his black-coated form. The upturned face, though rigid in death, yet showed lingering upon the white lips a tender smile, as if in the solemn repose he had been visited by a pleasant dream. A bottle labelled "chloral" stood upon the table. The churchman groaned in horror:

"He must have felt nervous and taken an overdose! He has been dead for hours."

Beneath the bottle lay two scraps of paper, upon one was pencilled:

"An old friend would like to see you. Follow the boy."

Upon the other, a trembling scrawl, the pencil still beside it:

"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

Charles Robert Harker.

JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 9.

Six Prizes, one of £5 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the next page in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, but the title and author's name are jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, August 31st.

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JUMBLED STORY. No. 9.]

INSIDE OF THE FARM.

To look at him and Miss Erskine, you would have settled down on him. He was no longer impatient, and instead of being the worst, had developed into the best conspirator.

Johnson blew a big cloud of tobacco smoke.

"I tell you, Arnold, you are making an ass of her. Miss Ralston is a fine girl, old fellow, but a hard party to a burglary, or hatching conspiracy against the development of a pet case.

"Sit down, old man," said the other; "I do believe it is clear that you showed your hand too soon. The success of the whole business will be in your chucking something like a groan, "but what can I do? If I only have no scruples about employing artifices, why should your cousin, Miss Erskine, promised to marry me yourself."

"You need not say any more about it," said Arnold, oblivious to the fact that there is a Miss Ralston in the hat.

"The girl doesn't want me, Johnson, that's clear."

"I do," said Johnson, wringing his hand with a vigour which his friend had suddenly and unexpectedly played tennis together, and were generally inseparable. It will be very easy to see from the way Miss Ralston said they were friends of very long standing. His scheme had told him that she had been told all about throwing away his half-smoked cigar and picking up his expression of his face.

On the evening of Miss Erskine's arrival, he dressed Johnson, in the drawing-room, showed no signs of that infernal reserve of yours to the dogs. You must with the keen eye of a doctor observing the details and conscious participation, though the proposer of the idea of a man proposing to a woman he has known only to serve as a tool in this way?" asked Arnold dubiously. of affairs."

"Oh, it is very simple," said Johnson; "and I shall know how the plot had progressed during his absence.

"There is no use," said Arnold wearily; "and, besides, that I have an idea. I'm going to do you a good turn. Leave it to me to find out for you what is the exact state that made the other wince; "and I hope she won't be into the spirit of the thing. But remember this, the triumph was increased, though it was dashed by just a night, but I can't, and that's the end of it. Why would we?"

All Arnold's old mopishness has flown away, too. I stay?"

"I know I am," said the individual addressed, with little remorse, as he saw Miss Ralston watching them leave it in my hands. You shall see how she will enter this afternoon."

With many misgivings, Arnold consented to be a party with a peculiar look in her eyes.

But the young girl who was sitting beside Mrs. Johnson felt that his plot was going to be a success, surprised, though she tried to hide it, when told that Arnold was the first person he saw as he descended from the situation and had given her promise of assistance.

"It is not clear that the girl does not want you, but you'll make a mess of it. What is your plan?"

But Mrs. Johnson said nothing.

"Splendidly," said Arnold; "you shall be the first to be as light as air, and go about with her as if quite angry with me for planning the deception we played on the train.

"But what will the other girl say? Will she consent to-day."

Finally, she asked him how long Arnold and Providence had cut him out for a diplomatist.

Among those who came in later was Miss Ralston. The hero and substituted heroine walked together, away?" said he, with a fine professional interest.

"We won't have to keep it up much longer," said Mr. State.

He knew that there was something wrong from the place."

Early next week he had to go up to town. At the end Miss Erskine had known each other. She seemed developed.

Mr. Johnson gave her an opportunity of talking to himself with special care and went up to the house. He was prepared to be very ill at ease with his fellow-girl in the world, and would do anything for me. Just serves her right to get this lesson."

During the next week the comedy progressed gaily. The consciousness of coming success seemed to have them passing the place where the lady sat for whose bow stiffly.

"Well how have things been going while I was to the deception. He felt as if he were a prospective company in the world.

Every sign given by the person deceived he watched when he saw Arnold take no more notice of her than to not make a mess of it. I shall supply her with a rival.

He wondered a little at the gift for realistic acting takes it how you really stand in her eyes. Since women is coming down to stay with us. She is the dearest one to manage."

Johnson one day told his wife that he believed him, but she made no allusion to the other couple for a three days!"

"Oh, I'll make that square. My cousin, Miss Erskine, had the courage I would clear out of Brighton this very long time.

"Miss Ralston!" said Arnold; "why, my dear boy, of three days he came back. He was quite curious to congratulate me, old man. It was all settled Johnson; "that is gloriously well acted."

"She does care for him," he said to himself; "but it they had met for the first time that day.

One evening on the pier, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson was benefit the play was arranged.

MRS. MAGDEIOR

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THE YOUNG RECRUIT.

From the Russian of W. Korolenko.

It was Easter Eve, 187—.

For some hours it had been dark. Still warm from the heat of the day, caressed by a faint breeze, the earth exhaled the sunlight it had absorbed in a light mist through which the rays of myriads of stars shone fitfully.

All was quiet in the little town pending the hour of the Easter dawn which the bells of the Cathedral would announce. But, hushed as the town was, it did not sleep, and, in spite of the darkness which reigned everywhere, and of the deserted streets, one became conscious of a feeling of expectancy, of some impending event for which all were waiting. From time to time a workman, who had been detained to finish some preparation for the morrow's festival, would pass on his homeward way, then all would be still again.

The moon had not yet risen and the little town was lying in the shadow of a hill crowned by a large and gloomy building, from each angle of which there rose a tower, its pointed roof standing out dimly against the sky.

Presently, from the cathedral belfry, a single bell rang out upon the night air. And, in a moment, every church took up the signal, warning the inhabitants of the near approach of the hour all were awaiting.

* * * * *

On the hill the gloomy door of the prison opened, and a half-company of soldiers marched out to relieve the sentries.

They made the circle of the walls, stopping here and there. The group halted at each post, and a single form detached itself from the black mass, its place being taken by another shape which advanced towards the relief out of the blackness of the night. Then the soldiers resumed their march.

On the western face a young recruit took up his post. His movements, still clumsy and undecided, proclaimed the newly-conscripted rustic, and his face bore an expression of strained attention which betrayed his inexperience.

He turned his face to the wall and grounded his rifle, then with a half-turn brought himself shoulder to shoulder with the man he was relieving. The latter repeated his orders.

"From one angle to the other—be on your guard," he murmured hurriedly.

The recruit listened with attention; over his face there flitted a shade of melancholy.

"Understand?" asked the corporal of the guard.

"Yes."

"Well, keep your eyes open. It's nothing to be nervous about, Fadéiff," he added, "goodness! man, you're not a woman!"

The relief resumed its march and disappeared behind the angle of the tower. The new sentry, rifle on shoulder, slowly paced the length of his beat.

* * * * *

As the last sound of the bell died away the stir of life began to show itself inside the prison. The doors of the cells were opened and the prisoners, each clad in his *khalate*, the fatal club-shaped piece of coloured cloth, corresponding to the English broad-arrow, sewn on to the middle of his back, came out one by one, forming long processions in the corridors. Two by two they passed into the prison church and, turning right and left, filled two inclosures guarded by strong and high palisades. Save the cells in the four corner towers the prison proper was now empty, excepting that in one of the common rooms a sick man was left lying on his plank-bed. The warder, warned of his sudden illness, came to examine him.

"Ivanoff! do you hear me, Ivanoff?" he called.

The prisoner did not stir. He murmured some unintelligible words in a muffled voice, moving his swollen, parched lips with effort.

"To the infirmary to-morrow," the warder ordered.

He left the room, leaving the watchman he had brought with him at the door. The latter scrutinised the invalid closely. "Ah!" he muttered, nodding slowly. "Prison life is nearly over for you, I fancy."

Decidedly there was nothing to be done, no object to be gained by remaining. He went to the door of the church, leaving the prisoner alone, and followed the service attentively, crossing himself and bowing every moment.

The wanderings of the delirious convict alone broke the silence of the deserted room. He was a man of middle age, strong and muscular. Fate had treated him unkindly; he had escaped from imprisonment in Siberia, braving a thousand dangers in crossing the Steppes, impelled by one motive, an incurable home-sickness. To see his native village, his own people once more, were it only for a month, a day, an hour—then, come what might.

But within a hundred versts of home, having accomplished so much of his perilous journey, he was re-captured and thrown into the prison where he now lay, apparently dying. He ceased to wander, his eyes opened, and his breathing became normal. Presently he sat up, staring straight in front of him, and a gleam of reason flashed across his face. He saw before him—this convict imprisoned for life—an open door!

With a single bound he was in the corridor. Some one left the church, holding the door ajar for a moment, and the sound of chanting, softened by the distance, fell upon his ear. He thought of the church in his native village, overshadowed by the rustling branches of the great pines, filled with old friends of his youth; how often at this season he had heard the same chant there!

* * * * *

The young recruit, armed with his rifle, paced his beat. Before him, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the vast plain, as yet hardly clear of the winter's snow. A soft breeze blew, the long grass of last year bending and rustling under it.

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The sentry halted, his back to the wall, and letting the butt of his rifle slip to the ground, he placed his hands on the muzzle, resting his head on them. He no longer asked himself why he was there this Easter Eve, gazing out over the deserted plain. In all respects he was still a simple peasant, not grasping many things familiar enough to soldiers as a rule. It was so short a time since he was free, master of his own welfare, his own fields, his own labour. And now some instinctive fear, inexplicable, motiveless, pursued his every step, breaking in his simple nature by sheer force of stern discipline.

He, too, saw his village; the same soft breeze blew there, the church was lighted up, and above it, also, rose the great, rustling pine trees.

Just above where he was standing, a black patch appeared over the crest of the wall; it was a man's head. The fugitive scanned the plain and the dim outline of the shadowy forest which lay on the horizon. He drew a long breath of fresh night air, and, hanging by his hands, let himself drop to the ground.

* * * * *

The joyous clanging of the church bells rang out upon the air. In the prison the door of the church swung open and the long procession of convicts defiled into the courtyard. The soldier drew himself to his full height and, baring his head, prepared to cross himself. His hand raised to his forehead, he stood petrified with astonishment. The escaping prisoner had just reached the ground.

"Halt! halt!" the sentry cried, raising his rifle.

The hidden fear which had previously weighed upon him like a nightmare took form and fled. "Duty." "Responsibility." The words passed like lightning through his brain. He raised his rifle to his shoulder and covered the fugitive, but before firing he closed his eyes.

In the town now, the joyous carillons were pealing, and the prison bells still filled all the air with melody, while from the church, in waves of glorious sound came the triumphal song "Christ is risen."

On the other side of the wall, above all the music of bells and organ there rang out the sharp report of a rifle. A stifled cry, a groan, answered it immediately, and then all was silence, broken only by the echoes of the rifle's report, and the dying vibrations of the bells.

Barely Saved.

All London was flocking to the exhibition. Among all the busy pleasure-seeking crowd one person seemed to find no interest or amusement in his surroundings.

Seated on a chair in the gardens, his legs outstretched before him, his crush hat tilted over his eyes, Guy Merivale presented a picture of despair. His smart evening dress, his polished boots and fastidiously correct tie, seemed to mark him as a member of society unlikely to be troubled by lack of money. But, as a matter of fact, Guy was at this moment fingering in the recesses of his pocket the last few sovereigns he owned in the world.

A clerk in the Foreign Office, he had never found the service of his country either pleasant or profitable; and now the sudden death of an uncle had deprived him not only of a liberal allowance in the present, but also of that provision for his future which an unsigned will had contemplated.

An unusual knowledge of languages and much acquaintance with foreign countries might have served him well in his career; but he had little interest in high circles to advance his claims. The only vacant appointment offered him was that of a minor consulship on the Gold Coast of Africa.

"The Gold Coast it must be, then," sighed Guy to himself.

He had been warned that his acceptance of even this offer must be immediate.

A shilling exhibition was a cheap amusement, and he thought that among its sights and sounds he could find time for solitary reflection if not for relief from his own thought.

A girl with blue eyes and fair wavy hair was moving through the crowd in front of him, leaning on the arm of a tall, soldierly looking man, evidently her father. Her nervous glances and shrinking attitude suggested that the situation was either novel or alarming to her.

"Why, Mabel," her companion whispered to her, "you are surely not afraid of a little crush like this? It is not so bad as the carnival crowd at Florence."

"Oh, don't talk of Florence, father," she replied. "I, can never think of Italy without remembering that terrible trial, when I had to give evidence against Ferari, who stabbed our butler."

"A contemptible wretch!" said her father. "Do not think of him. Ferari was sentenced to the galleys for life; he won't trouble you any more."

The girl sighed.

"That's just what I can't help doing," she said. "I can never forget how he swore to be revenged on me wherever I went. As he was leaving the dock he turned to the crowd of villainous looking Italians who had come to give evidence for him, and cried out:

"'Ostia, remember your brother, Giulo, and remember also this white-faced, chattering English girl.'"

"Pooh! empty threats, child."

"It terrified me, though, when they muttered among themselves, and a black-bearded Italian held up his hand, and as he fixed his dark eyes on me, cried:

"'Giulo, I will remember; she shall not escape.'"

"Come, come, Mabel," said her father; "in England you need not fear an Italian Mafia. I may as well tell you that the man you thought was my secretary the other day is a detective, and is following us now. It was quite unnecessary, but it may give you an extra feeling of security."

"How dreadful, father!" exclaimed the girl, shuddering. "I always thought he was your new secretary."

"Not quite," laughed her father. "I've not been able to find one yet. The young Foreign Office gentlemen were all cuffs, collars, and red tape. I want to find some one with more character and backbone—someone I can depend on in an emergency."

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Guy Merivale, who had been watching the girl with some interest, though pretty faces were no novelty to him, caught the word "dinner" as they passed. He was getting hungry himself, so he rose, and sauntering to a restaurant at the top of the garden chose a table in a retired corner. Hardly had he done so when the girl and her father entered and sat down at the next table, taking their seats with their backs towards him. As they did so the father made a signal, and a man who had been following them at a few paces distant stepped up to him.

"You can leave us for half-an-hour, Davis," he said. "You had better get some dinner for yourself."

The restaurant was almost deserted. But late as it was, Merivale did not feel inclined to move in search of other amusement. Not even the champagne could raise his spirits. He paid his bill, and, as his waiter cleared the table and disappeared, leant his head on his hands and gave himself up to his own gloomy thoughts. Had he been less abstracted he might have noticed the waiter at the next table regarding him intently.

"*Basta!*" he muttered to himself; "the great, drunken English pig sleeps."

At this moment Mabel's father called for his bill, and having paid it, remarked that he wanted to get a good cigar outside.

"And then," he added, "we'll go and listen to the band."

As her father left the room Mabel leant back in her chair, and through the open window near her watched the crowd as they moved in the lamplit gardens below. Humming over to herself the refrain of the music, she fell into a reverie, while queer fancies wandered through her mind, born of the spirit of the hour.

Suddenly the voice of the waiter broke in upon her meditations. Leaning over her, with his right hand on the back of her chair, he was offering her a glass of green Chartreuse upon a plate, held rather clumsily in his left hand.

"Will madame take a liqueur?" he was saying, in the soft tone peculiar to Italians.

"No, thank you," she replied shortly, impatient at being disturbed.

He bent his head rather close to hers, and there was an instant change in his voice.

"Madame will drink," he whispered; "she will also not scream nor move, else will I stab her to the heart." And through her dress she felt the sharp point of a stiletto pressed against her back.

"Has she forgotten Firenze?" he continued in a rapid concentrated whisper. "Behold Ostia Ferari!"

Another girl might have instantly screamed or fainted. Mabel felt turned to stone, as the blood ebbed cold from her heart.

There was a mist before her eyes, and a buzzing in her ears; and yet she could still hear the band playing a waltz, and she found herself thinking of the ball she was to have gone to that very night.

Slowly moving her head, she looked at the Italian with staring eyes, while her face turned white to the lips. Though his beard was gone, and his cheeks shaved clean and blue, she recognised the fierce black eyes she had seen in the court at Florence. And in those eyes she read—death.

"It is poisoned," she whispered in a faltering voice, as she gazed shrinkingly at the green, transparent liquid.

"And if it is," he answered mockingly, "it will not hurt. I would save the signora's white skin from an ugly mark—and my own neck. Quick, drink before the signor returns," he muttered, "or I will use the knife!" And she started as the sharp point of his dagger pierced her flesh.

Anything for a moment's time. Like a dove fascinated by the gaze of a serpent, she took the glass, and with her eyes fixed on his moved it to her lips.

As the rim touched them she saw a sudden spasm cross the Italian's face; a strong hand was pressing his neck, and in a moment he was hurled backwards.

Not an instant too soon. Guy Merivale at the next table had lost all thought of his pretty neighbour; but still the tune she was unconsciously humming caught his ears. Suddenly it had stopped, and the low whispers arrested his attention.

Looking up he saw the white, panic-stricken face of the girl over the waiter's shoulder; and beneath the napkin that covered his right hand as it rested on her chair he saw a bright knob, which, his Italian travels had taught him, was the hilt of a stiletto.

It was a moment for action rather than thought. Without a sound he moved his chair, till his long arm could reach the dagger, and then he threw himself on the Italian.

There was a crash of glass as the liqueur fell on the girl's dress—a hoarse *maledicto* as the Italian felt the stiletto torn from his grasp, and all was over.

Almost instantly her father entered the room, followed by the detective; and as the former bent over the girl with trembling lips, the latter seized the Italian.

"Neatly done, sir," he whispered to Merivale. "I will take good care of him. I know him now; the Italian police want him for a worse job than this. I will see that they get him."

The Italian was instantly hurried out of a side door by the manager and detective before the few occupants of the almost empty room had time to ask what was the matter.

"Your name, sir?" said the elder gentleman, turning to the younger man.

"Guy Merivale," he replied.

"Mr. Merivale, I owe you a thousand thanks;" and then he added tremblingly, "God bless you, sir; she is my only daughter."

Then, as he grasped his hand, he said:

"You will know my name, though we have never met. I think an application from you was handed to me on my return to the Foreign Office to-day. I am more than glad to owe this service to your father's son."

Drawing the young man aside, he continued:

"I see you have been appointed to the Gold Coast. I presume that you have no particular preference for that climate?"

"I can't say that I have," said Merivale, smiling; "but my letter will have explained. I have no choice."

"Then, Mr. Merivale, I will give you one. I heard to-night of your gifts as a linguist, and I have learned your coolness and courage. I have just been appointed Minister to one of the Balkan States. If you will accept the post of attaché to the legation and the duties of my private secretary, you will confer a personal favour on me. Come, no thanks, it is a bargain," he added, as Guy tried to express his gratitude; "and now let my daughter try and thank you."

Turning to the girl as she rose from her chair with swimming eyes and quivering lips, he said:

"Mabel, let me introduce to you Mr. Guy Merivale. I have found in him the son of an old friend—a gallant gentleman—and my new secretary."

PERCY WINCE.

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PAUPER BLUE BLOOD

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

CHARACTERS.

SEFTON RAVENSCROFT.—Son of the late Sir Reginald Ravenscroft and a pauper, owing to his father's failure.

GEORGINA PLUFF.—A governess in the family until Sir Reginald's death, when she intimidates Sefton into marrying her.

JOHN PLUFF.—A wealthy retired grocer, and cousin to Georgina Pluff (Lady Ravenscroft). In return for attendance at his dinners and At Homes, he supplies her with money.

MRS. RATHBONE.—A widow of whom John Pluff is rather fond, to the disgust of Georgina, who anticipates becoming his sole heiress.

LADY NORAH CANNINGTON.—In love with Sefton but who is compelled by her father to break off the engagement, owing to the former's poverty, and marry the Duke of Malvern.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ILLNESS OF MR. PLUFF.

THE pool was deep, but a moment later an apparition past recognition struck out for the bank, while Mr. Pluff followed bewildered.

Mrs. Rathbone on finding her feet, pointed pleadingly to something that was floating down the stream.

"Oh! save it! save it!" she implored.

"What?" asked Mr. Pluff, wading towards her in his dripping flannels, his eyes too full of water to notice the pseudo widow's short grey curls.

"My wig. For mercy's sake get it back. Oh! you *foolish* old man!" as John gaped stupidly.

Then the embarrassing situation gradually crept over his shocked senses. Mrs. Rathbone was false to the very locks that had first fascinated him. Georgina was right, and that little red speck now almost out of sight—— But his train of thought suddenly took more practical form, as he saw the dejected woman sink in weeping anguish upon a mossy boulder.

Seizing a canoe paddle which had drifted ashore, he ran along the bank till he reached the tree beneath which they had moored. The wig caught in a low bough, and lay within easy reach of the paddle.

A moment later, Mr. Pluff retraced his steps sadly, bearing the last remnant of his shattered illusion.

Mr. Pluff retraced his steps sadly.

How poor a thing it seemed now, that bedraggled mass of wet, damp hair.

Mrs. Rathbone rose to meet him, her face strangely altered by the washing away of delicate pink powder, the revelation of wrinkles hitherto concealed.

She snatched the wig almost angrily from him, without a word of thanks for its rescue, and forced it in a sodden, unbecoming mass upon her head.

Her dress hung in limp ungainly folds about her figure, she was shivering and frightened, unnerved by the alarming possibility of having to return without her Titian headgear.

"We'd better get home and shift as fast as we can," said Mr. Pluff; "the canoe can't drift farther than the stepping stones, and I'll pay the lad for the damage."

He offered Mrs. Rathbone his arm mechanically, but she refused it, and marched ahead with her nose tilted in the air, and the drops from her dishevelled curls trickling down her collar.

Mr. Pluff paused to shake the sand out of his shoes, but save an occasional grumble for the discomfort he had been caused by his own clumsiness, their conversation was nil.

He walked with Mrs. Rathbone to her door, advised her to take "an 'ot bath," offering her his damp hand in parting.

She refused it however with set lips.

"Ain't you going to say good-bye? Let us part friends, eh, Mrs. R.?"

"I shall not forget or forgive your cruel words to me to-day, unless you will retract them, Mr. Pluff."

"I say what I mean, and I stick to it," he answered.

"I shall leave early to-morrow," replied Mrs. Rathbone. "But I cannot refrain from remarking that I am bitterly disappointed in you, my once friend!"

"*You* are disappointed! Well, that's funny! I thought the complaining would be all on my side. I'm the one that's been 'umbugged, remember!"

"You have shaken my faith in mankind, Mr. Pluff," she said, as a parting shaft as she turned away.

"And I'll be blessed if I ever believe in a woman again," he muttered to himself, walking back in a very different mood to the one in which he had started out.

Georgina met him in the garden. She flung up her hands, and rushed towards him.

"Oh! John, what *has* happened?"

"Well, it speaks for itself!" he replied, shaking his wet coat. "We've had a regular upset this afternoon all round. Georgina, my dear, kiss me!"

The tone in which he demanded this embrace chilled Lady Ravenscroft.

The worst had come, and she must congratulate him.

She obeyed half-heartedly. He did not look a prepossessing figure to caress.

"I'm well out of it, Georgie, my girl," he muttered wiping away the moisture round his eyes.

"Yes, you might have been drowned. I suppose you saved Mrs. Rathbone's life, and that is how it came to a climax."

"Lor, no! Mrs. R. swam like a fish. But oh, it *was* a climax!"

"And—and—you—are—going—to—marry—her?"

Georgina gasped the question faintly. Her head reeled.

"Marry Mrs. Rathbone?"

His voice vibrated with rage.

"No, my eyes have been opened, and we've parted for ever."

Lady Ravenscroft flung her arms about John Pluff's stout shoulders, and hugged him in regular earnest. Her feelings were too great for words.

"Yes," he continued, "you were right from the first, you are always correct, Georgina, and I ought to have known, and been guided by your clever diagnosis of character. I'll stick to you, my lass, for the future, and not stray after false goddesses! The fact is, dearie, you're the only one I can trust, and, thank God, there are exceptions to every rule, but for the majority I say women are a dashed set of impostors, and I've done with them!"

"You dear old darling!" she cried joyfully; "I can't tell you how relieved I am that you are saved from Mrs. Rathbone. I always knew her to be untrustworthy — a sheep in wolf's clothing. Why, her very hair advertised the fact. But *do* tell me what she has done!"

"No, no, Georgie, I draw the line at that. What I have learned of her was told me in confidence, and not all the cajoling in Christendom would squeeze it out of me. I shall wipe her from my life!"

He seemed to have forgotten his wet clothing, and September evenings are treacherous.

Georgina reminded him.

"You will catch your death of cold," she exclaimed. "Do go in and change."

"These things have pretty well dried on me," retorted Mr. Pluff; "but there, I'm altogether bowled over, and too darned upset to take heed of anything. Not that I'm a very pretty spectacle, should any of your fine friends come driving up to the front door. At my age I ought to 'ave known better than to go canoodling off. Pity I did not take your advice again. It's wonderful 'ow everything you say comes true."

"Oh! don't stand talking, *dear* Cousin John," as his teeth commenced unconsciously to chatter, "or we shall have you laid up with one of those dreadful snuffling colds in the head that are so difficult to cure. Will you put your feet in mustard and water?"

Mr. Pluff grinned.

"I don't knock up easily," he declared in his boastful tone. "There's not a haler, heartier man drawing breath, what's never took an ailment since measles in infancy and mumps at school. Maybe I'll ask you for a drink of hot grog, but blow the mustard!"

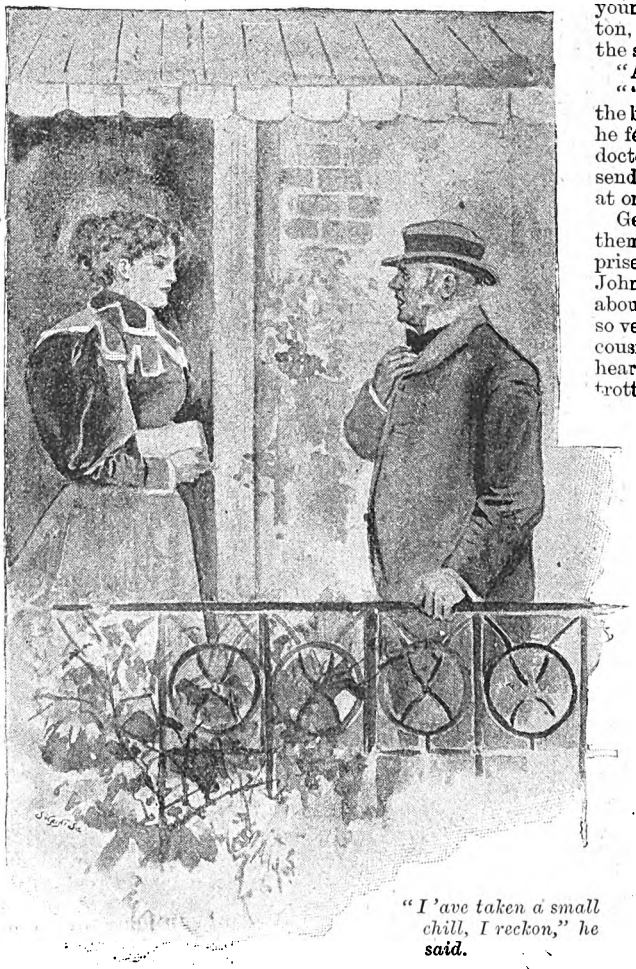
So saying he stumped away, while Georgina murmured a prayer of thanksgiving for the downfall of Mrs. Rathbone.

An hour or so later Georgina found John Pluff pacing the verandah in dry clothes, as if to keep warm through movement.

"I 'ave taken a small chill, I reckon," he said. "Suppose it was standing about jawing in them damp things. I've just been talking to your young man," indicating Sefton, who was walking towards the stables.

"And what did he say?"

"'Go to bed, Pluff, that's the best place for you.' Then he felt my pulse just like a doctor, and said he should send off for his medical man at once."



"I 'ave taken a small chill, I reckon," he said.

Georgina's eyebrows raised themselves in expressive surprise. Sefton must think John bad to trouble his head about him—Sefton who was so very slack, and disliked her cousin into the bargain. She heard the hoofs of a horse trotting down the drive, and saw that her husband was the rider.

"How do you feel?"

"Queer and skeery like. First 'ot and then cold. Think I'll take your lad's advice, and get between the sheets. Don't you worry yourself, Georgie dear. I shan't be on the sick list long."

So he went off with an effort at whistling, which soon failed.

Lady Ravenscroft noticed he helped himself upstairs by the aid of the broad banisters.

She waited for Sefton's return uneasily. She did not appreciate the bother of an illness in the house. As he reappeared on his polo pony, she noticed the doctor's dog-cart following.

"Do you really think Cousin John is ill?" she said a trifle sharply. "You seem to be making a great bother about nothing. He has gone to bed, and will be all right in the morning. John has such a wonderful constitution."

But for once Lady Ravenscroft was mistaken. The doctor seemed disinclined to make light of the matter, and called early again on the following day.

The slight chill turned into acute pneumonia, and two hospital nurses were summoned from town.

Mr. Pluff was very placid and quiet. He spoke seldom, and then it was only to murmur "thank you," for some service rendered. His helpless condition aroused Georgina's pity. She watched by the bedside, quarrelled constantly with the nurses, and really shed genuine tears of sympathy when Mr. Pluff appeared in pain.

Sefton also frequently crept into the invalid's room.

and sat at the opposite side of the bed, watching Georgina.

This action of his irritated her. It seemed as if he planted himself there for a purpose. Once she caught his eyes fixed with keen scrutiny upon her hand, as she moistened John's lips from a glass of water. The look was one of suspicion—she read its meaning only too well. Sefton esteemed her so little, that he actually thought it necessary to remain on guard beside the old man he so genuinely despised.

She flew at him in a frenzy and shook his shoulders.

"What were you thinking of in there—by the bed?" she asked fiercely, when they were alone.

Sefton did not answer.

She flew at him in a frenzy and shook his shoulders.

"You didn't think—you couldn't—that—that—I should be such a fiend? Oh! husband, for the love of Heaven, swear you never doubted me! I may be bad, but God knows I would never be guilty of robbing a human life!"

"I would not trust you," he answered calmly, and but for the look in his eyes she would never have forgiven the words.

"He does not know what he is saying," she told herself. "The doctor must see *him* next."

CHAPTER XIX.

Georgina Becomes Wealthy.

"I WANT to make a will," said Mr. Pluff.

The words came very feebly. "Doctor," he continued, "I think I am going to die."

There was a pathetic ring of resignation in John's tone.

Georgina was standing at the foot of the bed, with her hands on the rails; she made no sign that she had heard, only her eyes wandered instinctively to the writing table.

The nurse fetched pen and paper at her patient's request. His hand was weak and he wrote with difficulty, then motioned to the doctor and nurse to sign their names. "Put it in an envelope and seal it down," he murmured, closing his eyes.

Georgina's heart beat furiously, she staggered to her customary seat beside him, and held his hand.

"If you should see Mrs. Rathbone," he said at last, after a long pause, "tell her I forgave everything. It's not worth while bearing a grudge into the other world, eh, Georgie?"

She bowed her head.

"And Nesta Pyne," he rambled on faintly, "she's married you know. I—I would not give her a present, because she laughed, but that don't matter now, do it dear? When I'm gone, send her my gold inkstand, with—with John Pluff's compliments. You'll find a card in the ivory case."

A hot tear dropped on the sheet. It fell from Georgina's eye.

"Ravenscroft Park will be a different place," muttered the failing voice. "I've left everything to you. When little John grows up, you'll tell him about his god-pa won't you, old girl?"

"Yes, yes," whispered Georgina, her eyes suddenly scintillating, and her breath coming and going in more laboured gasps than that of the dying man. Then silence again.

She watched the calm face on the pillow reverently, yet at the same time thinking of all that the passing away of Mr. Pluff meant to the Ravenscroft family. No longer paupered blue blood, and the fortune *hers*, not Sefton's.

The dream was to come true—at last—at last!

An hour or two elapsed, when Mr. Pluff took a decided turn for the worse.

His mind began to wander and he complained fitfully of the wet clothes in which he said he was made to stand, and frequently re-acted his hunt after Mrs. Rathbone's wig.

"Give me the paddle, Georgina," he cried. "It's there, by the tree. Can't you see it—all wet and red? Bah! there are weeds and slime in that pool; and I'm cold, Georgie, darned cold!"

Lady Ravenscroft laid her hand on his burning forehead.

Occasionally his mind travelled back to old days, and he would talk of the shop and the customers, mentioning many names Georgina had never heard.

But finally he sank into oblivion, resting peacefully like a child asleep, his breathing growing fainter and fainter, till, with his hand still clasping Georgina's, John Pluff drifted to the Unknown.

She watched the coming of Death's Angel in silent awe, her throat parched and her fingers damp with the sweat of dread as they touched that thing of clay, now white and cold, upon the quilt. Poor limp hand! with the large diamond ring she had so often protested against, flashing below the lifeless knuckle.

A hot tear dropped on the sheet.

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Both the nurses were in the room, and one led Georgina to the door.

"You shall come back presently, Lady Ravenscroft."

"It's all over," said his wife, taking his arm and drawing him indoors.

Walking slowly downstairs, she went in search of her husband. Already the servants were drawing down the blinds, and the hush of the still sleeper fell upon the house.

Sefton was crossing the lawn and thought that the sun was being shut out in this the hottest hour of the day. He did not guess that Cousin John was dead.

"It's all over," said his wife, taking his arm and drawing him indoors.

"Oh!" murmured Sir Sefton, shuddering slightly. "Is it?"

And that was all this strange couple said, but what they felt or thought no one but themselves knew. Each had shut the other out of their life, each felt the keen pang of intense loneliness, yet cherished no wish for union.

Georgina went to the nursery, and gathering her son in her arms bore him away to her own room. Here she walked to and fro, rocking the infant softly and talking to him in low excited words.

"John—Reginald," she whispered, "my own little Reggie—to-day has altered your whole future. You are the heir to a fortune now as well as a title, my precious, my sweet! Do you know what mother is saying?" straining him tighter to her heart. "You will have a great and grand career, with your namesake's money, and your grandfather Reginald's great mind. Only a very brave man kills himself when he knows that to live is to shame his illustrious name. Why," gazing in sudden surprise at the shape of the baby's brow, "you are even a little like him now. I have thought of him so often, feasted my eyes nightly upon his noble countenance in wild unearthly visions, that you have caught the look—it was born on your tiny face—an exquisite miniature—a photograph of my thoughts."

Georgina's dreams wandered far from the dead man in the lonely wing, lying in death's solemn majesty, to a brilliant mental picture of Ravenscroft Park, transformed by wealth's magic hand. It flung her into exultant ecstasies.

If Sefton knew, he did not realise it yet. He would look on her with deep respect, for money could buy everything, even the goodwill of a cold and distant husband. She would have all the county people at her feet—those who had looked at her askance, snubbed, or avoided her. She could show them now that the proud Sir Sefton had not made such a bad matrimonial bargain after all. It was something to be on the top rail for once—and stick there!

The sudden change in the horizon, the brightening of Georgina's sky, in the midst of gloomy death clouds, seemed to fill her with the elasticity of early girlhood. She might have been sixteen again, as she rocked her baby in her arms, and banished the remembrance of John's cold hand.

But Sefton had crept to that silent chamber, compelled, it seemed, against his will—for the sight of a dead body always unnerved and upset him.

"Poor old Pluff!" he murmured, as he went back to his study, "there's not a single soul to mourn you; not one life made blank and empty by your absence. I despised you, did I? What a fool I was! You are as good as the best of us now; no caste or rank has any place where you have gone. How I envy you!"

Georgina smothered her cousin's coffin in the costliest flowers, adorned herself in the most exquisitely-fitting black, cried a good deal at the funeral, and went abroad for her health immediately afterwards.

"Dear Mrs. Humphery knows how dreadfully I feel my poor cousin's loss," she told Sefton, "and has begged me to join her and Mr. Humphery in their trip on the Continent. They are such nice, cheerful people, I am sure it will do me good. You can stay with some of your numerous friends. In the meanwhile I have ordered the house to be re-papered and painted."

The money was Georgina's, and she meant to let her husband know it. She treated him now like the very dirt beneath her feet, while he watched her airs and affectations with quiet sarcastic amusement—an attitude new to him.

"I should like to see the papers before they are pasted

She snatched the papers away angrily.

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on my walls, because if I disapproved of them it would necessitate having the work done over again."

She stared at him incredulously.

"I have to pay, so I should imagine the choice would be mine. But here are the patterns." She flung them across the table. "That is for the dining-room."

"I've no patience with your fusty old-fashioned notions, Sefton, and I want to make our home look stylish, for later on, when I am out of mourning, I mean to entertain on a very large scale. By about Xmas time we might begin our house parties and festivities."

Sefton's blood ran cold at the thought of his wife let loose

"Where did Sir Sefton offer you his hand and heart?"

"Vile taste!" he muttered. "Can't you see this sort of thing is not the least in keeping with old oak? Oh! and this for the hall," laughing outright in a peculiarly bitter strain, "really Georgina, if you want to deck up a house in such gaudy colours take a place of your own somewhere, and do not desecrate Ravenscroft Park."

She snatched the papers away angrily.

with a fortune. How she would brag and swagger! Why the very tone in which she mouthed the words 'our house parties' made him feel inclined to shake her. Besides which, gradually Sefton had grown to hate and abhor contact with his fellow men. Douglas Shirling, to whom he he was still devoted, noticed this painful shrinking and the eccentric ways of his friend; more than once he had

begged Sefton to see a doctor, but the suggestion was always received resentfully.

Georgina determined now, under these new circumstances, to hold her own. Sefton she considered a weak, unstable fellow, one she could ride rough shod over at will.

His opinion on the papers did not in the least alter hers, and she flounced out of the room with no intention of counter-ordering anything.

The following day they parted, and Sefton, believing that during his absence Ravenscroft Park would be left unmolested, joined his mother and sister without any apprehension.

Georgina, however, had laid her plans deeply, She was determined to lose no time. Besides the doing up of the house, she required an entirely fresh staff of servants. These she engaged before leaving England, not forgetting to send Nesta the gold inkstand with Mr. Pluff's card as requested, and writing a short note to Mrs. Rathbone. In it she gave a brief sketch of her cousin's peaceful passing away, quoted his words of forgiveness, and wondered if the General's wife would realise how deeply Georgina was indebted to her for that day's canoeing.

Once out of England with her friends the Humpherys, Lady Ravenscroft cast off her gloom and enjoyed herself immensely. Mr. Humphery was a merry, chatty little man, full of go, with a keen sense of humour, and a passion for caricaturing people on his cuffs. His wife existed merely for the vanities of this world, made a perfect science of the adornment of the human form divine, could prattle in rather a pretty voice for hours upon chiffons and bonnets, and took unlimited interest in the family affairs of her friends and acquaintances.

"So your husband is one of those dreadfully morose men that look on the black side of everything!" she said to Lady Ravenscroft, dropping her frivolous tone for one of genuine condolence.

"Yes, and the worst of it is I don't know *how* to wake him up!" sighed Georgina.

"Now take my advice, dear, for I have made a study of the masculine mind since the days of my teens: don't appear to *try* and rouse him, but fill your house with guests, mirth loving, light-hearted folk, who will make the old walls ring with their laughter. Surround him with all the luxury that your wealth can give, and gradually the depressed and gloomy individual will expand his wings like the newly released butterfly, so that you will forget he was ever a chrysalis!"

"Not a bad plan to work on. I know he is not in a hurry to return to Ravenscroft Park, and when he does a perfect transformation scene shall greet his astonished eyes."

"You are having the house re-decorated now, are you not?" said Mrs. Humphery. "Give a large party as soon as possible, for, after all, Mr. Pluff was only a cousin, and nowadays so little is made of mourning—it is going quite out of fashion."

"Yes; and poor John would not have liked me to grieve. He was always so considerate."

"A charming character. Quite an example," murmured Mrs. Humphery, remembering Georgina's anxiety anent Mrs. Rathbone. "Do you know," suddenly changing the subject, "this is the hotel my dear little Jacoby proposed to me in six years ago. I was travelling with my parents, and he followed us after the London season. I shall never forget what a fool he made of himself!" laughing softly.

"Do tell me, Lady Ravenscroft, when and where did Sir Sefton offer you his hand and heart?"

Georgina paled. Then in a chaffing tone replied:

"Oh, I proposed to him!"

"That is what people always say when they do not want to answer!" replied Mrs. Humphery, gathering from Georgina's intonation that she was joking.

(To be continued.)

Post-Card Competition.—No. 9.

There is a sentence somewhere in this number of *Short Stories*, the letters of which are intermixed. A guinea is offered to the person within 100 miles of London who first correctly transcribes it, and another guinea to the reader living a greater distance away. *Post-cards only, please.* Other forms of communication disqualified.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 7.

The discrepancies which occurred between the illustrations and the text in *Short Stories*, dated August 15th, were six in number. The first post-card to hand containing one of the correct solutions, was that of Mr. F. Bonsier, of 18, Lyal Road, Bow, who points out that while the dog in "The Itinerary of Caliban" was described as a big, shaggy Russian terrier, he is portrayed in the illustration as rather small and smooth coated. The provincial guinea goes to Mr. W. W. Adams, 102, Cape Hill, Smethwick, Birmingham, who points out that the man in the sketch on page 199 should have been carrying a stick instead of an umbrella. Penknives have been sent to the following persons, each of whom were the first senders of the remaining four discrepancies: Mr. Arthur R. Exley, 101, Chestnut Avenue, Forest Gate; Mr. Thos. H. C. Barlow, 56, Iliffe Street, Newington, S.E.; Mr. Chas. J. Wright, 43, Warner Street, New Kent Road, S.E.; and Mr. J. F. Thorrold, Surveyor's Office, Redditch.

Result of Jumbled Story.

No. 6.

Only nine attempts in this competition were absolutely correct. To the £10 offered in prizes we have added 7s., and divided the whole among the following winners, each of whom therefore receives £1 3s.:

A. Stevenson, 26, Woodliffe Street, Harpurhey, Manchester.
A. Davis, 17, Eve Road, Leytonstone Road, E.
F. Mulvogue, 26, Woodliffe Street, Church Lane, Harpurhey, Manchester.
Miss Taylor, 10, East Bank, Stamford Hill, N.
R. W. Thompson, 40, Victoria Road, Holloway, London.
Miss V. B. Schofield, 3, Topsfield Road, Crouch End, N.
C. H. Thompson, 15, Holmby Street, Camberwell, S.E.
Mrs. Parsons, 58, Ridsdale Road, Anerley, S.E.
S. Small, 10, Rodney Street, Bute Terrace, Cardiff.

The other seven competitors whose names appear below failed in very minor details, and to each of them has been forwarded a penknife as a consolation prize:

Miss A. Starie, 6, Tyndale Terrace, Canonbury Square, N.
Miss M. E. Buttiscombe, "One Elm," Cowley Road, Leytonstone.
T. Mason, Hawkhead Terrace, 31, Seedhill Road, Paisley.
W. Wharton, 3, Taylor Street, Weaste, near Manchester.
Mrs. Cooke, Fairview Heath End, Farnham, Surrey.
G. Trotter, 61, Brailsford Road, Tulse Hill, S.W.
F. Lees, 6, Edith Road, Peckham, S.E.

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Berlin
Alsenstrasse
Feb 25th 1896

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Eradicates Scurf and Dandruff, Prevents Hair Falling, Promotes Growth, and is the Best Dressing for the Hair. Perfectly Harmless, Clean, Cooling, and Invigorating. 1/-, 2/6, and 4/6 sizes, of all Chemists, or post free from THE KOKO-MARICOPAS CO. LTD., 11, Gray's Inn Road, London.

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A Dinner Service of 50 pieces is included, which is guaranteed to be worth the guinea alone, and a China Tea Service of 28 pieces, finished in gold, together with a lot of useful kitchen crockery. **The Secret of the Success.**—The Pearson Pottery Company are manufacturers, not middlemen, like many other advertisers. The Pearson Potteries have nearly 2,000ft. frontage to the town of Hanley. Thousands sold all over the world. Everybody not only satisfied but amazed at the quantity and quality given. Hundreds of these packages are applied for as **Wedding or Birthday Presents.** And what more useful present can be given? Every item is useful.

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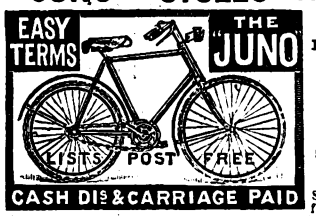

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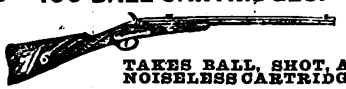

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This gun is the cheapest in the world. It is not a toy, but a practical well-made **Saloon Gun**, 37½in. long, weight about 4½lb. **100 Birds or Rabbits** can be killed with it at cost of **1/6** only with shot cartridges, or **6/-** per 500. Will penetrate a deal board 1in. at 50 yards. Can also be used in the house as a **Target Rifle**, with NOISELESS Cartridges at **1/-** per 100, or **5/-** per 1,000. This gun is fitted with a beautifully finished stock, nickel-plated fittings, etc., etc. **Price 7/6** with **100 Ball Cartridges.** Each gun is tested, regulated, and proved before sent to customer. **The "Union Jack" Pistol** (Registered), with 100 Ball Cartridges, price **4/6**, or pair for **8/-**. **Block Action Saloon or Garden Guns** (very superior manufacture) with 100 ball cartridges. No. 1 Bore, **12/6**; No. 2 Bore, **13/6**; No. 3 Bore, **15/6**. No. 3 Bore at 15/6 will kill a bird on the wing at 35 to 45 yards. Send for Price Lists of Air Guns, Saloon Guns, sporting novelties and ammunition. If you cannot send to-day, cut this advertisement out, and write some other time. ADDRESS—**W. R. JACKSON,** Wholesale Arms and Ammunition Dealer, **Tottenham, MIDDLESEX.**
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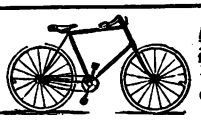

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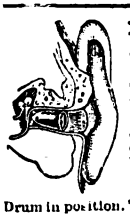

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A lady who has permanently destroyed Superfluous Hairs on herself, will be happy to forward free, to all similarly afflicted, full particulars of a simple, inexpensive and harmless self-treatment. Send stamped addressed envelope in confidence to Mrs. "T. D.," 87, Strand, London.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 401. FOR WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 5TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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IMMENSE REDUCTION IN PRICES OF OUR WORLD-RENOWNED

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ADMITTEDLY THE CHEAPEST IN THE WORLD. Seamless, Woven, and Reversible, Rich Turkey Patterns and Colourings, Superior Quality, with Handsome Border to match, a Marvel of Excellence and Beauty.

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	ft.	in.		ft.	in.	Sale Price. s.	d.	Former Price. s.	d.
No. 1	9	0	by	6	0	5	6	9	0
,, 2	9	0	,,	7	6	7	0	11	0
,, 3	9	0	,,	9	0	8	6	13	6
,, 4	10	6	,,	7	6	8	9	13	9
,, 5	10	6	,,	9	0	10	0	15	6
,, 6	12	0	,,	9	0	11	6	18	0
,, 7	10	6	,,	10	6	12	0	18	6
,, 8	12	0	,,	10	6	13	6	20	6
No. 9	15	0	by	9	0	14	3	22	6
,, 10	13	6	,,	10	6	15	3	24	0
,, 11	12	0	,,	12	0	15	3	24	0
,, 12	13	6	,,	12	0	17	0	27	0
,, 13	15	0	,,	12	0	19	0	32	0
,, 14	18	0	,,	12	0	22	9	36	0
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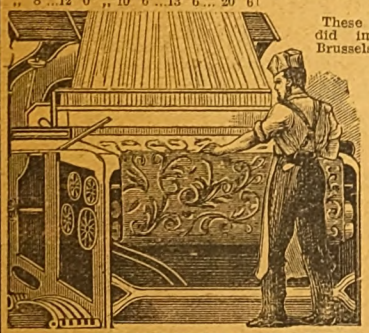

These Carpets are splendid imitations of Real Brussels Carpets, the designs having been carefully copied from the originals, both as regards colourings and patterns, so that when in use it is almost impossible, except by close scrutiny, to detect the difference. They have gained a world-wide reputation for magnificence, cheapness, and utility, having no equal. All designs are registered and deservedly considered works of art.

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"92, South Grove, Brooklands. "Dear Sir,—The Brusselette Carpet has arrived safely and is very satisfactory. I shall recommend your carpets wherever I can. "Yours faithfully, J. WILLCOCK."

Mrs. C. JONES, 35, Knowl Street, Stalybridge, writes: "Permit me to thank you for the most beautiful Brusselette Carpet received from you. It far exceeded my expectations, both in value and beauty."

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For the Immediate Production of

BOTANIC BEER.

A Nine-gallon Cask of Alcoholic Beer from a Brewery will cost you 10/6, but Eight Gallons of Beer made from

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Can be obtained for 6d., plus a pound or two of Sugar and a little Yeast.

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If unable to obtain it in your neighbourhood, send 9 stamps for sample bottle; or samples of both Wine Essence and Extract of Herbs, post free for 15 stamps.

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Great Reduction in price to 9d. per lb. in order to reduce stock, but

QUALITY GOOD AS EVER.

NEARLY 100,000 BEDS ALREADY SOLD

TO THOROUGHLY SATISFIED PURCHASERS.

NEWHAM'S LINCOLNSHIRE FEATHER BEDS

THESE BEDS are warranted doubly purified, dusted, and perfected in our own extensive factory at Boston, Lincs., made in strong linen bordered tick. The quality, sweetness, and purity of every bed guaranteed. These beds ALWAYS GIVE SATISFACTION, and many thousands of purchasers have sent us flattering testimonials and other orders for beds. Note following prices, *which are 25 per cent. less than our recently advertised prices.*

No. 1—Single Bed, Bolster and Pillow, 6ft. 3in. by 3ft. 6in., weighing 40lb. **30/-**

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Any sized Bed only 9d. per lb., *Carriage Paid*, to any station in the United Kingdom. FEATHERS ONLY **9d.** PER LB. The trade supplied. All orders must be accompanied by cheque or P.O.O. (which, as security to purchasers, may be post-dated ten days). Send for samples of Feathers and Ticks, Price Lists, etc., which will be sent *Post Free* and need not be returned. A great reduction on three or more Beds. *Please mention this paper.*

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BEECHAM'S PILLS

FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,

SUCH AS

Sick Headache, Constipation,
Weak Stomach, Impaired Digestion,
Disordered Liver & Female Ailments.

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PEARSON'S
£100
COUPON.
No. 36
Sept. 5, 1896.
S.S. S.S.

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A doctor's widow knows of a simple, inexpensive remedy that permanently destroys the roots, and will forward particulars free to all those afflicted sending stamped envelope. Address Mrs. B. D. WOOD, 4, DUKE STREET, VILLIERS STREET, LONDON, W.

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Permanently cured. A Pamphlet giving sound practical advice and particulars of a successful treatment for a rapid, simple, and inexpensive home cure, forwarded free to all upon receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—Prof. B. L. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

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The greatest beautifier in the World. Produces a lovely skin and complexion, and cures spots, pimples, redness, and freckles. The finest and purest soap made. For **Eczema** and all irritations it is the most emollient and soothing. Absolutely harmless. But beware of the many worthless imitations. Have Dr. Mackenzie's or none. At all Chemists and Stores, 6d. and 1s. a tablet.

Madame Adelina Patti writes from Craig-y-Nos Castle: "I find Dr. Mackenzie's Arsenical Toilet Soap most excellent."

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CURED SPEEDILY with **EVENIA CACHETS** (Regd.). A Safe and Certain Remedy. Send 1/3 to-day for a box, post free. **D. D. BUCHAN,** Priockheim, N.B.

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Ladies desiring any improvement in this direction should send me stamp for free particulars of a simple, inexpensive, harmless self-treatment, whereby a *full natural bust* can be obtained. Address, in confidence, Mrs. B. K. NORRIS, 7, Addington Crescent, York Road, London, S.E.

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SHORT STORIES

Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 401.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending Sept. 5th, 1896.

THE POSTSCRIPT.

A Parisian Comedy in a London Setting.

Handsome Clara Hastings saunters along the street with the tranquil and unconstrained step that comes of good health, good family, and a good figure. She left Brighton only this morning, and by to-morrow evening she will have finished her shopping and returned thither.

Clara strolls along without hurrying herself, as if she were alone in the street, with her two hands thrust into the pockets of her dark-blue dolman and her furled parasol thrust under her arm. It will be the fault of the passer-by if he does not notice the superb figure of the fair promenader and see her parasol in time to avoid an unpleasant collision.

Presently a man comes from the opposite direction, a good-looking fellow, Henry Wauburton by name, who puffs occasionally at his cigar as he stares all the women he meets out of countenance, the monster!

"By Jove," he says, "what a pretty little butterball! These girls manage to acquire an astonishing amount of style. And here comes Pansy, in her Gainsborough hat—hum, the familiarity of some of these persons is rather——"

He has run right into the parasol of Mrs. Hastings, who has been watching him for a full minute with much quiet amusement.

"Why, is it you, my dear Mrs. Hastings? What luck! And how strange—I was just thinking of you."

"And staring at the others? Do you know, Mr. Wauburton, you would have a pretty collection of plates if your eyes were photographic cameras? Do you especially admire Gainsborough hats?"

"Not at all. I have abominated them since I learnt of your dislike for them. Your dislikes are my dislikes, your preferences are my preferences, and my eyes, as well as my heart, contain only one portrait. But each time you appear to me again, I must take it again, for I always find you grown more beautiful."

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Wauburton got off his compliment well, for he meant it. He loved Clara sincerely and seriously. And she knew that widowhood was like travelling for pleasure; it is a charming way of passing one's youth; but, one day or another, one must return to one home and set up one's tent, or, rather, change it for a more permanent residence.

For some time the fair traveller had been thinking of bringing to, in the harbour of a second marriage. But, like a prudent woman, she was tacking about, examining the land and sounding the coast, before laying up at its last moorings the vessel of her independence. She studied Henry Wauburton with minute care, but with a lively desire to find him worthy of her, a desire which she had not concealed from a mutual friend, who manœuvred the threads with the patience and dexterity of a wise and experienced matron.

"Where shall I take you now?" demanded Wauburton after having obtained his companion's permission to act as her escort.

"To my house, if you have the heart for it. It is a long distance, but I am as good a walker as you are an agreeable talker. I am dying of hunger."

"If you are dying of hunger, there is only one thing to do—you must come to dinner with me."

"Sir!" said the young woman, contracting her pretty brows in affected anger, "I think I must have misunderstood you. If I did not know who you are——"

"Yes, but you know who I am. You know how I love you. Would you not go to the end of the world with me?"

"To the end of the world, yes; but not to a London restaurant, where we would be seen by some imbecile who would talk——"

"A little sooner or a little later, I sincerely hope they will have something to talk about. Be kind, my dear—madam. I ask you for your entire life—surely you can give me two hours in the meantime. Come, what do you fear? Do you wish me to serve you like a queen, not sitting down to the same table with you, erect behind your chair—or, rather, before you, so that I can see your limpid eyes, your pearly teeth, and your rosebud lips?"

"Serpent-tongue, I accept! But do not flatter yourself. The fact is, I would be less complaisant if a good dinner were waiting for me at my house, instead of such a meal as my maid can produce—and she doesn't know how to boil an egg properly. So, sir, you may thank fortune that I am a bit of a gourmet and will deign to permit you to eat also."

The difficulty was to decide upon a restaurant. It must be in a good neighbourhood, but not too prominent for fear of meeting someone they knew. After conning over the list, Clara, who had the City at her finger's ends, decided upon the Café Verrey.

"But they don't know me there," objected Wauburton, who was a man of fixed habits.

"So much the better. That will spare me the pleasure of hearing the waiters whispering: 'Never twice in succession with the same one.'"

"Ungrateful woman, you know well that I am entirely reformed. If my reformation should be to no purpose, it will lie heavy on your conscience."

Mrs. Hastings replied with a slightly reassuring glance. She was, at that moment, rather well disposed towards her Amphitryon. Perhaps her appetite had something to do with it.

Wauburton walked upon air. He poured out declaration on declaration, madrigal on madrigal.

"How beautiful you are this evening," he said.

"Truly?—this evening? Poor me! How sad I shall be to-morrow, when I have to go back to my accustomed hideousness," and she smiled happily, as if she were not uneasy at the prospect.

Wauburton made the regulation offer to unhook for her any star she might choose.

"No, sir," said she; "you need not do that yet. For the present I shall content myself with a rose to pin in my *corsage*. I could not enjoy a good dinner without flowers."

They were just passing a florist's. They entered and Wauburton selected a handful of *gloire de Dijon* roses and tendered half a sovereign in payment. The charge came to three shillings and sixpence; the florist had not the change, and neither had Wauburton. In vain the man rummaged about in his till; he could raise only six shillings; and had to go out to get change from a neighbour. Clara waited, a little surprised to see her companion haggle so about sixpence. Finally, the change was brought, and they proceeded on their way.

From that instant, Wauburton was no longer the same. He had lost his elation and seemed constrained.

"Is it possible," thought Mrs. Hastings, "that he is angry with me because I made him get me a few roses?"

But at the restaurant this man of fashion evinced a surprising parsimony. Under the pretext that he did not care for oysters, he ordered them only for his companion. He had a medium priced wine served, and offered champagne *frappé* with such evident reluctance that Clara refused it. The menu, while comprehensive enough, to be sure, was studied out in such fashion that it came well within reasonable limits. She had rather expected pompano for fish, but the waiter brought smelt.

And worse than that, Wauburton showed himself as saving of his wit and jollity as of culinary prodigalities. He was preoccupied, morose, extinguished. Mrs. Hastings, in accepting this *tête-à-tête* dinner, had committed, if not an imprudence—she knew she was with a man of many gallantries—at least a slight eccentricity. But, after this exhibition of his temperament, she felt as calm as if she had shared the repast with a schoolmaster or a gouty sexagenarian.

The dinner was carried through expeditiously; indeed, one would have said that Mr. Wauburton awaited the end of it with some impatience. He swallowed his coffee at a gulp, took no liqueurs, and when the bill, which he asked for immediately, was brought, his brows contracted as if at sight of a deputy-sheriff distraining on all his worldly goods.

Clara could not get over these niggardly ways, which would have shocked her in a man to whom she had been married for ten years. There was no doubt about it; Henry Wauburton was a miser! Shakespere forgot to add avarice to the three things which, according to him, woman detests most in the other sex. Mrs. Hastings experienced a complete disenchantment, and this ill-fated dinner left her with a heavy heart.

"However," thought she, "it is lucky that chance opened my eyes. I the wife of a man who cuts his pennies in two! Rather marry a spendthrift. But, who knows?—perhaps the poor fellow has been losing a lot of money lately."

To learn how matters stood, she brought the conversation round to hard times, bad investments, and tenants who would not pay.

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"The fact is," replied Wauburton, "that residence property is a pure luxury, and I wonder every now and then where I would be if my father had not years ago put the half of his fortune into good real-estate."

"Let us go!" said Clara, rising; "order a cab and let us separate. I must be going home, for I wrote to my uncle to come out and keep me company this evening."

Wauburton wished to detain her, but she felt no desire to stay. The charm was broken. She had expected an amusing adventure, a sort of respectable lark, a cavalier, respectful but gallant, caring for her, petting her, as he might have cared for and petted one of *the others*, not a thrifty companion who would simplify the menu and verify the bill. All Wauburton's insistence was in vain: she would not even allow him to accompany her. She entered her own house in a very spiteful humour, and, with a smile full of irony, paid the cabman who deposited her at her door. "It will be just so much less that he has spent for me," she thought.

The next morning when she awoke, she was as sad as if something in her life were changed. For deep down in her heart she had begun to accustom herself to the idea that she would one day be Wauburton's wife.

* * * * *

The day after her return to Brighton, Clara paid a visit to the head-dragon of society. It was a very unpleasant duty for her, for it amounted to nothing less than announcing to her old friend the resolution she had taken, and the news would undoubtedly be a sad blow to Wauburton's aunt.

"Come here, my beauty," cried the old lady, from the depths of her easy-chair, "and confess your sins. Ah, you little sinner, you indulge in pretty goings-on when you go up to town. Just look at the little innocent who gads about in restaurants! Well I hope you are not going to keep us waiting any longer. The entire town is talking of your escapade. Happily, someone is ready to make thorough reparation."

Mrs. Hastings was well used to the amiable old lady's pleasantries.

"I do not wish any reparation."

"Truly! What a pretty quarrel! I have seen many such. In faith, I would not wish to swear that I have not played the same *rôle* in my day. Come, my dear, what has he done to offend you? Speak, that I may box the ears of this naughty boy."

"Mr. Wauburton has not done anything to offend me. He is a very honourable man, very proper, and very respectful."

"Lord help us, we are lost! Poor Henry, I would rather she called you perjured villain. Do you know that my nephew will be crazed with chagrin?"

"It is a great honour you would do me, but——"

"He loves you so much! He used to vanish at the bare mention of marriage; now he is absolutely your slave. Well, now what is it? Do you not find him handsome enough, rich enough, young enough?"

"I did not say that. That is not the question. I am happy as I am, I do not wish to change—that is all. And it is my firm resolve."

"Unhappy boy, what a blow for him! And he expected it so little. For you must admit your last meeting was not of a kind to discourage him. Why, take that letter there on the table; I received it this morning. See how he speaks of you."

A woman never refuses to read prose when it is about herself. Clara took the letter, and was compelled to admit to herself that he wrote even better than he talked. What glowing admiration, what youthful enthusiasm, in these pages of which she was the sole topic! Her toilet, her least gestures, her most insignificant words,—all were repeated, ornamented, embellished. Never had she believed herself so witty and so charming; and she had no over-modest opinion of herself.

The poor aunt's eyes never quitted Mrs. Hastings, who softly folded up the letter with a shake of her pretty head. At bottom, she was not ill-disposed towards Wauburton for loving her as he did; she would have forgiven him many faults—all, save avarice.

"Oh," she said suddenly, "I did not see the postscript. May I read it?"

She hoped to find yet a few more phrases of admiration, a last supplement of praise. Women—and men, too—do so love to be praised! The postscript ran thus:

I forgot a detail that will make you laugh. You must know that I went out without my purse. Always thinking of nothing but her, you see. Imagine my distress—I was in a cold perspiration. Can you fancy me borrowing money of my fair guest to pay for her dinner? Well, I managed to live through it, thanks to strong nerves and two or three unhappy half-sovereigns that I happened to have in one of my pockets. Why, when we came out of the restaurant I had not enough to pay my tram fare, and it was a great load off my mind when I found I had enough to settle the bill.

Mrs. Hastings smiled strangely, without saying a word. The aunt, her poor heart torn with emotion, demanded:

"So you have decided? It is all at an end? Ah, poor boy, how shall I tell him this *no*?"

The worthy woman had no more heart for pleasantry her distress was a pitiful sight to see. And it was doubtless through pity that Clara slipped down to her knees on a cushion beside the old lady's chair, and whispered:

"Then, if the *no* is so hard to write—write *the other*."

Not comprehending a word of this, but grown fifteen years younger, the old lady half smothered her future niece, and cried, in a trembling voice:

"Write? Never! The post is not quick enough. I shall telegraph. But I cannot run downstairs. Do you, dear heart, run down and telegraph yourself."

And that is how, two hours later, Wauburton received this telegram which made him pale with joy:

"*Yes.*—Clara."

L. S. V.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 8.

The London guinea goes this week to Mr. J. Hopkins, 14, Upper Marylebone Street, W., and the provincial guinea to Mr. J. Smart, Shenstone, near Lichfield, Staffs. The two words, *lightly* (p. 226, col. 1, line 4 from bottom) and *tightly* (p. 227, col. 1, line 26) were equally correct, the elongated letters in each case forming six-sevenths of the complete word.

POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 10.

There is in this number of *Short Stories* a word of which three-fifths of the letters are turned upside down. A guinea goes to the reader who first points this out, and another to the reader living more than a hundred miles from London. *Post-cards only, please*—other forms of communication disqualified.

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THE STOLEN SELF.

THE shades of twilight were deepening in the forests, as tired and footsore I paused in one of the valleys of the Las Animas. I had left the mission of San Fernando a few miles back to push on into this region, hoping to find here a stopping place for the night.

From descriptions of the spot fresh in my mind I knew I had reached that fortilage in the wilderness of Christian faith, the mission of Santa Clara de Los Angeles.

A wild, lonely, picturesque retreat it was, too, the half-dozen deserted adobe houses and monastery, with cross and belfry rising above the tree tops, bearing the mortgage of three centuries of sun and storm, adding to the solemnity of the isolated scene.

As dead as the mission of Santa Clara is now to the touch of life, it has, like all those temples in the wilderness erected by the pious followers of the Spanish conquerors, a remarkable history.

Here the priests in their sacerdotal robes had torn down the grotesque images of the New World's benighted race and reared the cross of Catholicism. And here, when preaching friars and monks had proved themselves more "human than divine," and followed scenes of bloodshed in which strife waxed warm.

But the holy brotherhood passed the borderland of their teachings three hundred years since, and their memory belongs to the dust and shadows of a forgotten past.

I had been told an old hermit named Warlock, living in an Indian hut, would give me shelter and good treatment.

There also lived at Santa Clara one called the Mad Monk of whom many startling stories had been told.

This strange couple comprised the present population of the old mission.

As I paused upon the edge of this opening in the wilderness, I saw the remains of the old huts standing in a semi-circle on the south side of the ruined monastery, which showed even then that it must have been an imposing edifice, ere sun and storm, executors of time, had foreclosed their mortgage on its walls. As my eye ran hastily over the forsaken scene, it rested at last upon a thin wreath of smoke, curling lazily above the thatched roof of flags and boughs covering a dwelling of stone, which stood apart from the collection of huts.

In a moment a tall, gaunt figure, clad in a long linen tunic, below which I could see the extremities of a pair of goatskin pantaloons, appeared in the doorway. A mass of shaggy iron-grey hair fell upon the man's broad shoulders, but his features were concealed by dense clouds of tobacco smoke, as he complacently sucked the leaves of the fragrant weed, rolled in corn shuck.

His tunic was the same I had seen the priests wearing at San Fernando, and I realised at once he was the mad monk I had been warned to avoid. Accordingly I made a hasty retreat, but he discovered my presence almost instantly, and called to me in a harsh, grating voice, to stop.

Feeling that "discretion was the better part of valour," I darted through the fringe of bushes skirting the clearing, and quickly out-distanced my pursuer.

I had not gone far, however, when I almost ran into the arms of a man ascending from the bank of a small stream, with a bucket of water in one hand.

He uttered a low cry at my abrupt appearance, and came near dropping the vessel, while I started back with alarm. He recovered to ask:

"Whither so fast, stranger, and at that unseemly gait?"

"The mad monk!" I exclaimed. "He——"

"Ha—ha—ho—ho! been on the old fellow's premises, have you? Better keep off if you don't care to have his fingers round your neck. They say they hurt—for a little while—ha—ha! ho—ho!"

"I wanted to find a stopping place for the night, and——"

"You applied to him. Very rash act, young man. Now you have escaped him you can't do better than to share my shakedown. I don't claim it is the best you ever saw, but it is the best about here. At any rate you are welcome."

The man's tone was not unpleasant, and, though his personal appearance was far from prepossessing, I concluded he was honest, and accepted his offer.

His abode proved to be merely a hut of adobe, but while it was as humble as the mad monk's it had a cleanliness about it that made it agreeable.

"You are called Warlock, are you not?" I asked as we entered his primitive home, and he motioned me to a bench on one side of the room.

He nodded, and, as he busied himself about the evening meal, I had time to study him, soon satisfied to my mind that he had seen good circumstances some time. In fact I had been told he had been driven into the wilderness from a comfortable home by disappointment in love. His language showed he had been well educated, and there was an ease and polish about his every movement which years of isolation and estrangement from society had failed to eradicate. In the midst of my speculations, however, he invited me to partake of the simple repast he had prepared.

"Doesn't your neighbour ever trouble you?" I asked.

"Very seldom now. He and I had a little difference once, but I overcame him, and since then he has avoided me. Poor fellow! I pity him!"

"You know his history, then?"

"Like an open book. And when we have finished our supper I will tell it to you, if you care to listen. I can never eat and talk at the same time."

When the meal was over, and my host had lighted his rolled leaves of tobacco, he said:

"Now, young man, for the story of the mad monk. But first I must enjoin secrecy upon your part, for if he knew we were making gossip of his life history, he would not allow you to leave the valley alive.

"Years ago, no matter how many, Fray Augustin,

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then a young man full of zeal and God-like ambition, was sent by the church to take charge of the parish in the wilderness, Santa Clara de Los Angeles. The newly-fledged friar's heart expanded with the anticipations of the great and good work before him in harvesting the vast field of human souls ripe for his sickle.

"So assiduously did he set himself to work that soon the little monastery was filled with the dusky brotherhood, as into the shadowed hearts of the benighted race penetrated the light of Christ.

"Fray Augustin had good reason to be elated over what he deemed his success; but I am sure his joy was greatest when he looked upon his flock to behold the fair daughter of the chief of his unsophisticated worshippers, the lovely Iona, kneeling nearest to him.

"She was indeed a picture to stir the heart of the most devout follower of the Cross, and it is little wonder if Fray Augustin lost his.

"A little above medium height, she had a form as straight as an arrow, with the symmetry of a Venus. Her hair was of a glossy black, and of the texture of silk; her eyes! who can describe them? Now of a deep hazel, they seemed to melt into a liquid blue when she laughed, sparkling and glowing with a mesmeric light. Her skin of a velvety softness was dark, but it had none of the Indian's reddish or brownish hue.

"In her presence Fray Augustin forgot his vows to the good fathers, his duties to the church. Aye, he stole himself from God to lay body and soul on the altar of Love."

A low exclamation caught my attention at that moment, and arrested the speaker in his narrative. Looking up we saw framed in one of the small apertures that answered for the cabin windows the haggard visage of him of whom my companion was speaking.

I saw him beckon to me with a long, bony finger, and I drew nearer to my host.

"He is jealous because you are with me," whispered my companion. "But be not alarmed; he cannot enter here."

In a short time the wild-looking countenance disappeared, and we could hear the sound of retreating footsteps, which finally died out in the distance. With a look of relief, my companion went on with his absorbing story.

"One day the padre found Iona playing a simple game of chance.

"She started up in affright at sight of him, and would have fled had he not restrained her. He bade her resume her playing and watched her with eager interest. Somehow the plum seeds in her shapely hands seemed not such objects of evil as he had always denominated them, and as she shook them in the box before turning them on the smooth ground, the rattling was such music to his ears that he fairly forgot his dignity.

"'Away with such child's play!' he cried. 'It may do for Indians, but I'll show you a game worthy of the bishop's skill."

"In his excitement the padre shook from his flowing sleeve a pack of cards, with which he had whiled away many a lonely hour playing solitaire.

"Iona proved an apt scholar, and it wasn't long before the twain were intensely occupied in the game of Mexican monte. And this was the beginning of the end. Fray Augustin played solitaire no more.

"Finally there came a rude awakening from this idyllic dream. A messenger appeared at Santa Clara with the information that the bishop had left the head of the church at Santa Fé, to make a tour of the different missions, noting their conditions and catechising and baptising converts. Especially did the bishop wish to be remembered to good Fray Augustin, whose reports over many others had been most flattering of his success. No doubt the faithful padre would receive the promotion due to such fruitful labours.

"Here was a dilemma. Fray Augustin paced the cloisters of Santa Clara with clouded brow and heavy

The twain were intensely occupied in the game of Mexican monte.

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heart. Little hope was there for him to hold his present position, saying nothing of a promotion, should Father Aceno behold the emptiness of his church. In his despair the padre sought Iona to confide his misery to her. She listened very attentively to what he had to say, offering several suggestions which he could not carry out.

"The next day, however, she came to him with a radiant countenance, saying she had devised a way for him to fill the church.

"Fray Augustin kissed her tenderly when she had concluded, and rained blessings on her head. Already in imagination he saw the church filled to overflowing and himself receiving the bishop's praise for his good work.

"Iona's plan was to appeal to the vanity and love of contingence inherent in the Indian's breast rather than to spiritual desires. In other words to teach the catechism by a series of object lessons never before sanctioned within the sacred precincts. Forthwith the padre gave out word that he had a new game to teach his children, and lo! the monastery was crowded. What an interest was awakened!

"So carefully did Fray Augustin—hark! I hear him outside now! But he will go away in a minute. Well, he arranged his questions so that they could be answered by means of the figures on the cards, and then trained the minds of his dusky listeners to remember the reply belonging to each device This was the more easily done with the Spanish cards used by the Mexicans, which had designs of cups, swords, cudgels and gold pieces instead of clubs, spades, hearts and diamonds.

"The interest Fray Augustin had aroused in this uncommon method of teaching the catechism was, thanks

The faithful priest sank at the foot of the altar.

to his careful judgment, at its height when the bishop with his accompanying padres reached Santa Clara. With what pride he looked upon his well-filled house and with what amazement the bishop listened to the prompt recital of the catechism, you may imagine.

"'A good work, a great work,' the bishop repeated, rubbing his chubby hands with delight, unconscious of the rigid machine system to the whole programme, for the padre had found that his pupils would so persist in relying on the object lessons he had been obliged to secrete Iona behind the confessional to prompt them at each question by showing the suggestive card.

"But everything was working well and Fray Augustin's success was almost complete, when Iona, with womanly curiosity, peered out from her concealment to get a peep at the bishop and his associates. Her glance was made at a most inopportune time and—Fray Augustin read a moment later in the bishop's changed countenance that his little scheme was betrayed. He stood dumb with terror.

"When the scene which followed was over he sought the place where he had passed so many happy hours with Iona, to seek her sympathy in his downfall. Even her solace was denied the unhappy man. When the angry bishop and his followers departed from Santa Clara, the fickle maid went with them happy in a new-found love.

"It was many years ago that Fray Augustin fell from grace, but no one was ever sent to fill his place. For some unaccountable reason he still lingers round the old scene, growing more morose each year. Every Sabbath morning he has held mimic exercises in the old monastery, going through in the most minute particulars the ceremony of catechism and worship. He isn't just right here," and the narrator tapped his forehead significantly.

When he had finished his story my host became silent and he sat with his head bowed as if in deep meditation, until at last he threw himself upon a pile of dried grass in a corner of the room and I knew by his heavy breathing he was soon asleep. I lay down on the opposite side of the room, but it was some time before I fell into a fitful slumber, broken at length by the deep mutterings of the strange man as he talked in his sleep.

"The cups represent the theological virtue Faith, the gold pieces Charity, the swords Justice, and the clubs Fortitude. Ah, Iona, it is a beautiful game. We—*por Dios!* he sees! he reads it all!" and the dreamer started half to his feet to sink back with a groan.

I never hailed the appearance of daylight with so much joy, and I was looking for an avenue of escape when he arose to his feet, donned a priest's garb, and swiftly crossing the apartment, disappeared through an opening in the wall, which had been concealed by skins.

Curiosity taking the place of fear, I followed him, to find that the hut connected with the old monastery.

It instantly occurred to me that it was the Sabbath morning, and while I stood a spellbound spectator the strange man went through the exercises of the morning worship with an invisible audience. When he had finished, with an eager look upon his countenance, he addressed one seen only by him, saying:

"Ah, Father Aceno, did they not recite the catechism perfectly? Have I not done my work well?"

A voice so strange and far-brought that I could not realise it came from the mad, answered:

"You have done a good, a great work, Fray Augustin, and your promotion is assured. May God bless you."

Then, while the sound of the voice seemed to linger over the solemn scene, the faithful priest sank at the foot of the altar, and with the murmured word "Iona" on his lips they ceased to move. The Unseen Hand had borne his soul upward to that promotion beyond the dispute of mortal bishops.

GEORGE WALDO BROWNE.

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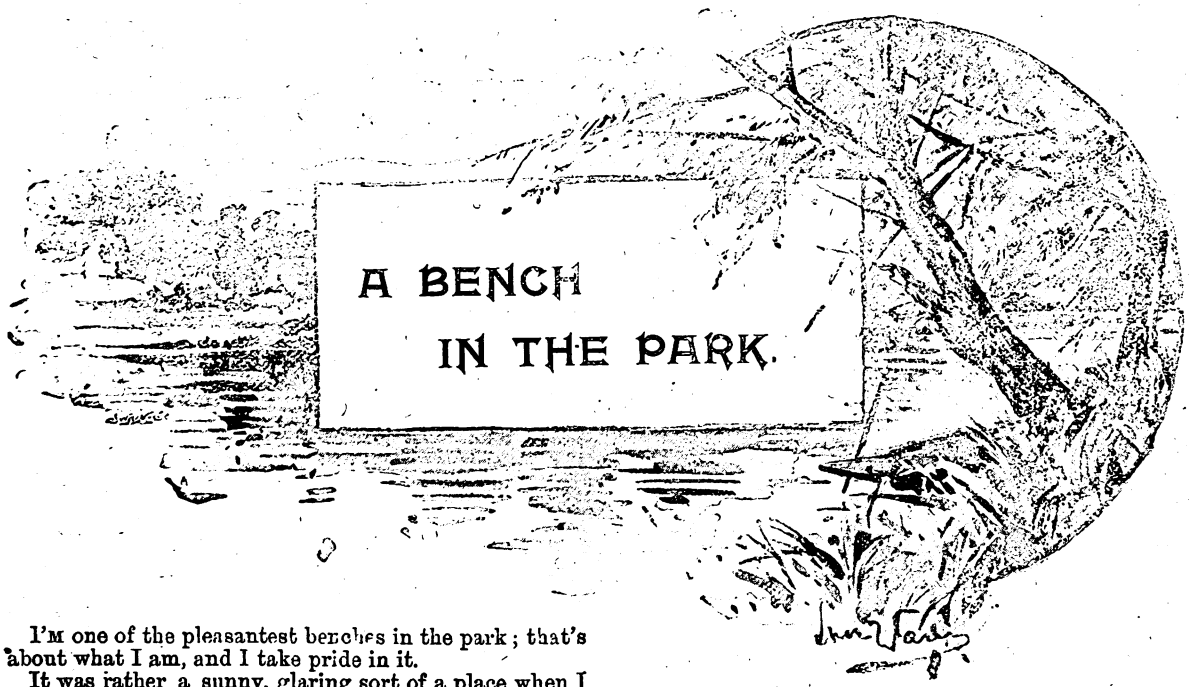

I'm one of the pleasantest benches in the park; that's about what I am, and I take pride in it.

It was rather a sunny, glaring sort of a place when I first planted my legs here, but that is quite altered now.

The shadow of a great tree falls over me, and other trees lie beyond; and between the road, with its rolling carriages, and my blessed little path are ever so many bushes green and fresh, through which one can just catch glimpses of the ladies' dresses.

Farther on you go down some steps, and come to a little winding path, where there is a spring, and where one can lose oneself in the most charming natural manner, just as though one were in the country. Not that I ever lost myself there. But I heard folks say so.

The men often stalk by, paying no attention to me, but women generally stop and try me.

I have plenty of acquaintances, and some dear friends. There are the two girls, twins always dressed alike; the mother and her four children; the old lady who brings her knitting; a plump young woman who always eats bananas and sponge cake, and leaves the crumbs and skins on me in a paper.

And my married couple—my oldest friends. I used to wonder at first why they walked so slowly, and why that broad-shouldered fellow took that little woman's arm. Now I know. He is blind.

A stout lady and a stout gentleman sat down on me one bright summer evening, making me creak dreadfully, and the stout gentleman said to the stout lady:

"Gabriella is an idiot!"

"Gabriella is a girl," said the stout lady.

"It is all the same thing," said the gentleman.

"I was a girl once," said the lady reproachfully.

"Bless my soul! so you were," said the gentleman; "and I was a boy. Dear, dear! And precious fools we made of ourselves."

After that neither of them said much for a while.

"The Rev. Mr. Spinner is one of the best men that ever lived," said the old gentleman.

"But just a little older than Gabriella," said the old lady.

"A very young man yet; not eight-and-forty," said the old gentleman.

"And Gabriella is just eighteen," said the old lady, "and Charles is three-and-twenty, and so handsome!"

"Stuff and nonsense! What's handsome in a man?"

"I thought a good deal of it once," said the old lady.

"So did I; and look at us now," said the old gentleman.

"I tell you, Spinner is just the man for Gabriella; and I won't hear another word about Charles Baldwin."

Then the old lady got up and trotted away, and the old gentleman trotted after her. And half-an-hour went by, and just the loveliest girl I ever saw, with the handsomest young man by her side, stopped just before me.

"Sit down and rest, Gabriella," said the young man.

"Oh, if papa and mamma should be up here," said the girl.

"The last place where we need fear to meet them. Now tell me all, love!"

"There's not much to tell," said Gabriella. "Pa is determined that I shall accept Mr. Spinner, and I'm afraid the dear, good man will be brought to propose, and I know he doesn't love me one bit. All the congregation expect it, and aunt and uncle, and—oh, what shall I do?"

"You know what I have always urged you to do."

"And I have always said that, though I'll never marry anyone else, I can't marry even you clandestinely. Don't be cross with me, Charlie."

"If you loved me as I love you ——" began Charlie.

But just then Gabriella began to tremble.

"Somebody is coming," she said. "Oh, dear, it's ma and pa!"

And in a moment more the shadows of those stout parents fell upon me as they walked past arm in arm, the old gentleman talking emphatically, the old lady shaking her head, and neither of them looking towards my ve...

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lovers. When they were gone, Charlie gave his arm to Gabriella, and away they went in the opposite direction.

Then I was left alone, and alone I remained for an hour. At the end of that time there came up the path a lady of forty, very prim, very plain, and very neat, who dusted me off with her handkerchief—not that that offended me—before she would sit down, and then shook her head and sighed.

"It seems so suitable," she said to herself. "Mr. Spinner is a good age for me. I respect and admire him; we have congenial tastes. I could make his parsonage all it ought to be. I was made for a minister's wife, and I should have been one if that flossy-haired little flirt Gabriella Thompson hadn't gone into the Bible class. Such a wife for a clergyman as she'd be! Oh, dear; I like him so! Well, it's my cross I suppose. I'll try not to think about it—but it's so absurd for him. Bless me! there are two men coming up the path. What will they think of me here all alone!" and off she hurried.

About moonrise, I saw coming up the path, a man. He had a thin face, with very small blue eyes, a very long nose, a very long chin, a very wide mouth, and no whiskers or moustache whatever; but a face with a mild, pleasant expression, for all that. As he sat down, he laid a book upon me, and I read upon its cover the name Spinner.

This then was the clergyman.

"I can't say that I see my way very clearly," he said. "It is plain that I am expected by the congregation to offer my hand to Thompson's daughter, Gabriella. Her father plainly desires it. They believe that I have been paying attention to her. I suppose I have. I mustn't do anything wrong. Especially I must not awaken hopes in an innocent young heart to crush them. I merely thought her a child. Still, since I have seemed to feel more, I must fulfil the promises of my actions. I fear I shall not make her happy, and she is not the woman I need. There is Miss Crump now. Ah, what a woman! Had I not unconsciously paid particular attention to poor, dear Gabriella, I should now be free to—but no matter. Duty first. Heigho." And the Rev. Mr. Spinner took up his book and departed.

"What fools people are!" I said to myself. I knew they'd all come back again, and so they did. One day Gabriella and Charles would talk, as lovers do, on me. Another, Gabriella and her mamma. Miss Crump came, too. Sometimes the minister came himself, and crossed his legs and consoled himself with the thought that he was doing his duty to Gabriella.

Once old Thompson came with him, and told him how, matters once arranged, he would buy the handsome house next the church for his daughter. And the Rev. Mr. Spinner inquired whether Gabriella was really happy in the prospective union; and Thompson—old sinner—said: "Very, only she was shy."

I tried my best to shake him off. I would have been willing to be smashed up, just to have him hurt a little.

At last I knew that the day was fixed. One evening Miss Crump came to sit on me and weep, and wandered away in the wrong direction in her agitation. And there followed her as far as my post, Spinner, who did not weep, but groaned. And the moon went up, and he sat there still with his forehead on his umbrella handle, when a shriek was heard, and there down the path, a lady, who cried:

"Oh, dear! what shall I do? What shall I do? I've lost my way, and it's night!"

And it was Miss Crump. And Mr. Spinner ran to her and said:

"Dear Miss Crump, don't be afraid," and Miss Crump sat down upon me and said:

"Oh, Mr. Spinner, I was so terrified! I couldn't find my way, and there was a drunken man in the arbour. It is dreadful to have no one to take care of you."

And he said, not meaning to speak so, but doing it involuntarily:

"If it were in my power you should never be without someone to take care of you again."

And she started to her feet, and he stood away from her. And she said:

"You are engaged to Miss Gabriella," and he said: "Forgive me. My heart spoke. I must crush it, and do my duty. Only you know my secret, now."

And Miss Crump burst into tears and said:

"We must both forget this. Poor Gabriella!" And just then two more figures came into the moonlight, and Gabriella's voice cried:

"It is Mr. Spinner."

And then she came up, leaning on Charlie's arm, and said: "Kind friend, forgive me." And he said: "For what, my child?" And she said: "I've promised to marry you, but I can't. I love you, but not that way. I wouldn't make you a good wife. Pa knows I feel so. And please let me off, Mr. Spinner. Charlie and I are going away with each other to-morrow. And before we go you will bless us and—and—marry us, Mr. Spinner, and tell pa. I know you are not in love with me, and I——" and then she looked at Miss Crump!

"This is all very wrong, I'm afraid," said Mr. Spinner. "A child should not deceive her parents. Go home, my dear."

"I will be Charlie's wife," said Gabriella, "and never part from him again. I have promised, Mr. Spinner, and I am of age to-night."

"Then it is clearly my duty to marry you," said Mr. Spinner. And next morning, Miss Crump playing the part of bridesmaid, he pronounced them man and wife.

Then Gabriella gave him a note for her parents, and they parted. And then Mr. Spinner took Miss Crump's hand.

"Dare I hope?" he said.

And she answered: "Oh, Mr. Spinner, I hardly know. This is so sudden—but——" and then—don't tell of it—Mr. Spinner kissed her and they went away together.

VERA MAPPIN.

RESULT OF

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 7.

THE first prize of £5 goes this week to Miss Hammond-Spencer, Glendaragh, Teignmouth, S. Devon, whose attempt in JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION, No. 7, was most nearly correct. Each of the competitors whose names appear below have received £1: Mrs. E. Davis, 13, Barbican Terrace, Barnstaple, North Devon; Miss B. Clifton, 46, North Side, Clapham Common; Miss Sarah Thompson, Stafford Street, Bilston, Staffs; Mrs. Bertha Davis, Alma Cottage, Worple Street, Mortlake, S.W.; Mr. R. Collett, 116, Phillip Street, Aston, Birmingham.

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A Comedy off the Stage.

By G. Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUT STILL A WOMAN.

"LUCY," whispered Daines, as to his horror he saw that one hand clutched the bottle which was partly hidden by the great China crape mantle thrown over her arm, and this was blackened by a broad stain.

She did not seem to hear him, and he laid his hand upon her wrist. Then only did she turn her eyes upon him with look of wonder, as if surprised to see him there.

"You?" she said; "I thought you had gone."

"Great Heavens!" he whispered. "You mad girl, what have you done?"

He glanced at the policeman behind her as he spoke, but the man stood stolidly watchful of all that was going on around him, and did not seem to heed them.

"What have I done?" she said, in a low tone, and with an hysterical quiver in her voice.

"Yes, that horrible stuff. Oh, you must have been mad."

"Yes," she said, nodding her head slowly. "I was mad against her—so mad. It was too much to bear. Take me away, please. It isn't so crowded now. It's all gone off, and I want to be shut up in the dark, where I can have a good cry. There's something burning in my head, and I shall be better then."

"Oh, my poor girl—my poor girl," he whispered, and he took her arm.

"No, no; don't touch me," she said. "I'm not fit for you to come near. I feel as if I'd murdered her, and I want to die. Please go."

"I can't leave you like this," he said.

"But you can't know what I was going to do," she said, with a quick look of surprise.

"Yes, I knew afterwards—too late. Look here. When I picked up the bottle——"

He held up one blackened glove, and she drew in a sobbing breath as if in pain.

"How horrible!" she said in a whisper. "I felt obliged to do it. I got rid of you, and then I hurried out before it was over, and came and stood here to wait for them. It has often been done before. I'm telling you so as to make you hate me and keep away. I've read of it in the papers—of how one woman will throw vitriol in another's face to spoil her beauty for ever. I said I'd spoil hers and make him hate her and come back to me. Look, I've got a bottle full here. It was full of scent when he gave it to me, and I suppose I was mad. I came and waited, feeling how easy it would be. No one would think it of me. I kept it under my mantle—Rod gave me this mantle."

Daines looked at her in horror as she talked on in a low, despondent, helpless way, searching the past and seeming totally irresponsible for her actions. There were plenty of people about, and the policeman was close behind them, but no one paid any heed to the couple apparently waiting for their carriage, and Lucy went on slowly in the same halting whisper, while Daines felt that she leant more and more heavily upon his arm.

"They were very nearly the first; and as soon as they came along there Roderick saw me standing here like this, and he gave a start and looked as if he would go back. But he didn't: he came on, with her on his right, and I had only to draw the bottle from under my mantle and throw the stuff all over her face and bosom. It was so easy."

Daines groaned, and she gazed up at him with a pitying look in her pretty eyes.

"Yes, it was very horrible, wasn't it?" she said, as she

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wrinkled up her brow. "I wonder now that I could ever have thought it, but I did. I was so jealous, and I hated her so. And there she came along, looking so young and happy and beautiful, and she turned her head to him as she walked, and laughed and chatted to him, while he looked as white as a ghost and as if he knew what I was going to do."

"Oh, Lucy, Lucy!" groaned Daines.

"Yes," she said softly; "but I don't think it was me then. I felt as if some devil was in me, making me hold the bottle tightly, ready to dash the stuff in her eyes and blind them for ever, so that she should never look love into his again."

"Mad!—mad!" groaned Daines pitifully.

"Yes, I was mad then, and I stood ready—it was such a little time—and she came closer and closer; and just as she came towards me she turned and saw me as I stood there, and I suppose it was because she was so young and happy—she looked just like what an angel must be—so pure and good—and she smiled at me, just as one sister might at another; and then—it was all like a dream, Mr. Daines—she was going on down the stairs, and I stood here, seeing her get into the carriage with him."

"Then you did not throw——" began Daines, hysterical as a woman now in his excitement, and she looked at him wonderingly.

"Throw it—at her?" she said simply. "Oh, no: she looked so young and beautiful and happy. I only wanted to be happy too. No; I felt that I could sooner have drunk the stuff as I stood here; but I'm such a coward, I want to live. Everything is so beautiful when you are young and happy, and someone loves you. No, I felt I could not die. Take me home, please, Mr. Daines. I feel as if I should break down if I tried to stir alone, and this stuff is burning my poor hand so much, but," she added, with a piteous smile, "it's better so."

"Lucy, Lucy, my poor girl," he whispered, as he drew her closer to his side, to hurry her down into the brightly lit street, and then into the first turning leading north, followed closely by a couple of men pestering to show them a cab.

With a quick motion Daines snatched the bottle from the trembling girl's hand, and dashed it far out into the roadway, where it shivered to atoms, sparkling in the light, and the two men, believing it to be a paper of coin as they heard the jingle, rushed after it together. Before they had recovered from their surprise Daines had hurried his companion into a cab, where she sank back with a sigh, quite insensible before they reached the house so short a distance away.

CHAPTER XV.

OLIVE'S FIRST TASTE OF MONEY MATTERS.

"ROD, dear," said Olive one morning at breakfast, "what am I to say to the Frasers?"

There was no reply. Braetoun sat at the other end of the table, tapping the cloth with a letter that he had refolded after reading, and looking now flushed now pale.

"Rod, dearest," said Olive, smiling at the absorbed look in her husband's face.

Still no answer, and he sat gazing straight before him, his chair wrenched on one side, and the lines deepening in his brow and about the corners of his lips.

Olive rose quietly, but he did not notice it, and with her eyes sparkling she crept round behind him, and with a girl's merry smile upon her lip, she leant forward with extended hands, and placing her left over his eyes, caught up the letter with her right.

He gave a violent start, throwing back his head and striking her sharply upon the mouth; but without heeding this, he leapt up and caught the letter from her hand.

"Oh, Rod, dearest!" she cried, as she clapped her hands to her mouth and the tears began to gush from her eyes as her face grew convulsed with suffering. "Rod, Rod, how could you?"

"How could you be such a fool?" he cried savagely. "How dare you do such a thing?"

"Rod, dear," she cried, amidst a burst of sobbing, as she applied her kerchief to her lips, which were bleeding freely, cut as they were against her white teeth, "how could you? Look!"

"How could I?" he cried fiercely as she held out the deeply-stained cambric. "How could you be such a silly hoyden, playing tomboy's tricks like that? Recollect who you are, who I am, madam. How dare you snatch one of my private letters like that?"

"I—I did it, dear, in play."

"In play!"

"I spoke twice, dear," she said piteously, "and you made no reply."

"In play! You, a married woman! How dare you?"

"I dared, dear," she said, flushing a little now, "because I was your wife, and I thought we had no secrets one from the other."

"Then, please think differently for the future."

"I did not mean to annoy you, dear," she said, looking at him reproachfully; and then the girl spoke again, her lips quivered, the tears showered down, and she held out her handkerchief. "Oh, Rod, what have I done that you should punish me like this?"

"I didn't punish you. It was an accident—entirely your own fault. How was I to know that you had crept behind my chair like some silly schoolgirl, instead of my wife?"

"I—I am—very sorry," she faltered, trying hard to master her emotion, but the rebuff was agonising, the pain in her cut lips nothing. He was keeping something back from her, holding her at a distance—so soon too. And now, instead of being tender and ready to comfort her, his words sounded brutal.

"If you had asked me, I would have shown you the letter. There, take it, and read it," he cried. "It isn't from a woman."

He threw the letter on the table, and walked to the window, to place his foot on a chair, and stand looking out.

"It isn't from a woman."

The words seemed to echo in her brain, and she stood gazing after him, wide eyed and wondering, but with the pain she suffered greater than ever. Not from a woman! Why should she think it was? How could she think it was? His words sounded like a reproach—they were such as he might have spoken if she had made some cruel, jealous accusation.

But she crushed down her agony, driving away the thoughts that came rushing through her, and remembering that he had seemed irritable and strange during the past two or three days, she smiled sadly, and without so much as glancing at the letter, she followed him to the window, and laid her hand deprecatingly upon his shoulder.

"Rod, dearest," she whispered; "only a few minutes ago and I was so happy. Please, please don't be angry with me, love. Here is the letter. I don't want to see it, if you do not wish."

"Oh, read it now," he cried without turning his head; and a spasm of pain convulsed and made piteous the sweet young face that looked so passionately towards him.

She made no reply, but stood holding out the folded letter, whose envelope, face downwards, was upon the table.

To give her time to read, Braetoun took out his cigarette case, lit up, and began to smoke, all without turning his head, making believe to be very much interested in what took place in the square.

"Well, have you read it?" he said, breaking the silence at last.

"No, Roderick," she said sadly. "I do not wish to read your letters."

He faced round, to find her standing pale and statuesque,

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holding out the missive, and with her nether lip beginning to look swollen and disfigured.

"But I told you to read it," he said sharply.

She darted a piteous look at him, full of appeal, for his anger, which had been calming down, seemed to increase, and, half blinded by the tears which filled her eyes, and quivering with the new emotion from which she suffered, she slowly obeyed, opening the folds, and began to read the very brief, curt note, which was as follows:

Eaton Place, Wednesday.

Dear Sir,—When you honoured me six months ago by marrying my child, I gave my solicitors the fullest instructions to make it plain to yours that the arrangements over the marriage settlements were final, and binding in every way. They secured an ample income for Lady Braetoun, in which you, as her husband, would, of course, share. I regret to say that in any case I should not consent to alterations being made, and that even had I felt disposed to be so weak, certain matters that have come to my ears of late would have fixed me in my original carefully thought-out intentions.

With regard to the other portion of your letter, I am obliged by habit to refuse. I make a point of never advancing money on interest to any friend.—Your obedient servant,

Isaac Emsworth.

The Right Hon. Lord Braetoun.

It took Olive some minutes to grasp the import of the letter, which she read twice, and then looked up wonderingly at Braetoun.

"You have been asking my father to alter something, Roderick, and to lend you some money."

"It says so, plainly enough, doesn't it?"

"Yes, dear," she said humbly; "but why?"

"Why?" he cried savagely. "Why? Bah! how can you be so childish! You know I want money."

"You said you did, dear, but I believed you were joking. I thought we had plenty."

"Ah!" he cried, with his irritability increasing. "You go on spending and never troubling yourself. Joking? Great Heavens! When I am pestered to death!"

"Oh, Rod, dearest," she cried, forgetting her own suffering as she read his in the sunken cheeks and careworn expression. "I am so, so sorry; and papa has refused to help you?"

"You see he does."

"But he can't have understood, any more than I did. I thought, indeed, that my money, I mean the money settled upon me, would help to make you rich."

"And all the time you are a perfect child over money matters. There, I can't explain these things to you. I am ill and worried—Olive, don't cling to me so. Can't you see I'm hot and worried, and that my nerves are all ajar?"

"Yes, dearest," she said tenderly. "Sit down, no, lie down on the couch a little while, and tell me, darling. You musn't be worried about money when you are ill. I know I'm very stupid about it, but I have never learned anything. Papa always said that women had nothing to do with cash accounts: that was men's work. There, you'll be more comfortable now," she continued, as he threw himself on the breakfast-room couch; "now tell me how to help you, dear. It is absurd for you to be worried. How much do you want?"

"Oh—there, I told your father, and he sends me back that cold, brutal letter."

"No, no; don't call it that, darling. Perhaps he was a little cross, and someone at the Cape had sent him a tiresome letter by this mail. He is very much bothered sometimes, and I know he loses a great deal of money, but he never would tell me anything about it. Now, be a good boy, and tell me at once," she said, as she bent down over him and pressed her lips upon his forehead, and then started as she saw the effect, and hurriedly and with a slight shudder made believe to hold her folded handkerchief to his brow, for she had left the mark of blood where she had kissed him.

"There, don't do that," he cried impatiently. "My head's hot enough as it is."

"Is it, dear? A poor darling head. Wait a moment."

She ran to the chimney-piece, took a scent bottle, and hurriedly saturated her kerchief with the pungent contents, bathed his brow, removing the last trace of her loving kiss.

"Now, Rod, dear," she said, as she furtively touched her own lips from time to time, "how much money do you want? I have—yes, over seven pounds."

"Seven devils!" he cried so furiously that she started away in alarm, but turned back with a loving smile, which looked terribly pathetic as she caressed him.

"Rod, my darling," she cooed over him; "don't, dear; you frighten me. I know you don't mean it."

"Then you shouldn't talk such idiotic nonsense. Can I pay seven thousand pounds with seven?"

"Seven thousand! That's a great deal, dear. Why, what have you been doing?"

"Never mind. I have it to pay at once, or I shall be sold up or something. Be quiet. Don't paw me about."

"Rod!"

"Well, there. I don't mean that, but I can't bear it now. Go and finish your breakfast, and let me think."

"No: I want to think for you, as your wife should. Why, I have plenty of money, Rod. I mean, we have. What is mine is yours, and you shall have all you want, dear."

"How?"

"Why, I'll give it to my own dearest husband, of course; anything to make him happy."

She choked a little as she said this, and the tears would come, in spite of her efforts to hide them.

Her convulsed face moved him a little, and he spoke more gently.

"You mean well," he said, "but you are a perfect infant still over these matters. Your marriage settlements tie up your money so that I can't touch it, and you can't either."

"Then what's the good of it, dear?" she cried wonderingly.

"Ah, what indeed!" he cried. "I was a fool ever to consent to it all. I didn't know it would be so tight as it is."

"I remember now," she said; "I have read about money being tight in the City."

"In the City!" he growled, "it's tight everywhere. Hang him! he was too clever for me."

"Do you mean the man you owe the money to, Rod?"

"No, I don't. I mean your old grab-all of a father."

"Rod, dearest, don't, don't, please. You hurt me. Dear papa would not do anything that was not for my—for our good."

"For your good, as he calls it, yes; but he has made a confounded mistake this time, and so he'll find out."

"Has he, dear? Oh, I am sorry."

She rose and rang the bell, making Braetoun start up on his elbow.

"Here, what are you doing? Don't do that. Olive! What are you about?"

"Trying to do something for you, dear. You seem so ill."

"No, I won't have it. You're going to send for that confounded, croaking raven, Murray. I don't want him here. He does me more harm than good."

"No, no, no, dearest."

"He does, I tell you, and he comes here a cursed deal too often. I won't have him hanging about and talking to you in his smooth way."

"I'm sure he is very, very kind and patient and nice."

"Oh, is he?" cried Braetoun angrily. "I won't have him fetched."

"Did you ring, my lady?"

"No," cried Braetoun fiercely.

"Yes," cried Olive firmly. "Tell them to send the brougham round as quickly as possible. Go at once."

"Yes, my lady."

"What are you going to do?" cried Braetoun, with his

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face looking drawn and strange. "I won't have you go to fetch him."

"I am not going to fetch him, Rod, dear," said Olive firmly. "I think you want a different doctor."

"I don't want any doctor," he snarled—"Yes, I do."

"It is your anxiety about money makes you ill, and I am going to papa at once."

"What! You are going to your father!" cried Braetoun excitedly. "What for?"

"To tell him he must untie some of my money," she said quietly, "because you want it and are in great trouble. There, don't fret and trouble any more, dearest. He does not know how ill you are, and how worried. I won't be long. He will do anything I ask him. There, look up at me as you always do, dear. I—I—I can't bear you to speak to me as you did just now. I know, darling. Don't say anything. It's all past now; but don't, pray, speak to me again like that. You don't know, dearest, how you hurt me. There, it was because you were so ill and worried."

"Yes, yes," he said hastily, as he drew her down and kissed her, "that was it—worry and illness. I was not myself."

"But you are now," she cried, clinging to him lovingly, and sobbing over him for a few moments. "There, the sun has come out again," she said merrily, "and I am going to fetch you a big bag of money to pay the horrible ogre who has been troubling you. And now, dear, you are not to leave that couch till I come back."

"Oh, I don't know. Hadn't I better come with you to face the old man?"

"No, sir, certainly not. Papa would do anything for me, and perhaps he wouldn't for you. He has known me longer, sir. There, lie still, and try to go to sleep."

She hurried out of the room, looked in five minutes later to nod to him playfully, and then with cruelly aching heart drew her veil tightly over her face, and went to the door just as the brougham drew up.

"Poor wench!" muttered Braetoun, as he turned his head to the wall. "Curse it! how bad I do feel. But I'm not going to have Murray here so much. I believe he'd poison me if he dared. Comes here a deal too often. But she is a little angel of a girl, after all, and I behave awful bad to her. But it's all fate—hard fate too, for I do try my best to run square."

He lay thinking for a few minutes, and then winced at a keen throb of pain which shot through his head, one which influenced the tide of his thoughts.

"He'd better mind what he's about. Why, I'd shoot him as soon as look at him, that I would."

He tried to divert his thoughts to another channel, and lay musing.

"Ought I to have gone with her after all?" he thought. "No: she's right. I should have been like a red rag to the old bull. He'll do it for her, like an old fool. Wish I'd told her it was twice as much. Regularly sold me over those settlements. Who would have believed that everything could have been tied up so tightly? Why, I'm a regular cypher. Rigdon regularly laughed at me. Said they were useless as securities for any advance. He's a cursed old fool, but he must have known something beforehand. Made some inquiries, I suppose. Talked to Murray. Thick as thieves. Ah! what a stroke of fate—what a cruel position—to be regularly under the thumb of a man like that, regularly at his mercy. I believe I'm the most unfortunate beggar that was ever born."

CHAPTER XVI.

EMSWORTH MAKES A CONFIDANT.

BRAETOUN would not have lain there in Chester Square if he could have known all that took place.

Murray's brougham drew up at the door in Eaton Place, and, on alighting, the Doctor was shown at once into the dining-room, where Emsworth was seated at breakfast, evidently making a hearty meal; and Murray's face showed a slight trace of annoyance as the door closed.

"Ah, my dear Murray!" said Emsworth, holding out his hands and wincing as he moved. "Very good of you to come. Had breakfast?"

"No: I came on as soon as I received your message."

"Bless you, my lad! Don't look very bad, do I? Touch the bell, will you?"

Murray rang, and then said gravely:

"What is it, Mr. Emsworth? I am pressed for time."

"Yes, I know. Lot of poor beggars forming *queue* at your door: but they must wait a bit. You must eat or you can't work. Hot plate for Dr. Murray."

This to the butler.

"Now sit down and talk to me."

"Yes. What is wrong—not"—with a gasp—"Lady Braetoun?"

"No, no, no, my dear boy. She's well enough. I'm the sick man, I tell you."

The Doctor drew in a breath as if relieved, and Emsworth looked at him searchingly.

"Thank you for that, Doctor. I like it. I'm glad to see that my darling has someone beside me who loves her."

"Lady Braetoun won my esteem from the day I first met her, Mr. Emsworth."

"I know she did, sir, I know it; and before I begin to groan over my troubles I'm going to tell you something. Murray, I've been making a fresh will."

"Indeed!" said Murray coldly; "then I hope you have not remembered me in it."

"But I have, sir," said Emsworth with a chuckle. "Not in the regular way, though. Short a time as I've known you, it has been long enough to make up my mind what to do. Of course, Olive inherits the bulk of my savings and winnings, but she'll want protecting."

"Who should protect her but her husband, sir?" said Murray frowning.

"My friend, sir, the man I trust, the man who will act to her as a brother. You."

"Mr. Emsworth!"

"Hush!—Set the things down, and mind I am not interrupted."

The butler, who had entered with a tray, quickly laid a fresh cover and left the room.

"Now eat your breakfast."

"No, not now," said the Doctor excitedly. "You must alter that will, Mr. Emsworth. I cannot consent to undertake this duty."

"Yes, you can," said Emsworth sternly, "and you will, for her sake."

"No, sir. I cannot put myself in so false a position."

"You can, and you will, sir," said Emsworth, stretching across the table and seizing the Doctor's wrist, to grip it tightly and hold on, drawing his breath heavily, and unable to repress a groan.

"My leg—my leg!" he muttered.

"Yes: what is it? A touch of gout?"

"Oh, some cursed thing of the kind. Forced to have two men to give me my bath—oh, I had it hot; don't look horrified—and to dress me. Then hang me if they weren't obliged to get this arm chair and curry me down like a blooming Guy Fawkes on the Fifth of November. Here I am, and I can't stir. But I can eat, and I want to see you eat too."

"I dare say I can soon relieve you."

"Yes: of course you can; but wait a bit. I want to relieve my mind first. You'll do what I have said. You'll be my sole executor?"

"It is impossible, sir."

"It is not impossible, and you must do it. I've devoted my life to making a fortune for that girl, and when I'm gone she must have someone to watch over her interests."

"Yes, sir; but I am not the man."

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'But I say you are. I know you like her so well that you'd do anything sooner than see her suffer."

"I would, sir," said Murray, in a deep voice.

"Then why do you hesitate?"

"I hesitate for her sake."

"Then you are wrong. Look here: it's of no use to beat about the bush. I've had several little hints lately that I'm growing old. This is one of them. I've to die some day like a man, and I want to go to my long sleep in peace, feeling that I have left everything as right as I can for my darling child."

"You have a fortune to leave her, sir," said Murray coldly, "and you have chosen a husband for her to protect her."

"Yes, and a pretty devil of a mess I've made of it," cried the old man, flushing. "I thought I was very clever. I thought it all out, and I wouldn't have listened to anyone who had tried to dissuade me."

"No, I am sure of that, sir."

"Don't taunt me about it. But there," continued the old man, with a groan: "it's of no use to cry over spilt milk. It's done, and I've got to make the best of it. But, Murray, why didn't you tell me what a scoundrel he was?"

"How could I, sir?" cried the Doctor passionately.

"And that he was in such a state of health?"

"Mr. Emsworth, you cannot deny that you knew almost as much as I did about Braetoun, and that you have believed his sweet young wife would entirely redeem him. I believed this too."

"Yes. I suppose I knew all this," groaned Emsworth; "but I wouldn't quite know it. I was carried away by my vanity and pride, and the way in which that old hen harpy of a mother worked me round her finger. There, it's of no use to hide anything from one's medical man. I was dazzled by the title, birth, and position. It was too much for me, and every objection which rose before me I knocked down with the idea that Olive would redeem her husband from all the past. One moment—I am in a good deal of pain. Tell me what it is—not something worse coming on? I can't afford to die yet, Doctor, but speak out the truth."

He dabbed his wet brow with his handkerchief, and sank back in his chair, Murray immediately devoting himself to his fresh patient for the next few minutes.

"Well," said Emsworth at last, rather piteously; "what does it mean—short obituary notice in the *Times* about one of Samuel Smiles's self-help men, and a quiet substantial funeral?"

"Not for many years to come, I hope, sir," said Murray quietly. "It is a form of gout undoubtedly, and it must not be trifled with. You have been doing too much lately, and suffering a great deal of mental anxiety."

"More than I ever did before in my life, my lad. Things have been very bad at the Cape, and I fought the trouble through and won; but then down upon me came the trouble about Olive's husband. Murray, my lad, you've relieved my mind partly about myself, for I don't want to die yet; I'm not tired enough of life to wish for the long sleep, and I want to make a long fight yet to redeem my child's position. When I go promise me that you will take my place as my executor."

"It is impossible, Mr. Emsworth."

"It is not impossible, man. Look here; I've sent for you to do me good. Don't begin by doing me harm. I've got worry enough upon my mind as it is. For a couple of months past, one on the top of another, little and big, the worries have been piling themselves up, about that scoundrel, Braetoun. He left off for a time, but he has drifted back to his old games. The turf has greater attractions than his wife; he has been making ducks and drakes of a lot more money, and got himself deeply involved, and now——"

"Does Lady Braetoun know all this?"

"Not yet, man," whispered Emsworth, inserting a crooked finger in the Doctor's buttonhole, "and she don't know that the miserable hound has gone back to some wretched woman—some actress he used to know at Brompton. Confound him! I should like to shoot him for the scoundrel he is."

Murray sat gazing straight before him, with his brow knit, his teeth set, and his hands grasping the edge of the table.

"You knew what a scoundrel he was," said Emsworth, in a deep voice. "You ought to have told me. You ought to have fought against me, and insisted that I had made a wrong choice. You ought to have done all this."

"And if I had, Mr. Emsworth, you would have called me a meddlesome slanderer, and have persisted in spite of all."

"Yes," said the father with a groan, "I should, my lad, I should. Oh, Doctor, Doctor, what miserable fools we clever men are!"

"Yes," said Murray bitterly, "even the most able."

"There, I can't take her away. I should be making worse of it. Why, she has all her stupid old father's weaknesses. If I were to go and tell my poor darling that he was the scoundrel he is, she'd turn upon me fiercely, and defend him to the last. She's as stubborn as I am. Believe ill of him? Not she. It would take something very strong indeed to make her think he was anything but the husband she swore to love."

"She may win him to the true course yet," said the Doctor hoarsely.

"Never. Can't you kill him out of the way next time he's ill? Such men are of no use whatever. I know you hold him together, and that he has you to thank for such health as he has. What do you think is the last thing?"

Murray made a gesture with one hand as he gazed despondently before him.

"I told you he has got through all the ready money I supplied them with to start them—all gone, and since then he has been setting some scoundrel of a solicitor and money-lender to work to turn her settlements into cash."

"But you will not allow that?" cried Murray excitedly.

Emsworth's hand came down heavily upon his arm.

"Got you!" he cried.

The Doctor stared.

"Now look me in the face, Murray, after that, and tell me you will not be my executor, and watch over my child's interests when I am gone!"

"But you have the money properly tied up?"

"I've done all I can, but who knows what dodges and tricks may not be tried in dealing with a weak woman who is ready to believe and can be cajoled. Tell me now that you refuse."

Murray was silent for a few moments' bitter struggle, as he thought of the position he occupied, and the dangers and temptations that might come. Then he said quietly:

"I cannot refuse, Mr. Emsworth. There is my hand."

"No, I am right this time, my lad. Thank you. That has done me more good than any medicine. Look here," he continued, taking his pocket-book from his breast. "You did not know it was so bad. It has come to this. Read that."

Murray read the letter, and l anded it back.

"What have you said to him, sir?"

"I have told him in the plainest words I could write, that he will not get a penny from me, and I'm waiting to see what card he will play next."

There was a tap at the door.

"Who's there."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the butler; "I wouldn't have interrupted, but my young lady is here."

(To be continued.)

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THE WAGER WON.

THE Empress had just ended her game of chess one evening at the Winter Palace, Petersburg.

"It is enough," she exclaimed, turning to her lady-in-waiting whose duty it was to supply her with a fresh pair of gloves at the beginning of every game: "I shall not play any more. I will have my revenge to-morrow, M. le Marquis."

"Your Imperial Majesty has had it already," replied the Marquis Strogonoff, who was the popular and accomplished French Ambassador. "If you could but see the deep contrition of my heart for having had the presumption to defeat you, you would find yourself amply revenged."

The young Empress smiled graciously and rejoined: "Very well, but I prefer deeds to words. That is what I try to impress upon my people. *Apropos*, you know how we Russians pride ourselves on the strictness and alertness of our detectives, and how nothing escapes their keen vigilance. As you seem to doubt the watchfulness of my subjects, I requested that the very next case of detected smuggling be at once made known to me."

"To doubt would be treasonable, your Majesty," said the Marquis, with a smile. "Do let us hear the details."

"Count Lazareff has just been arrested and detained on the frontier for smuggling all kinds of contraband articles from Paris, which were most ingeniously hidden in the linings and roof of the carriage; and the Emperor, to encourage the detectives, has distributed among them the heavy fine of 800 roubles which the Count had to pay. What do you say to that, Marquis?"

"I can but say, your Majesty," he answered with a shrug of his shoulders, "I can but say how clumsy the man must have been to fail in such a simple thing."

"Simple thing!" repeated the Empress with a slight look of surprise. "I do not think you would find it so easy to deceive our inspectors."

"Will your Majesty give me leave to try?" the Marquis quietly asked.

"Oh, no," she answered, with a smile. "It would be of no use. You know that your person and property as Ambassador are sacred, and therefore you would not be a fair test. I would wager, however, this diamond ring that were you to pass our frontier as a private individual you would not succeed in smuggling in the veriest trifle without being detected."

"I accept the challenge," replied the Marquis, with a graceful bow, "and as I am shortly going to France on urgent private business, I shall avail myself of your gracious permission, return to Russia as a private individual, and subject myself and property to the most rigorous search of the custom-house."

"You have accepted my challenge," the Empress rejoined. "Remember, Marquis, we shall have no pity on you."

* * * * *

Great excitement prevailed at the small frontier station on the road from Königsburg to Petersburg. The officers of the custom-house were on the alert, for they had received orders from headquarters that when the travelling carriage of the French Ambassador should pass through that day it was to be most carefully searched and examined, and even the person of the Marquis was not to be spared. Such were the Emperor's orders, and, unusual as they were, they must be obeyed.

It was a bitterly cold day, the snow lay deep on the ground, and the custom-house officers, who had been doubled in number, were congregated around the stove, warming their sheepskin-lined kaftans, and speculating on the rich prize which would undoubtedly fall into their hands.

"Count Lazareff's roubles were nothing to it! By St. Alexander, the Emperor is a kind father to us," and the men stroked their long beards and gulped down bowls of hot tea. But hark! There is a faint tinkle of bells and the swift sound of horses on the crisp snow.

"Here he comes!" cried one of the men, jumping from his warm seat. The rest quickly followed, and as the Ambassador's covered sledge with its four horses drew in sight it was surrounded by the band of officers.

Respectfully touching his cap, the head man accosted the Marquis and apologised for the intrusion, but he had received orders to examine carefully the carriage effects of his Excellency, and must trouble him to alight while the search was being instituted.

The Marquis, who was luxuriously reclining in the warm folds of a magnificent black-fox cloak, roused himself at the words, and replied that there was no occasion to apologise.

"Alphonse," he cried, as his valet came to the door of the sledge, "take care of Fidele, and see that the poor little thing does not catch cold coming out into this frosty air."

The Marquis then stepped out and hastened into the custom-house, followed by Alphonse, who had carefully wrapped a rug around the French poodle. The poor beast, who had been snugly seated on a pile of warm furs, evidently disliked being disturbed, for it gave vent to its displeasure in a short bark.

Like eager birds of prey over a rich prize, the examiners gathered around the sledge, and began their search in the most systematic manner, ransacking every possible place of concealment. Even the cushions and linings were not spared, to the indignation of the coachman and valet, who looked on with sullen eyes not daring to interfere, but muttering at the folly of their master in permitting such an outrage.

As yet they had not discovered a single contraband article, and more eager became the search, until at last the baffled men had to abandon it.

The Marquis meanwhile was warming himself at the stove, with stoical indifference, sipping hot tea and stroking Fidele's curly head. Nor was his equanimity disturbed when they approached him and intimated that he and his two servants must submit to being searched. "Very well," said he. "Only I warn you your trouble will be in vain, for you will find nothing. But fulfil your orders by all means."

Disappointed by previous failure, the men made the

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personal search as strict as possible, but it was without result. One of the inspectors even approached Fidele, and insisted on examining the rug with which the dog was covered, as it might contain something hidden in its folds. Fidele gave a low growl at being thus disturbed, and its master took it up gently, and said: "Poor Fidele is not accustomed to be treated roughly. Well, you have found nothing. I told you so. And now, I suppose, we may proceed on our journey."

The chief examiner, bowing low, assured his Excellency that he would not be further detained, and he was soon in his sledge once more, carrying his pet dog in his arms. The horses pawed impatiently, and the merry bells began to tinkle a chime of departure. In a moment the swift sledge was out of sight, leaving the disappointed custom's officers bewailing their ill luck.

* * * * *

It was again a brilliant evening scene at the Winter Palace. The young Empress was surrounded by her court circle, and when the Ambassador approached, not a little curiosity was aroused as to the result of the wager. It had become a lively topic of speculation since his departure, and bets had been high on both sides. Even the Emperor who generally kept aloof from such trifles, was amused at the incident, and was curious to know how the Marquis would explain the affair as the baffled search at the frontier had been promptly communicated to Petersburg. The Empress felt triumphant, and naturally concluded that the Ambassador, rather than run the risk of failure, had given up the idea altogether.

"Welcome back to Petersburg," she exclaimed, graciously extending her imperial hand, and smiling as he bent down over it. "What news from Paris? I fear you did not find anything there worth smuggling, if I may trust the report of the officers, who seem to have treated you most unmercifully, and searched every possible corner."

"Your Majesty certainly has no occasion to find fault with your faithful subjects, for I can bear witness to the keenness of their eyes and fingers," the Marquis replied, with a slightly amused smile at the eager looks of the circle of auditors. "But still, I did bring back a trifle, which perhaps you will allow me to show you. My valet is in the ante-room, as I could not well intrust it to other hands, and perhaps your Majesty will give permission to him to enter here."

With an incredulous look, which was reflected on the faces of her court, the Empress gave the required order; and as Alphonse entered with Fidele in his arms she could not suppress a laugh, in which her whole circle joined.

"What a pretty little dog!" she exclaimed. "But it scarcely comes under the head of contraband; and if this is the only thing you have brought from Paris I am afraid you have lost your wager, and my diamond ring is safe."

The Marquis did not look disconcerted, but taking Fidele from the arms of Alphonse, he placed it on the ground.

"Now, Fidele, good dog, make your bow to her Majesty," and in the most absurd way the dog kept nodding its head several times in succession.

"Now, Fidele, die," said the Marquis, putting his hand on the dog's curly head. Fidele wagged his tail, gave a hoarse bark, and in another moment, to the surprise and horror of the assemblage, its head rolled on the carpet.

There was an involuntary scream from the ladies, and even the Empress cried out: "Oh! what is that?" as the Marquis bending down over the headless body of Fidele, quietly drew forth from the opening at the neck a long, white roll of lace.

Unfolding it carefully, he held up to the astonished gaze of those present an exquisite dress of the far-famed Chantilly lace so finely wrought as to be almost priceless. A murmur of admiration was heard from all. Gracefully kneeling before the Empress, the Marquis presented the lace.

"Will your Majesty pardon my presumption, and kindly deign to accept this souvenir from Paris?"

"How very beautiful it is!" the Empress exclaimed, taking the delicate fabric in her hand. "It is truly a magnificent souvenir. Rise, M. le Marquise; you have indeed fulfilled your word and fairly won the wager. I herewith acknowledge myself defeated," she added playfully; and, taking the diamond ring from her finger, placed it in the Ambassador's hand.

"I will not part with it but with my life," was the gallant Frenchman's answer, as he rose to his feet and put the ring on his finger.

"That is indeed a wonderful dog," said the Empress, turning to Fidele. "I certainly never saw anything more true to life, and I must give you credit for the clever way in which you eluded the vigilance of my officers."

Fidele now became an object of great interest, and its head being replaced, it had to go through its various accomplishments of barking, nodding its head, and wagging its tail, all of which, owing to the ingenious mechanism concealed in its head, it performed to perfection. It was not surprising that it had escaped detection at the custom-house.

ABRAM ISAACS.

JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 10.

Six Prizes, one of £3 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the next page in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, but the title is jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, September 7th.

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JUMBLED STORY. NO. 10.]

EVER BEEN IN THE FOG.

THE messenger-boy: "Any answer, sir?

Harry: "What is it? Oh!" (Before him stands a arch over the door—ding! ding!—where's James?—He's fixing the——and, oh, my darling, I don't know where to take you, for, you see, the florist is at work in an awning frame out here."

Maud (same): "Why, Patrick says he can't ever stow the minister's fee—tied up in a brown-paper bag!"

Harry (somewhat discomposed): "This is jolly, I vow." I'm just t-t-tired to—de-death———"

Maud: "Now, dear, we'll have a nice, delightful chat; to-day, and I've so many things to tell you."

Harry: "Oh, Maud."

Maud (staying Harry's impassioned rush): "No, not so exasperating! I've been going through it all day, and here, you reckless boy! Don't you notice that carpenter?

Harry: "The dining-room?"

Maud: "The presents are displayed there."

Harry (hopefully): "The music-room?"

Maud: "No; the caterer's men have possession of the parlour, and then——"

Harry (sarcastically): "Perhaps the kitchen——"

Maud (quite seriously): "It's a perfect pandemonium!"

Harry (same): "Or the stable?"

Maud: "Dear!"

Harry (aside): "Just the place for me, then." (They enter.)

Seamstress (opening door): "If you please, Miss little sole-leather? I think perhaps we'd better——"

Maud (tearfully): "Oh, now you're getting cross—Oh, excuse me, Mr. Spooner. Thought it was the man we've had with that dress. When it was sent home we wear both or neither or none at all, and be hanged to fitted again, and——"

Voice (over banisters): "Has he come, James? Tell him!"

(Enter down the stairs, with a dove-like swoop and recedes.)

Servant (opening): "Well, you are here at last, are you? (Rings.)

Maud (springing up): "Oh, dear, it's no use! Just listens to the following):

Harry: "Hum!"

Voice: "Oh! It's only Mr. Spooner, Maud. What can have become of that man? Now, Maud——" (Voice approaching.)

Voices: "Maud! Miss Maud! Maudie!"

Harry (in despair): "Well, I'll go. But——"

Bridesmaid (outside): "I'm awfully sorry to disturb your toes." (Drops heavy scantling almost on Harry's little studio! But it's a mass of confusion, for every-foot)

Maud's mamma (entering hurriedly): "Maud! Maud, would you step upstairs? That back needs to be creams—and your Paris hat is put—in the ice-chest, please pack the handkerchiefs in—a salad-bowl or soup roses, bring 'em here—and drive tacks through the dead floral bell; it's made of—one hundred chicken croquets. Would you—oh, good evening, Mr. Spooner!—would I shouldn't think you would—and I don't blame you, it's Harry——"

Servant: "It's Mr. Spooner, ma'am."

Maud: "Any way you like, mamma—I don't else. There! There!" (Brief bliss, broken by little kiss——"

Harry: "No! Off with you. (Exit boy.) You see, (Maud slips out, remaining some time, while Harry hear them!"

(Outside Maud's house, and rather dark. Harry is!" (Reads letter and tears it up.)

Indistinct figure (which has collided with Harry): There! forget all about it, and we'll talk about something voices).

Maud, The bridesmaid, the bell, and various voices: in the bottom of some trunk, I'm sure—if those are sprinkled with—Mr. and Mrs. Snyder's best wishes, "There's two dozen, I think, of white silk—lilies for the messenger-boy, silently holding forth letter.)

Harry (petulantly): "I know well enough what this instant? I don't quite understand how I am to——" may for ten minutes, when re enter Maud.)

Maud: "Oh, Harry, you can't think what trouble Charley has never been best man before, and he's simply wild to-night with all this bother—oh! papa's found that—— Coming, mamma!" (Exit).

(Harry comtemplates ceiling with what patience he frightfully nervous about it. This is the fifth note to-ments, and she sends—three cakes of toilet soap—so you put all those light things into the tin box or the tureen—for there aren't bags enough to—flavour the thing not immediately wanted is put there."

Maud (re-entering): "Oh, Harry, isn't this awful?"

Harry (remorsefully): "Poor little girl! There! for, as you know, we've only seen each other four times and all my things are being packed upstairs, and——"

Maud: "That's settled. Now, to begin again. It's time to-morrow we'll have been married just seven hours where it ought to be—ding! ding!—you must see the white scarf or a pearl-grey one like mine! Let him away—you're laughing at me, you wicked—but I'm so sweet——"

Harry: "Well, we'll be at peace now. Come, one rustle, Maud, all smiles and happiness at seeing Harry.) much I love her—hear her say how much she—uh! going!"

Maud (shrinking away): "Ow!"

Harry (in joyous soliloquy): "Eight o'clock! At this delicious. I want to see her once more—tell her how mum—and set off by—four dozen dessert spoons—and centre of every one—ding! ding!—Mrs. Smith's compli-him——"

Maud (tenderly): "But remember, dear, that I love you, Maudie, but won't you please come out here for an and a quarter. Jove! Doesn't it seem queer—and, that, and the women from madam's are in the library getting ready to prove it!"

Second indistinct figure: "Hi, there; look out for you just as much as if I weren't so awfully busy—"Beg pardon, sir, but I couldn't see. We're putting up Eh! Confound you: take care where you are day from him. He's asking whether he shall wear a care." (Exit mamma.) "And, as I was saying, with the——"

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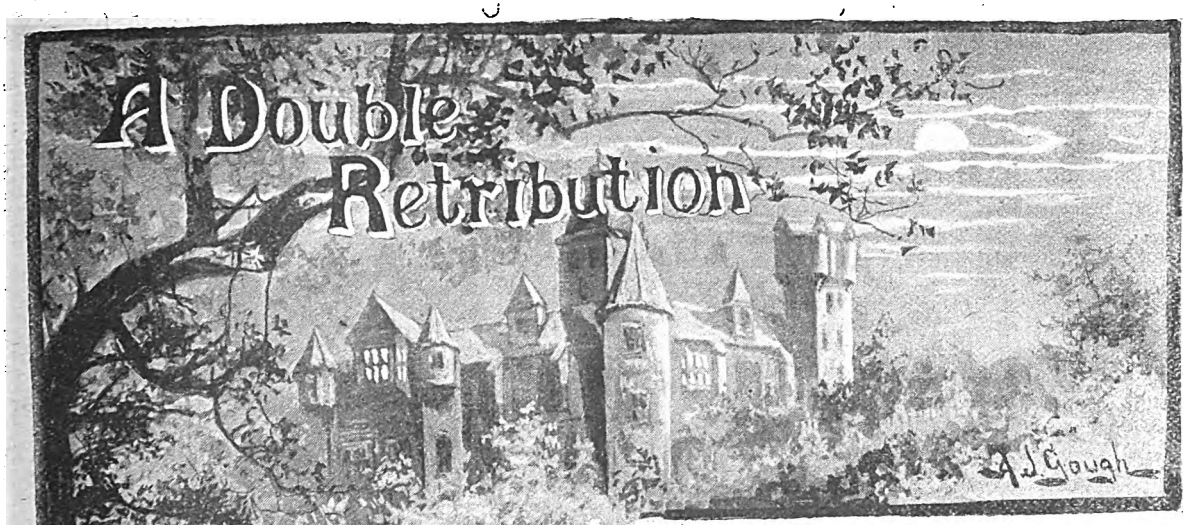

It is a black, stormy night. The trees are swaying and creaking, and their gigantic branches are tossing about in the fierce west wind like huge writhing arms stretched out in intersected confusion across the shadowy road which winds for a couple of miles through a thick forest of pines. A heavy rumbling is audible in the distance, speedily resolving into the sound of carriage-wheels; it comes nearer and nearer, and then suddenly ceases. The carriage stands still. The horses are tired, and need no staying hand as the coachman scrambles down and walks from side to side, peering into the dense blackness which envelopes them on every side.

"Pierre! what is the matter?" rang out an impatient though melodious voice. The window was let down with a jerk, and a woman's head looked out.

"Madame," answered the man, deprecatingly, touching his hat, "the horses are tired. There ought to be an inn near, but I fear I have passed it. It is so dark and stormy that the road seems unfamiliar and I cannot make out where we are."

"Drive on very slowly. I will look out, too, and the first house we come to, you can get down and seek information. If it be possible, we will stay there the night."

The coachman mounted and did as he was ordered. Presently there seemed a break in the density on one side of the road. There was a clearing in the forest and a glimmer of light a hundred yards away.

"Pierre!" came in sharp tones again, "go and see what that light is! The horses will stand still without you."

Pierre knew from experience that remonstrance was vain. His way was through thick underwood and long grass, and he dreaded some unknown danger with every fresh step. A long, wandering house of two storeys soon stood up in black relief against the murky sky. He struck on a gravel pathway, and followed it up till he came halfway round the house and found a way of entrance. It was a low, trellis porch, with a narrow door. After fumbling about, he discovered a long wire with a handle attached, which he pulled vigorously. A jangled tinkle sounded faintly in the interior of the house. In a moment footsteps were heard, a bolt was withdrawn, and the door slowly opened. An old man in shabby livery stood there.

"Monsieur," said Pierre, "my mistress is driving from Fehrenstadt to Aronsen, and, owing to the storm, we have been delayed, and I do not know where we are. Can you kindly tell me how far it is to the nearest inn?"

"Humph, *du lieber Gott!*" the old man said; "there's no inn, as I know of, within six miles of here, and it is a ticklish road in the dark. Wait a bit, I'll go and speak to the master."

He soon returned, carrying a lighted lantern. "The Herr Graf sends his compliments to the lady, and will be happy to receive her as his guest till the storm is over. I will come down with you."

The two men walked with rapid steps down the drive and appeared on the road some twenty yards ahead of the carriage. Whether it was the unexpected noise in the distance, or the sudden gleam of the lantern light, the horses started and plunged, then galloped with ringing hoofs straight along the country road.

"*Mon Dieu!* My poor mistress!" cried Pierre, and he flew, as if possessed, after the runaways.

The lady, fortunately, had alighted some moments before, as Pierre's absence made her restless, and now she stood speechless, as she saw first her carriage, then her servant, disappear from before her eyes.

The old man shook his head as he looked round and mumbled to himself; then swinging his lantern high, he caught sight of the tall, erect figure standing motionless by the roadside.

"That must be the lady herself," he muttered. "If you are the lady who owns that vehicle, you had better come straight along to the house with me," he continued, aloud; "the horses can't be stopped, and your man will soon find his way back."

"There seems nothing else to be done," she said decisively; "go on with your lantern and I will follow."

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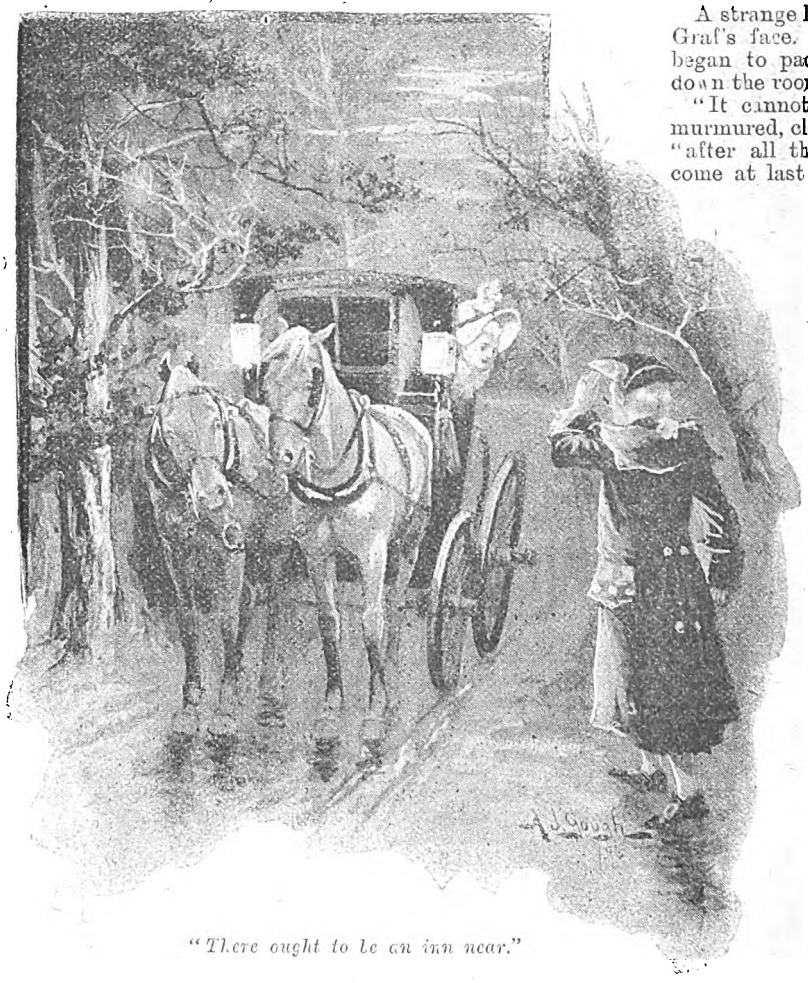
The man obeyed. They came to the house and stepped into a broad, low hall, with many doors leading from it.

"Where is your master, my man?" the stranger asked; "tell him that Baronin von Reichstein is the name of his guest, and she thanks him for his courtesy and would like to see him."

"Yes, *gnädige*," replied the old servant, "and will you please to take a seat in there, and I will send my wife, the housekeeper, to you." While speaking, he opened a door to the right, and the Baronin walked in with stately step. It was clearly but not brilliantly lighted, and was a comfortable room, with low lounges and deep chairs, covered with an old-fashioned chintz; polished floor, with a few skin rugs lying about. She shivered, however, as she walked down the room, and, after throwing aside her travelling cloak and bonnet, she sat down by the newly kindled log fire. She was a woman of fifty, at least, well preserved, and with a slender, even youthful figure. Her hair, though snow-white, was luxuriant and waved. Her features were delicately chiselled, and her skin, though somewhat wrinkled round the eyes and mouth, was like marble, and the reflection of the fire-light gave almost a youthful shimmer to the eyes, and a rosy tint to the cheeks.



"There ought to be an inn near."

She took off her gloves, and putting her elbow on the arm of the chair, she leant her head on a little white hand, sparkling with the gleam of costly rings. She must have been a very beautiful woman in her youthful days, and possessed that regular type of beauty which seldom changes its character, even in fading years. Heinrich, the man servant, forgot to close the door, and, after knocking and receiving answer, he entered a room on the opposite side of the hall. It was a small library, and seated at a writing-table was an elderly man, with iron-grey hair, straight features set with classical rigidity, and, though strictly handsome, cold, passionless, hard. He turned round and faced the servant, who delivered the stranger's message, supplemented by certain explanations of his own.

"What name did you say?" asked the master, in even tones.

"Von Reichstein, Herr Graf."

There was a slight pause.

"Ah, very well. Send Martha here, and I will give her orders about our guest."

Heinrich bowed himself out.

A strange look came into the Graf's face. He got up and began to pace slowly up and down the room.

"It cannot be possible!" he murmured, clenching his hand; "after all these years, has it come at last? There can only be one Baronin von Reichstein. I must see for myself—be convinced that the name is not a mere coincidence."

So saying, he opened his door noiselessly, and, making no sound with the soft slippers on his feet, he stealthily crossed the hall and gazed from the shadow right into the other room.

The Baronin, as though instinctively conscious of an unknown observation, changed her attitude, and her eyes moved uneasily from one object to another. Herr Graf withdrew further into the shadow, still watching her intently.

"It is she! Oh, Heavens, how little changed!"—his features softened and worked convulsively for some seconds, then set into the same unbending rigidity as before—"the same fair, false mask! How many more lies has it told since it lied my life's happiness away? She shall sleep in that very room to-night. It cannot be coincidence that makes to-day the anniversary of that memorable occasion."

With a cruel smile that might have curdled a brave heart, he went back to his old seat at the writing-table, his eyes glistening with excitement, and a dull red spot on each pallid cheek.

A shrivelled-up, little old woman, with a basket of keys, now entered and approached him timidly.

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"Get some refreshments ready, Martha, and take them to our guest in the morning-room. Light a fire in the north bedroom; the Frau Baronin von Reichstein will sleep there to-night."

Martha started as the Graf spoke. "The north bedroom, did you say, sir? But——"

"The north bedroom," he replied emphatically; "mind there is no mistake about it. Uninvited guests must be content with what is given them."

The old woman still hesitated, but lacking courage to speak, she shuffled out of the room. "Well, I never!" she said half aloud, "the room that has not been used for years, and which folks vow is haunted. The master is a strange man, and no mistake."

* * * * *

The Baronin von Reichstein had retired to her room. In spite of the large log-fire burning briskly in the open grate, there was a chilly, damp atmosphere hanging about the walls and furniture, which was of a heavy, sombre character. The bed was one of those ancient canopied four-posters of early days, and presented a funereal appearance. The Baronin shivered the second time that night as she glanced round the room. There were two wax-candles lighted on the dressing-table, and their flickerings created uncanny shadows which lurk in every corner. She rang for more lights. When two more candles were brought by the old woman, who looked pale and frightened, she placed them on the high wooden mantelpiece above the fireplace.

"What can make me so uneasy to-night, I wonder?" she thought impatiently; "those stupid horses, and that idiotic coachman! How could I divine that I should be stranded in the middle of the forest, at the mercy of a man who seems either to have outlived the manners of ordinary society, or never to have had any at all. The last premise seems the most likely. That reminds me, I meant to have asked his fossilised old retainer the name of her master."

So communicating with herself, she moved about examining the furniture, and finally drew a low couch, which seemed to have got in there by accident, to the side of the fireplace. Then she loosened her hair, drew it into one thick plait, removed a wadded silk quilt from the bed, and then, throwing herself on the couch, she arranged the coverlet over her.

"It would be an impossibility to attempt sleep in that hearse," she thought, viewing the heavy bed; "I wish it were morning."

She tried to sleep, but everything conspired to keep her awake. The thought of her coachman and horses did not disquiet her, but the rain beating on the window panes, the curtains moving with the wind, the shaking of the door in the socket, the falling embers of wood—all these worked upon her imagination and took on a weird importance. She sat up, and, putting the coverlet round her shoulders, rested her feet on the fender and gazed into the fire. She hated to have time like this for thinking. She had lived through many strange and sad experiences which she never had wish or will to summon from the past.

By dint of leading a busy, restless life, full of variety, friends, and pleasure, wrapped up in her only surviving son, who was married and happily settled, and to whom she was hurrying, she never allowed regretful moments to take her unawares, and if threatened with a sleepless night, always took a sleeping-draught, which effectually wooed and won the fitful god. To-night she was powerless; her luggage somewhere out in the forest, sleep refused to be conjured at will. She tried to concentrate her mind on the bright home of her son, but all kinds of gloomy shadows and voices of a dead past rose to defy her in those silent hours of the night. With sheer force of will she drove them back into their secret lairs for a time, but presently out they crept again—the stealthy, ugly, shapeless phantoms—on they came like a phantom tide, crowding, mounting, accusing, overwhelming—an offspring begotten of remorse and shame, suppressed and concealed for more than a score of years.

She rose impatiently, shook herself, and began to walk about the room. She went to the alcoved window, drew

She drew aside the curtain.

aside the curtain, and looked out. The storm of rain was over, and through the swiftly-scurrying clouds were glimpses of stars and of the unfathomable firmament beyond. Just then the moon shone out clear and still. She was not a timid woman; an idea suddenly struck her, and she went and blew out the candles. Then she sank into a large chair by the window, with the curtain drawn half-way back.

A momentary lull, and back again came those relentless shadows, sad and terrible. She was gazing abstractedly into the darkness. Suddenly her brow contracted, and she pressed her hands tightly over her eyes.

"Am I demented?" she cried; "*his* face is the last I should ever expect to see in this world, and yet I seem to see it distinctly, stern and angry, as I saw it last. It

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was only an illusion!" and she gave a deep sigh, and looked out steadily again.

Nothing to be seen but the neglected shrubs and straggling grass, with a black background of lofty pines; a wild, weird scene enhanced in expression by the fitful moonshine and moaning wind. From one mood she dropped into another—the retrospective. Scenes came before her to which the former mood seemed but the prelude, and passed in shorter time than they take to describe.

The first is laid in an old garden, gay and trim, which has many winding walks and hedges of yew. There is a fountain, and close to its gleaming marble rim are two figures—a man, tall, stately, bearing erect, in velvet coat, lace ruffles, buckled shoes, and a young girl, in the picturesque costume of the Trianon period, satin petticoat, bunched paniers, and full sleeves of flowered silk, a soft muslin kerchief drawn loosely round the graceful shoulders, leaving the marble pillar of the soft neck bare and cool, little high-heeled shoes, and a coquettish fan. A large, drooping hat topped the dainty head, which was dressed high, with tiny curls straying over the rosebud ear and delicate neck. Her face is turned away.

The man is bare-headed, and the breeze lightly lifts his thick chestnut hair from a broad, noble forehead, beneath which burn two passionate eyes which are bent with yearning intensity on the slender figure of the girl as she seems to sway like a willow in the wind. He puts his arms out slowly; she does not draw away; then he draws her with a fierce rapture into a close embrace and devours the sweet, downcast face with hungry, burning kisses. "My Ermantrude! Mine now and for all eternity!"

A break in the vision.

The scene changes, and a second picture gradually forms on the inexorable camera of retrospection. Two people are walking down an avenue of linden trees. The girl we saw before in the garden. Her companion is not the same; he is more massive than the lover of the last scene; his expression less intense; hair darker, eyes smaller. He is pouring out avowals of love and devotion. The girl turns her head aside. By degrees he wins her attention; she allows him to kiss her and to put a sparkling ring on her finger. There is a narrow footway on one side of the avenue beyond the line of lindens, and an unsuspected observer has accompanied them step for step. It is the man with the chestnut hair and passionate eyes; he is breathing quickly with suppressed rage and excitement, and, as the final seal of the engagement ring is put to the compact, he rushes forward, with a muttered curse, and confronts the lovers with flashing eyes and face inflamed with jealousy. "Hypocrites!" he struggles out hoarsely.

It was a tragic, a dreadful scene. The girl gives a sharp cry, remains as if struck for a second, and then flinging her arms up and pressing her hands over her ears, she flies back the way she came as if for bare life. The two men were brothers. Rudolph, the first lover, was poor and proud; Carl, the younger, rich and powerful. Carl looked at his brother in amazement. "How dare you make love to my betrothed!" grasped out Rudolph. Now it was Carl's turn to burst out in frenzied indignation; and hot and strong, bitter and stinging, were the words they hurled at each other. The passion displayed was too deep for depiction. They parted.

The third picture is slowly unfolding.

The brothers meet again at early dawn in the depths of the forest, where no ear can detect the clashing of swords, and no arm of the law can intervene to avert the duel which is to prove of deadly result to one or the other. The survivor is to retain his bride. The seconds are officers from a neighbouring garrison, over-zealous in their temporary office, and unrighteous in the antipathy each bears to the opposing party. Carl is wounded to the death. Rudolph relents, and vows never to return to the beautiful Ermantrude who has proved false to both.

The Baroness von Reichstein only guesses at that

Carl is wounded to the death.

third scene. She never saw either lover again after the fatal encounter in the avenue, but heard of the duel and Carl's death. To this day she turns sick and faint at the smell of the linden trees. Even now, as she reclines in the low chair by the window, with tightly pressed lips and contracted brow, the sickly sweet odour seems to float before her sharpened senses after the lapse of thirty years' silence.

She shudders, and rises to leave her seat. She will try and sleep, now she has allowed these ghosts of a buried past to hold sway for a time; they will surely rest now. An indescribable something arrests her; she cannot move, not even raise her eyes. She sinks back. Still feeling that same eerie sensation of an invisible barrier, she looks up, and becomes conscious of a light in the room. Just at first she forgets the candles are extinguished, and then a chill of terror overtakes her. There is a cold, phosphorescent, bluish light, filling the room mistily, dimly, and brightest round the bed. She dares not breathe; a dreadful oppression weighs her down; she wonders if she is going mad, and a sickening horror seizes her. All at once, after one rapid glance all round, she gives an agonised gasp and loses consciousness.

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This is what she saw: On the bed the clothes were disturbed, showing the outlines of a massive figure; on the pillow, with closed eyes, and a greenish pallor on the cheeks and forehead, was a rigid ghastly face. There were stains of blood on the linen coverings, and by the bedside stood a shadowy form in the act of pouring some fluid from a bottle into a glass—the lady at the window here opens her eyes, and with fascinated, horror-stuck, staring look, every nerve strung, every limb tense, she followed each detail of the ghostly scene. Phantom-like figures pass in and out of the room, noiselessly and rapidly.

Still that quiet figure on the bed sleeps on; still the shadowy figure by the bedside holds the glass in its hand. Now the figure of an aged man enters, misty and uncertain; profound grief is shown in his very attitude; he stands gazing on that quiet figure with a sorrow-striken face that would melt the stoniest heart. Now he stands erect, seems to be listening to someone speaking at his side; as he listens his countenance changes, his features become convulsed, an awful look enters his face. He lifts his hand high up, and, with eyes fixed into space, seems to pour forth torrents of words.

The figure on the bed moves, rises—"My God!" muttered the lady at the window—endeavours to clutch the old man's arm, opens his mouth to speak, but suddenly falls back on the pillow, and from his side, which now reveals surgical bandages, spreads a bright, crimson stain, which spreads and spreads, till the whole bed seems flooded with red, and a little red stream trickles to the floor and collects in a dark, ominous pool. The old man staggers, falls to the ground, and is borne swiftly by shadowy figures from the room. Confused forms pass to and fro; the light becomes indistinct, the shadows less frequent and more dimly seen; in another moment all has vanished, the gruesome vision is past, only the moon shines into the room, throwing long, silvery beams across the bed with its undisturbed linen and snow-white pillows.

But the door remains open, and a tall figure stands on the threshhold. It advances, like the figure of a relentless fate, sinister, strange, and seems to seek something. The Baronin's horror-struck eyes are still staring into space. Evidently they take in this fresh apparition as part of the awful pageant. She begins to speak:

"You, too, Rudolph? I expected you. Do not look at me so sternly! I did not mean it. How could I tell what would be the ending? I swear I never knew till to-night. I was so young then. A—a—h!" with a long convulsive shudder, "look at the blood," and she draws her skirt aside; it is only the red silk coverlet that has slipped from her shoulders. "Don't go till I tell you what my life has been—how I have been punished. I married, Rudolph! Yes—to try and forget. I have had six children, bonny boys and girls. Tony, the eldest, lived till he was six; then he was drowned in the lake. Pretty little Adèle was poisoned with berries gathered in the woods with a careless nurse. My handsome Eccard was killed by a fall from his horse. One of my babies fell down the well in the Reichstein Schloss, and was picked up dead. Two boys grew to be twenty; then one was killed in a railway accident, and now I have only my Ernst. He is married, Rudolph, the only one left. I am going to him to-morrow. Would to God I were with him now!" She sighed quietly. The words fell mechanically, as from the lips of an automaton.

"Your husband? Is he alive?" said the figure.

She did not think it strange that the phantom spoke. "He was killed in a storm ten years after we were married—twenty years ago. For one life, six have been taken from me. My sin was great, but my punishment greater, for I loved *you*, Rudolph, and lost you for ever!"

The tall, erect figure never swerved. It was Graf Rudolph von Wilding himself—no apparition. It was the white outline of his face that the Baronin had seen through the window and taken for an illusion. He drew back when he saw himself observed, and only appeared again to remain an intent, awful spectator of the ghostly phenomena that had just taken place.

"Baronin Ermantrude von Reichstein! The dreadful scene you have just witnessed repeats itself every anniversary night of the real tragedy that was enacted here thirty years ago. I knew this, and for that reason caused this room to be prepared for you to-night." He spoke in icy, stern tones; she put up her hand as if to ward off a blow, and bent her head with a faint moan.

"After our unnatural duel my unfortunate brother was carried in a dying state to the forester's house close by. My father was sent for, and learnt at the death-bed the cause of the fatal quarrel. Standing there, he cursed that false woman, cursed all who loved her, and all whom she should love." The bent head, and stretched-out arm at the window sank low, and seemed to press heavily on the arm of the chair. "He poured forth curses which roused the dying man to protest. His bandages burst! death was instantaneous. My father died the next morning. I bought this house, and here I have lived and shall live to the end of my days. No detail will escape my memory if I live a thousand years. This is the room to which he was carried, that the bed on which he lay, this the very night on which he died."

He paused. There was a solemn, ominous silence in the room. The moon still shone through the alcoved window. The Graf's dark form was deeper in the shadow than before. No sound came from the crouching, motionless mass leaning over the chair.

"And now, Baronin Ermantrude, are you satisfied?" he continued. "True, you have suffered, but that is just. Let me remind you that the result of those sins, which our own folly and blindness lead us into, remains our constant, our nearest companion, till death deliver us from the burden."

He turned to go. The Baronin never moved. Whether it was a faint touch of pity, a sudden stirring of remorse, or a vague misgiving which arrested his steps, he hesitated, came forward a few paces, hesitated again, his face working with conflicting emotions. She was but a woman after all, and had suffered much.

"Frau Baronin," he said gently. No word, no motion in answer to his call. "Ermantrude!" he whispered hoarsely. Silence still prevailed. He took one stride forward and bent over the drooping figure, lifted her up, and laid her head back on the cushions.

Just then a silver moonbeam struck right across the pale, chiselled features, revealing wide-opened eyes, agonised and appealing, already fixed with the appalling, terrible stillness of death itself. Ermantrude, the sinning, the suffering, was dead! Rudolph started violently. It was not possible! He seized her hands; they were icy cold to the touch. He bent his head in agony of suspense to listen for the faintest heart-beat. All was still, intensely still.

"A three-fold murderer!" he muttered; "my brother, my father, and now my—Ermantrude!" he suddenly shouted. He knelt on the floor by her side; he fondled

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the cold little hands, laid them against his cheek, and kissed them; he murmured broken, unmeaning words of love and endearment. Was it fancy, or did those fixed troubled eyes gradually soften into a quiet calm? Suddenly he came to himself again. He stood up, passed his hand over his eyes, looked long and fixedly on that pallid face, pressed a lingering kiss on the marble forehead, then swiftly left the room.

Listen! What was that? A shot, loud and piercing. It echoed clearly through the stillness of the early dawn which had risen fresh and calm, after the stormy night. The sound did not rouse the two old servants. A few hours later, the rays of the morning sun lightly touched the rose-sprays hanging over the library window, then shot downward through the window into the room, and hovered over a still, lifeless figure that lay stretched out on the floor, face upward, one hand clutching a pistol, the other thrown across the chest.

A still, lifeless figure that lay stretched out on the floor.

* * *

Heart disease, the doctors told Ernst von Reichstein was the cause of his mother's death. He adored his mother, and was almost broken-hearted when the terrible summons reached him. She had carefully concealed her weakness from him, but had known it herself for the last few years. No one could account for the second death in that house of terror that night. There were strange rumours about for months afterwards, and the heirs of the last Graf von Wilding would not enter the house. It was closed up, and allowed to fall into decay and ruin.

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The Editorial Mind.

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AN EYE FOR AN EYE.

I.

"HAVE you read about poor Detective Forrester?" asked my friend, John Hawthorne, late of Scotland Yard, as we sat chatting, after supper, in my rooms.

"Forrester?" I answered, "no; what has happened to him?"

"He was attacked and nearly murdered by some Marylebone roughs last week," replied Hawthorne: "we never thought he would recover, but his splendid constitution has pulled him through, though he'll never be the same man again, poor chap."

"What was the cause of his being so brutally injured?" I asked.

"His clever handling of the Slater Coining Case," replied the ex-detective, "you know how smartly he captured that fellow Slater, thereby breaking up one of the most expert counterfeiting gangs London has ever harboured. Well, the rest of the crew managed to make good their escape, but they determined to be revenged for the conviction of their chief, and, with that motive, the ruffians contrived to waylay Forrester in some lonely place and beat him savagely about the head with sticks and life-preservers until they all but killed him.

"Poor fellow," continued my friend, a tone of deep sorrow in his voice, "I wish to Heaven I had been at hand, for he saved my life two years ago, when, through just such a motive as that which almost caused his death, I literally hung within an inch of eternity."

"You never told me about such an occurrence," I said reproachfully.

"No, I did not," replied Hawthorne. "Months passed before I could recall its happening without a shudder. But you can have the story now, if you would care to hear it."

"Shall be delighted," said I, refilling my friend's glass, and pushing the cigars across to him.

Selecting a weed, Hawthorne said interrogatively:

"Remember the Alister murder case?"

"Quite well," I returned; "the owner of Mortimer Lodge, Colonel Alister, awoke one night hearing a strange noise proceeding from his study. He rose at once, and, donning a dressing-gown, went downstairs, entered the room, and found Mr. James Harman, burglar, endeavouring to force open a small safe in which the Colonel kept his valuables. Naturally, Alister resented Mr. Harman's intrusion and endeavoured to capture him, but the burglar, having once tasted the delights of penal servitude and not wishing for a repetition of them, shot the Colonel, and made good his escape.

"Alarmed by the report of firearms, the servants rushed into the room, and found their master lying mortally wounded upon the floor. Medical aid, prompt though it was to arrive, availed nothing, and the Colonel expired in a few minutes, after giving a brief description of his murderer.

"Doubtless Harman fancied himself safe, but, unfortunately for his security, the detective who took up the case was named John Hawthorne. As a natural result after a two months' chase upon the Continent James Harman stood in the dock at the Old Bailey and heard himself sentenced to death.

"There you are," I concluded airily. "Is not that the Alister murder case in a nutshell?"

"Rather a large nutshell," replied Hawthorne, laughing. "However, that has but little to do with my story, which commences on the night before Harman's execution.

"The month was November, and a dense fog hung over the river as I made my way along the Embankment to my home in Chelsea. Though wearing a thick overcoat the cold was so intense that I shivered; yet, despite the unpleasant nature of the weather, I felt exceedingly happy, for the capture of Harman meant my receiving the £100 reward offered by the Government, and also, in all probability, a speedy promotion for, as our chief phrased it, 'my devilish smart arresting of Harman.'

"As I neared Waterloo Bridge, a seemingly one-armed man stepped up to me, and holding out a box of matches implored me to purchase it, whining out a piteous tale of non-employment owing to an accident that had caused the loss of his right arm. He was an old man, grey-bearded and raggedly dressed, but, owing to the dense gloom, I could see no more of him or I should have probably acted very differently.

"As it was, I felt exceedingly sorry for the poor fellow, and, unbuttoning my overcoat, made a search for a few coppers that would provide him with a night's lodging. Muttering thanks and blessings, he came close up to me, looking pitiable with his bent shoulders, and the empty coat-sleeve fastened across the breast of his ragged coat.

"But just as I was about to hand him the money, his figure suddenly straightened, I saw a bare, muscular arm bent back above his head, and before I could move a step or raise my hands to defend myself, some weapon—a life-preserver, I think—descended with crushing force upon my head, hurling me backwards, almost insensible.

"I have a vague recollection of being lifted into a cart, of feeling myself bumped and jolted as I was driven away, then came a horrible sensation of falling, a sudden shock, and—oblivion.

II

"A DULL, throbbing pain at my head, a sense of horrible numbness in my limbs—these were my first impressions as consciousness returned to me.

"Wearily opening my eyes, I saw, a few feet above me, a ceiling, black with age, and crumbling to pieces in many places.

"Wondering as to my situation, I made an effort to rise, but sank back with a gasp, a sharp agony at wrists and ankles telling me that I was firmly bound with cords.

"Bound hand and foot! What did it mean? Where was I? I could not understand, but gradually as the pain at my head, caused by the heavy blow I had received, abated, I began to think more clearly, and in a few minutes had become fully aware of my position.

"I lay stretched upon an old horsehair couch, my arms firmly bound beneath my back, while my ankles were fastened together so tightly that the slightest movement of the limbs was impossible. I could move my head, however, and, wondering for what reason I had been secured in this way, proceeded to take stock of my present abiding-place.

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"It was a small room, poorly furnished with a common deal table, a couple of rickety chairs, and the couch upon which I lay. One small window, destitute of blind or curtains, faced me, and beyond its six grimy panes of glass I could see the air was quite dark, indicating that the long November night had not yet given place to day. The only illumination of which the apartment could boast came from a paraffin lamp standing in the centre of the deal table before mentioned.

"After noting these details, and wondering again why I had been brought to this place, I began to grow impatient, for my position, with almost my entire weight resting upon my arms, was a most uncomfortable one.

"Finally my impatience culminated in an angry shout of 'Hullo!'

"Immediately I heard a door behind me open, and someone entered the room. I looked partly round, and by the light of the lamp saw a man of about sixty, tall, grey-bearded, and very powerfully built.

"I recognised him at once as the man who had waylaid me on the Embankment, but somehow I felt sure that I had seen his face some years ago.

'His features were regular, and even handsome in their formation, but they were now marred by a most sinister expression, and his eyes, as they gazed down upon me, bore a look of triumphant malice.

"'So you've woke up, guv'nor,' said he sneeringly. 'Hope you've passed a good night.'

"'What is the meaning of this?' I demanded angrily. 'How dare you entrap me!'

"'Ha, ha!' interposed the man, with a chuckle. 'Clever idea, that arm business, wasn't it? Took you in finely, guv'nor, didn't it, eh? Ha, ha!'

"'Confound you,' I shouted, for his taunts struck home, 'release me or it will be worse for you.'

"'Oh, will it?' he answered mockingly. 'Sorry I can't oblige you. Am afraid you'll have to stop as you are.

'"But come, guv'nor,' he continued, as I was about to speak, 'you don't seem to recognise me. Don't you recollect Dick Taggart?'

"I knew him then in a moment as a notorious 'fence,' or receiver of stolen goods, whom I had seen sentenced, some nine years back, to a long term of penal servitude. But why had he pounced upon me? I had not been connected with his arrest. I was mystified, but the man's next words contained a terrible explanation.

"'I see you remember me,' he went on, 'but Taggart's not my name. My real name's Harman, and——' here he came closer to me, and his voice sank to a hissing whisper—'Jim Harman is my son.'

"'Your son,' I repeated, in amazement, 'your son?'

"'Yes, my son,' he answered, his eyes glaring ferociously at me. 'My son, whom you've hunted down and brought to the gallows. Curse you. But you shall be avenged, Jim, you shall be avenged, I swear it.'

"My situation was revealed now as one of the greatest peril.

"Helpless in the power of this man, unable to stir hand or foot, I quickly realised in what frightful danger I was of having my life sacrificed to satisfy the revenge of Jim Harman's father.

"After a pause, during which I endeavoured to think of some plan for escape, Harman spoke again, and now his voice was broken with emotion.

"'Ah! you don't know how proud I was of my boy; how I loved him—scoundrel though I was—with all my heart; how I endeavoured to save him from following the evil path I chose; how I contrived to spare him the knowledge of what his father was, and how all my plans were thwarted by my arrest and imprisonment.

"'When I came back to freedom, three years ago, it was to find my boy the associate of thieves and already far down the road of crime. But what choice had he? *He* did not have the chances given to his father—a University education, a good position, a handsome salary, all thrown away through sheer folly—no, someone told my boy who and what his father was, and he drifted into the life I had led, his doings culminating with the shooting of Colonel Alister.

"'But,' here the old man's voice rose almost to a scream, 'he never meant to kill him; Jim only wanted to escape. It was you, bloodhound that you are, tracked him down and caused sentence of death to be pronounced upon him.

"'It's the last man-hunt you'll ever do, though,' continued Harman, more quietly, yet with a terrible menace in his voice. He took a watch from his pocket and glanced at it. 'Just half past seven,' said he; 'you have thirty minutes more to live.'

"With these words, the horror of which to me can be imagined, he was gone, closing the door behind him.

"I knew my fate now, but was determined not to die without a struggle. Half-an-hour hence—at eight o'clock, the very time fixed for Jim Harman's execution—I was to be murdered. Rendered desperate by this thought I strained with all my strength to free my hands. I felt the cords cutting into my wrists, yet still I wrenched and tugged at my bonds, until the blood was trickling over my hands. But I persevered, though the agony was terrible and at length succeeded in wrenching free my right hand. Then, though stiff from my captivity, I struggled into a sitting position and, with the cords still dangling from my left wrist, set to work to free my ankles. Oh, for a knife with which to cut the cords, but my pockets were empty, so I was compelled to use my fingers. The deadly peril of my situation lent me strength, but the knots were well tied, and for some minutes I strove in vain to undo them. With finger nails broken and wrists bleeding, I struggled hard, and was just feeling the first knot giving way, when the door suddenly opened, and Harman entered.

"He took in the situation at a glance, and, with a hoarse cry of rage, sprang towards me. As he reached the couch I turned and grappled with him, but in vain, however, did I attempt to overcome my terrible opponent. My ankles being still bound proved a great disadvantage to me, yet I struggled desperately, feeling that I was fighting for my life. With a violent effort, Harman suddenly dragged me off the couch and endeavoured to force me down, but as I fell I came upon my knees and still grappled with him.

"He seemed to have the strength of half-a-dozen men, and I was fast being overpowered, when, in a mad endeavour to throw me backward, he stumbled over one of the chairs and came down with a crash, breaking it into pieces beneath him. I still clung to his wrists, and dragged myself on to him before he could rise to his feet. In a moment I had seized him by the throat and must undoubtedly have won the desperate struggle, when his right hand came in contact with a leg of the broken chair. Using this as a club the ruffian, with a snarl of triumph, dealt me several heavy blows upon the head and shoulders.

"Instantly my hands relaxed their grip, and with a groan of agony, I fell backward upon the floor, insensible.

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III.

"Slowly consciousness returned to me, and I opened my eyes to find myself standing upright, gazing into the malignant face of Harman, who, supporting me in his arms, stood beside me. My head was aching terribly, and in addition to being bound hand and foot, a towel had been tied tightly over my mouth so that I found it impossible to utter a sound.

"Upon seeing that I had recovered my senses, Harman released his grip upon my shoulders, saying with a taunting laugh:

"'Stand steady, guv'nor, and look around. See where you are?'

"Wonderingly I turned my head, but was stopped sharply by something tightening about my throat.

"Good Heavens! A rope was noosed around my neck.

"I looked back at Harman, and saw that a most horrible grin was distorting the old ruffian's face.

"'Don't you like a hempen collar?' he asked with a chuckle, then, his face changing suddenly to a look of diabolical rage, he hissed: 'Ten minutes more and you swing.' So saying, he disappeared out of my line of sight, and then I saw that I was standing upon a large table, while, looking upward, I could see that the end of the rope around my throat had been fastened to a beam that ran across the room, a few inches below the ceiling.

"An awful fear fell upon my heart. To be brutally murdered by strangulation! Great Heavens! What would become of my wife and children? At thought of them I made desperate endeavours to free myself but my efforts were useless.

"'Ha! ha!' came Harman's voice to my ears, 'you can wriggle, but you won't undo those ropes this time, so you may as well leave off trying.'

"His tauntingly spoken words were only too true, and I gave up attempting to free my hands. I was helpless, absolutely helpless, in the power of this man, who, maddened by his thirst for revenge, would, I knew, show me no mercy.

"Of my thoughts during the next few minutes I will not speak. I could hear Harman alternately chuckling and groaning, and knew the man to be mad, but the rope was fastened too tightly for me to turn and look at him, and as I gazed straight ahead, I could see through the open door into the room in which I first had found myself. I saw the old couch, the single rickety chair, and the fragments of its fellow lying upon the floor, but the deal table had been moved, and I guessed, instinctively, that I was now standing upon it! At the grimy window the faint light of a foggy morning was just visible, and I felt my blood turn to ice as I thought that this was to be my last day on earth!

"Just then Harman uttered a cry.

"'Three minutes more,' he shouted, 'three minutes more, and it'll be eight o'clock—eight o'clock! Ah!

"'And he—and he,' Harman went on, his voice rising to a scream, 'he'll die then. Curse you—curse you—you shall die with him. But think of the difference. Scientific apparatus will be used for him—he'll be dead instantly—no pain—nothing. But you—you shall die by inches, and I myself will witness your dying agonies, and gloat over them as I remember my revenge—my revenge. Ha! ha! ha!'

"His laugh was horrible to hear, but I had resigned myself to my fate now, for I felt that I was doomed. Doomed! For what? Because in the execution of my duty I had captured a dangerous ruffian who had committed a cowardly murder. Oh, my God. What an awful death would be mine!

"Suddenly Harman shrieked out: 'Listen, listen! Eight o'clock, eight o'clock!'

"It was so. From some church close by the sound of a clock striking the hour came with terrible distinctness to my ears. Presently Harman began to count: 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—Ah! Eight—eight!'

"A second's pause, then he broke out with: 'Jim—oh! Jim! My boy, my boy!'

"His voice died off in sobs, but suddenly, with a frightful oath, I heard him dash forward until he stood within my line of sight.

"Heavens! How ghastly he looked. With blood-shot eyes that glared ferociously at me, his nostrils dilated, his upper lip curled, showing his yellow teeth, his muscular hands working convulsively, Richard Harman looked horrible enough to terrify the bravest man.

"'Curse you—curse you,' he shrieked. 'Curse you a thousand times for your cowardly man-hunting. Blood-hound that you are—Die!'

"And, with a frenzied yell, he seized the table and dragged it away from beneath my feet.

"A sudden jolt and the rope tightened about my throat. I felt the blood rush to my head, a thousand twinkling lights danced before my eyes.

"Then came visions of green fields, of lovely flowers and trees. I was wandering in magnificent gardens, when, as from afar off, there sounded on my ears a piercing shriek, a flash of bright red flame blazed before my eyes—then all grew dark and I knew no more.

* * * * *

"'By Jove, what a narrow squeak, but he's coming round now, doctor,' I heard a well-known, hearty voice say, and opening my eyes I saw Forrester's handsome face bending over me. I felt very weak, and my body ached all over, but some brandy partially restored my energies, and in a husky voice I whispered:

"'Where am I? What are you doing here, Forrester?'

"'You're at No. 8, Princess Street, E.—one of Harman's charming abodes,' answered Forrester lightly, 'and I came to arrest the old ruffian, but he's passed beyond earthly justice.'

"'What do you mean?' I asked hoarsely.

"'He's dead,' replied my fellow detective, 'died of heart disease, the doctor here says.'

"'Heavens! what a shock it was to me when, on opening the door, I saw you hanging there, and Harman dancing about, chuckling and muttering to himself in a horrible manner. As we entered (I had brought two policeman with me, for I knew what a tough customer the fellow, old as he was, would prove) Harman uttered a wild yell and fell dead. I cut you down, and had a doctor summoned, but I was afraid we were too late. You are better now, though, aren't you?'

"'Oh, yes,' I returned, and with Forrester's help, contrived to sit up, a shudder passing over me as I saw a form lying prostrate upon the floor, and thought how nearly Harman's vengeance had been accomplished.

* * * * *

"And now," said Hawthorne, as he re-lit his cigar, "you can understand what my feelings were when I heard of my rescuer having been almost murdered. Ah! Poor young Forrester!"

R. J. Beauchamp.

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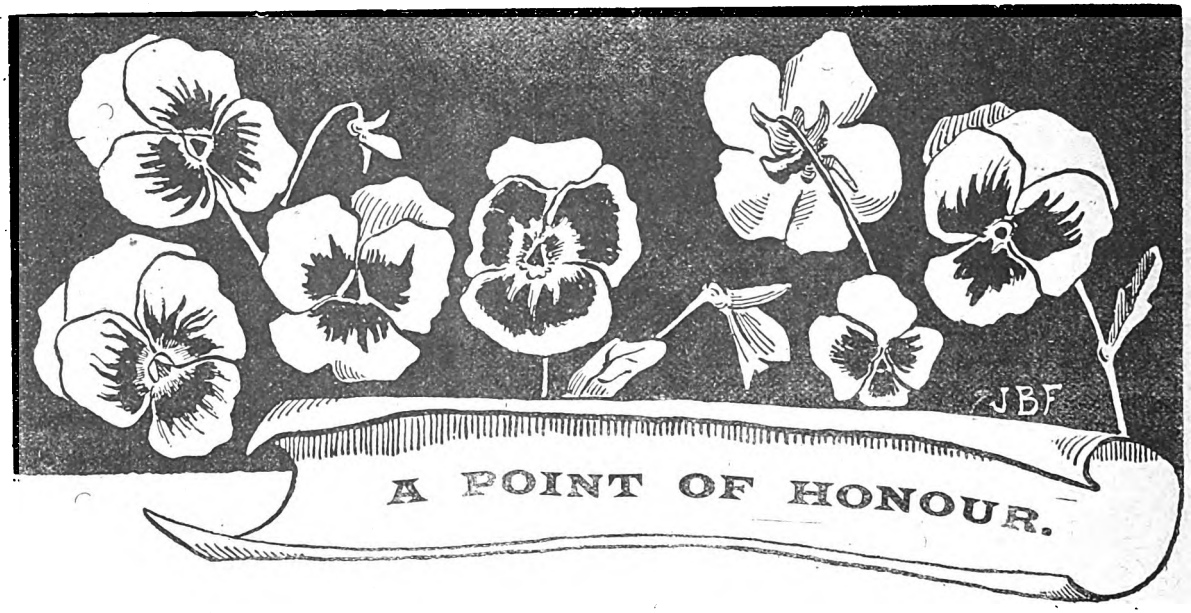

"AND here am I," finished up the big man in the club's biggest chair, "left with this confounded slip of paper in my pocket—'I promise to pay, before the first of July, the sum of three thousand pounds,' while Sainter is travelling as hard as he can to the other end of the world. If I ever meet the fellow again I'll shoot him on sight."

"Better not," said the untidy little man with the scraggy hair, who wrote stories, "he might just be going to pay you. Let me see the paper, will you? 'I promise to pay, before the first of July—' Hallo, where's the date of the year? I declare he's forgotten to put it down. You believe me, old man, he will turn up one of these fine firsts, and pay you every penny. Sainter is a man of honour."

The lawyer opposite chuckled, and rubbed his hands

"It is a nice point," he exclaimed, "a very nice point."

"Isn't it?" said the writer. He was thoughtful for a moment, and then he left the room.

The next evening he came into the club with a jaunty step, and a roll of manuscript in his pocket. The men knew what that meant, and began talking hurriedly so as not to give him a chance.

"I wonder what old Sainter's doing," said the big man.

"I have been thinking," said the lawyer, who had thrown himself back in his chair and was looking at the ceiling, "about that point that was raised last night."

"So have I," said the writer, 'in fact I've written a little story about it."

He unfolded his manuscript, and without a blush, began reading it out.

* * * * *

There was a commotion in Scratch Gravel on the morning of June 23rd, 1875. Jack Langworthy, a local celebrity, had killed a tenderfoot, and there was naturally some curiosity, not to say excitement, over the affair. The circumstances of the case were this: Jack and the tenderfoot were having a little game of cards, when the former noticed a slight deception on the part of his adversary in the way of dealing himself from one to four cards too many and concealing them in his coat sleeve.

"Sich proceedings are entirely foreign to the customs of this yere camp," finally remarked Langworthy, and at the same time sent a pistol-shot into the tenderfoot. The ball passed diagonally through the head from the base of his left ear, and, ranging downwards, made a final entrance into the side of a whisky barrel, which stood in one corner of the room.

"You'll lose some of yer whisky if you don't regulate the hole I've just made in that 'ere barrel," quietly remarked Jack to the proprietor of the place, adding parenthetically, "and it's good liquor, too."

As for the tenderfoot—well, he was dead.

The rude law of Scratch Gravel took cognisance of the fact, and also of the manner of his death, and Jack was arrested. A few weeks later he was arraigned for the murder, and pleaded guilty. The Judge sentenced him to be hanged. Then Jack made a speech. Among other things, he said:

"I killed the man, I know, and perhaps it's fair enough that I should die too. Leastwise, I don't set up my judgment agin that of the Court. The laws of Scratch Gravel should be inforced, but just now I'm sort o' sorry the inforcement is necessary. The deal is a hard one, and the worst of it all is that the roughness is not agin me alone—oh, no, not agin me, but Sally and the twins. I don't care for myself—just as soon go as not—but when I think of the twins I think—I think, by mighty! I'll have to tell you I can't stand it. You see, the twins are boys—both boys—and they are a fine pair an' no mistake. I allers reckoned on the twins mounting to something in the world, but if their father is to be hanged—that settles it. What would the twins ever amount to then? Now, if I could go some other way it wouldn't look so bad—the twins might pull through—but to be strung up like a common thief, it would be a weight on them 'ere twins that 'ud keep 'em down for ever. So you see it ain't for myself that I care—not fer

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me and not fer Sally so much, either, although I do kinder like the old gal—but the twins. Well, it breaks me all up to think of leaving 'em, it does for a certain fact. Jedge, when will the performance take place?"

The unfortunate man was informed that the 10th of July was the date fixed for his execution, and that he should make preparations to be on hand at that time punctually, so as not to delay the proceedings.

"You see, Jack," said the Judge familiarly, "we ain't goin' to be mean enough to lock you up, not you—it wouldn't be right—not with an honourable man like you. It ain't fer any dislike fer you or bad feeling that we're going to hang you, Jack, but it's the law, you know, the law. So you'll make it a point of honour, Jack, to be on hand when the time comes."

For the next week Jack stayed at home nearly all the time. Occasionally some of his friends would drop in to ask about his health and the health of the twins. The slightest mention of the latter would set his tongue in motion, and somehow he seemed to think there were no other children in the world worth talking about.

"They'll pull way ahead of their old dad in a few years," he had often said. "Maybe one of 'em 'll be an auctioneer or a bank president, and the other a steam-boat captain—who knows? Them twins are smart."

It was the month of June. Wonderfully bright the sun shone, wonderfully sweet the birds sang, wonderfully grey and bare and cold were the distant mountains. It seemed to Jack that all creation was smiling over his misfortune and mocking him for a coward who was afraid to die.

One evening, just a week prior to the date fixed for his execution, he seated himself on a boulder near his cabin door and took the twins in his arms. The little fellows climbed all over him. One of them put his brown arm round the paternal neck and pulled the grizzly hair and beard with his chubby fingers. Then looking into the upturned face, he said sorrowfully:

"There's water in your eyes, daddy. What's the matter?"

Jack put the child down rather roughly, and remarking as he brushed his eyes, that the "'skeeters war mighty troublesome that evening," he walked into the house.

The 10th of July arrived. In the morning, quite early, Bill Drake, an old-time friend of Jack's, came to see him.

"Seems like thar ought to be some way to get out of this," remarked Bill.

"I'd just as soon go," said Jack, half apologetically, "ef it wasn't fer the twins. You see, I've sort o' banked on them twins fer a long while. I reckon thar'll be a good turn out at the gallus, Bill."

"You wouldn't slip away, would you, Jack?" whispered Bill, with a strange light in his eyes.

Jack reached for his revolver.

"I don't want to shoot you, Bill," he said fiercely, "but I'll do it, sure, if ye repeat that insult. Thought ye knew me better than that. I'm ashamed of ye."

"But you don't understand me!" exclaimed Bill excitedly. "Listen! The Jedge sentenced ye to be hanged the 10th of July, *but he forgot to name the year!* The 10th of July ten years from now will do, or longer. He only said the 10th of July!"

"But he meant to-day," said Jack, trembling in every limb.

"But he didn't say it. You may suit your own convenience about the year, Jack. For yer own sake, and for the sake of the twins, skip."

There was much disappointment that afternoon among the citizens of Scratch Gravel when it was discovered that Jack was gone. A search was made of his cabin, but there were no signs of Sally, Jack, or the twins. They were all gone for good.

And now comes the strangest part of this story. The 10th of July five years later a grey old man, bent nearly double, thrust his shadowy form into the presence of the chief magistrate of Scratch Gravel, and demanded a hearing.

"I am Jack Langworthy," he said, "and I have come back according to promise to be hanged. You see, the twins are dead—both dead, and Sally, she's gone too—ran away with another man, and now I've come back to meet the requirements of the law. There has been some delay, I'll admit, but I was bound to come back some time, and here I am."

The laws and customs of Scratch Gravel had changed somewhat since Jack departed from the place five years before, and as the affair in which he was interested was no longer a sensation of the day, he was simply told to leave the town as soon as possible. He went at once, and the last seen of him alive he was tramping slowly out of town with his face towards the setting sun.

A little later in the year, when the chapparel bushes began to shed their leaves and the vines that tumbled over the grey rocks were touched with frost, the fleshless frame of a man was found suspended from a rock over a deep ravine.

It was Jack Langworthy.

* * * * *

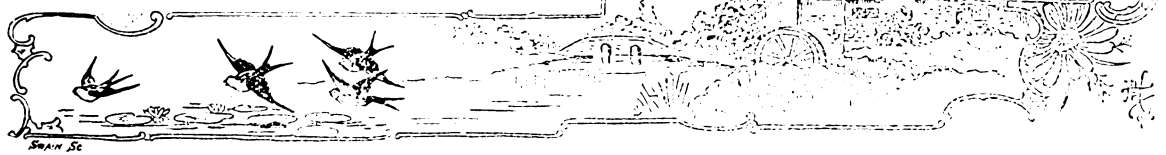
The author looked up with a smile of triumph.

"You see," he said, "Sainter may turn up one day——"

But the room was empty.

GRACE HAWKER.

New Serial Story by George C. Wallis will shortly commence in *S.S.* It will deal with the lost Island of Atlantis, and be of the most exciting interest.



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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY No. 7.]

THE AUTHOR OF "DREAMS."

I HAVE always taken a particular interest in the toilers of the street.

I watch them as they stand on the pavement and shiver in their rags; as the fierce rain pours down on their ill-clad bodies. Some of them have their stories.

I once knew one of these miserables who had an Eton and Christ Church education, and who had won by his brain almost every honour it had been possible to obtain.

And what is more this man was the author of "Dreams," that is to say he was the writer of one of the finest works that ever mortal penned.

For twenty years I had known him to be selling matches at his position in Fleet Street without missing a day.

During that time I had become so acquainted with him that occasionally I persuaded him to take me to his rooms in a back slum off the Strand.

I would bring him a bottle of port, or some of my old whisky, and we would light a fire and chat together.

It was a sultry day in July when I noticed that for the first time the old man was absent from his post; a friendly policeman, whom I cultivated, informed me that the old match-seller had been taken ill on the previous day.

I made a few purchases, and went round to his room.

As I was going up the rickety staircase, a strange thing happened.

A tall, well-dressed man was coming down, wearing a long black coat.

He had a mass of dark wavy hair hanging on his shoulders, a white face, with high, intellectual-looking forehead.

It was the reputed author of "Dreams!"

I pulled my hat over my eyes, and waited until he had passed. Then I ran up to my friend's room.

"Did you see him," he cried, almost before I had entered. "That man who went down? He was my brother."

The old man fell back on the pillows, and seemed exhausted.

My friend noticed the incredulous expression on my face.

Presently he told me his story.

"When Geoffrey and I were young men we worked together in a firm in the City. That was long ago.

"I was ever a dreamer, and, although I plodded away at my work, I was not brilliant. With my brother it was different, and he was soon to be made a partner. I was thinking all day and all night; thinking and dreaming; occasionally I wrote down my thoughts. These were afterwards published in a book. It was called 'Dreams.'

"One day a cheque was missing from our office. It is the old story. I was suspected, although I was not accused; I felt that all eyes were upon me as I went about my duties. I did not mind, for I was thinking about the last chapters of my book.

"I was working in my room one evening, preparing the manuscript for the publishers, when the door opened, and my brother stood before me. I see him now, as he stood there in the open door, and pointed an accusing finger towards me.

"'Thief,' he hissed between his clenched teeth. 'You—a thief. You, a Montgomery, a low down thief!'

"'Geoff,' I cried, 'believe me——"

"He interrupted me with a gesture.

"'It is no good,' he said, 'for you to deny it. I know everything. I have collected proofs. Answer me this: What were you doing at the hour when the cheque was stolen?'

"It was impossible for me to say. I was tongue-tied. Oh, the agony of it! But a woman's honour hung on my silence. You know her, perhaps. The heroine of 'Dreams.'

"'Well,' the old man continued, 'that woman's honour depended on my silence. And so I could answer nothing. I was entirely in my brother's power. By speaking he could ruin me. My career, not yet begun, would be cut off. I fell at his feet.

"'I will give you everything that I possess,' I cried in an agony of fear. 'You may have anything that you ask for. I will sell you my soul——'

"'Pish!' he interrupted brutally. 'I would not rob the Devil. There is only one way by which you may be saved.'

"I looked up eagerly. Anything that would prevent inquiry, and preserve a woman's honour—you know her I think you said, she was the heroine of 'Dreams'—there could be no price too high to pay for that.

"'There is only one way by which you may be saved,' my brother repeated. 'There is only one thing that I will take from you. That is—your book.'

"The old man pressed his hand to his forehead.

"I went to a drawer in my table, and handed him the manuscript.

"He took it, and without a word left the room.

"My surprise may be imagined when the next morning I received my dismissal from my employers. They suspected me of stealing the cheque. My brother had forgotten to speak for me. But I did not care. Nothing had been found out, and I was shielding a woman's name.

"A few weeks later she passed me in the street. I was selling matches. She looked at me with pity, and then she threw me a copper. I have kept it, you see, in that little velvet case on the wall. It is all that I have to remind me of her.

"You saw the man who went out just now. He was my brother.

"He wanted to know whether I had ever written another book. He said that if I sold it to him he would let me have all the profits. He was very kind and generous. I wonder why?"

This is the match-seller's story, and it seemed to have exhausted him. There is yet the sequel to be told.

It will be remembered that Geoffery Montgomery had published nothing since his one great work. One day he wrote an ode to an actress.

She, poor girl, being in sore need of money, took it to the editor of a certain magazine. He paid her £100 for it, and then spent half his fortune in advertising it.

The magazine was an obscure little publication, but its circulation for the next week was as much as that of all the rest of its kind put together.

It was then found out that the poem was the merest twaddle.

The intensest excitement prevailed in literary circles; vague rumours were spread everywhere, The public demanded that the author of "Dreams" should produce something worthy of his reputation.

It was for this reason that he had applied to his brother. The public are still waiting.

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BY MISS WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

PAUPER BLUE BLOOD.

CHAPTER XX.

At John Reginald's Door.

Sefton was staying with his mother and Eva, when he received an invitation from his uncle, Lord Macphairson, to shoot in Scotland. No mention was made in the letter of Georgina. Sefton was asked alone, just as in his bachelor days.

Had he cherished the slightest regard for his wife or her feelings, he would have resented the slur upon her, and accordingly refused. Instead, it rather pleased him than otherwise—he felt so thoroughly with his uncle for disapproving of the present Lady Ravenscroft.

Lord Macphairson was his mother's only brother, and heartily shared her dislike of the late governess. This raised him in Sefton's eyes, increasing his respect to admiration. There was no humbug in his uncle Oliver, and he accepted the invitation to Laurieston Hall, to the Dowager Lady Ravenscroft's great delight.

"I can't tell you how glad I am you are going," she said. "Of course you know as well as I do how plainly your uncle stated his disapproval of your marriage, but Oliver has always been a good brother to me. I like to think that he and my boy are friends."

Sefton always improved in health when away from Georgina. Her presence seemed to absorb his vitality and, vampire like, bereave him of strength. His brain, too, grew clearer in her absence, and his mother had no idea of the tricks it too frequently played him. As yet his self-control was strong, and he was clever enough to conceal the infirmity that occasionally turned him livid with fear. He could not get over having imagined, as he thought, that never-to-be-forgotten interview with Norah the week before her wedding, and believing it for days together, till facts proved stronger than fiction.

"Of course, it was an illusion of my unhinged intellect," Sefton still told himself persistently.

Norah in the green lane, whispering of love, was no more a creature of flesh and blood than the tall figure of Sir Reginald that had faced him more than once in the study at Ravenscroft Park.

"These little freaks of fancy," he would say in calmer moments, "will land me in a lunatic asylum, if I don't look out. Ghosts!—of course, there are no such things. If I had really seen the spirit of my father when my mind was clear and capable of understanding, I should have fallen dead at his feet. Men do not look on such sights and live!"

This argument was sound enough, and convinced Sefton he occasionally suffered from some malady, probably indigestion.

The day he was leaving for Scotland he received a letter from Georgina, asking him to tell her of his movements.

"If you are not with your mother, let me know," she said, "as it looks odd to my friends if I am ignorant of your whereabouts. We may as well play out the farce to its bitter end, and act the ordinary lukewarm husband and wife, without publishing the fact that now, more than ever, we are strangers. Remember it was not always so, you were only a man and human, and there is a tie between us which will live and grow, year by year, to show that you are mine, and I am yours, the crown of our existence—the child, John Reginald, I hear, is well and thriving. He is not old enough yet to miss his parents. When he comes to years of discretion, which of our two gifts, I wonder, will he value most? The baronetcy he must some day inherit, or the money, which, from his youth up, will bring him the good things of life. We shall see!"

As Sefton crushed the writing in his hand, he felt an ungovernable hatred rise in his heart for John Reginald, because he was not only his child, but Georgina's.

It was too late to answer the letter then, but the following day he wrote from Laurieston Hall.

When upon reading his reply it gradually dawned upon his wife's intelligence that Sefton was actually staying with Lord Macphairson, after the slighting manner in which he had treated her, Georgina's anger and annoyance knew no bounds.

Her outraged sensibilities found vent in a furious epistle penned to her husband at Laurieston Hall, and a fit of sulking, under the plea of a headache, that lasted two days.

It was the final straw—a challenge to Georgina. He had practically snapped his fingers in her face—cast her off—divorced her from her wifehood. She would show him that she could return blow for blow, insult for insult. She was now the stronger of the two, and was under no obligation to her husband.

Henceforth they should be worse than strangers—foes, enemies—each fighting for the upper hand. Georgina's blood boiled, and though she wished her husband dead, she still did not regret having married him.

"Cousin John would never have left me his fortune," she said, "if I had not been Lady Ravenscroft."

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The long rigmarole of abuse, emphasised by dashes and ink blots, was opened by Sefton while dressing for dinner in a luxurious apartment at Laurieston Hall. Already the evenings were turning cold, and a cheerful fire blazed in his grate. It was pleasant to be valeted and waited on again hand and foot, to meet old friends and acquaintances who had never even seen Georgina, so did not remind him of her existence by asking after Lady Ravenscroft or her son. His wife was never mentioned in the Macphairson family, and most people believed the Ravenscrofts were separated, or that he kept his wife hidden away, because she was an impossible creature—quite unpresentable!

Before Sefton went down he commended Georgina's execrations to the flames, and banished all thoughts of her from his mind. He knew a party from Castle Dermott was coming to dinner that evening, but had not heard the names of the expected guests previously mentioned.

The drawing-room was full of people as he entered, but it was not till he had glanced round several times that a girlish figure, surrounded by a group of men, attracted his attention. They were hanging on her words, and the sparkling flow of conversation rippling from the beautiful lips seemed vaguely familiar in tone to Sefton's astonished ear.

Her face was turned away, but even as he looked she moved, and a striking profile, well-known, dimmed Sefton's vision. A sudden mist rose before his eyes, and then a voice said at his side:

"May I introduce you to the Duchess of Malvern?"

Norah glanced up and saw him. In a moment the scene flashed before her—of Sir Sefton riding by as she drove beneath the triumphal arch on her wedding afternoon. He, too, remembered the chilling stare he gave her in return for a shy bow and half-hesitating smile. The idea of cutting Norah! His conscience reproached him strongly for his ungentlemanly action.

A moment later he advanced with outstretched hand and greeted the young Duchess in the old friendly strain.

"Why, Sefton!" she cried. "I had no idea you were here," colouring to the very roots of her hair, and then paling as white as her gown.

What a traitor he must think her—what a truthless, weak, unstable flirt!

She moved across the room to a sofa, leaving her other friends and keeping her eyes fixed in openly expressed wonder on Sefton as he talked without constraint.

"How do you like married life, Norah?" he asked in an undertone.

A bright smile broke over her face, it was impossible not to see that she was happy.

"It is quite delightful! I've been having a splendid time. Victor is truly the ideal husband, as far as giving me my head goes. I do just the maddest things imaginable, and he never minds. He is such a nice boy! You see a husband replaces or does away with a chaperon. We are like a set children let loose at Malvern Court. All our friends are young, and we scorn conventionality. I never knew how beautiful it was to be alive until this last summer."

Then remembering how heartless her words must seem, she checked her effervescing spirits.

"You have forgiven me, Sefton," she said, gazing at him pleadingly. "I'm not worth being angry with, and nobody troubles about me, or takes me seriously."

"Forgiven!" he said, "why of course you are forgiven. It is so long ago since you wrote that letter, such a very old score, that it has worn out before now."

Norah was perplexed. What letter could he mean? she had never written since her faithlessness the day his child was born.

But before she could question him, the signal for dinner broke their conversation, a general move was made, and Lord Macphairson offered the Duchess his arm.

Later on, however, when an opportunity arose, Sefton lured Norah into the conservatory, on the pretext of admiring the flowers. His curiosity about himself made silence impossible, and he put the question to her straightly:

"Tell me, Norah, did you meet me about a week before your wedding, in the road outside the gates of Rosemont? Did you promise to break your engagement with the Duke of Malvern? Answer me honestly, yes or no?"

He expected a look of unutterable surprise, and in this he was not disappointed.

Norah gave a little gasp of abject amazement before replying wonderingly:

"How can you ask me? You must know!"

He shook his head. Then with a quick insight into the truth as she caught his puzzled look, and read the confused thoughts that were groping after light, Norah spoke:

"Yes. We met, and I vowed falsely, but as I live I *meant* to fulfil my promise at the time."

Sir Sefton shook from head to foot.

"Then why did you not?" he asked fiercely, every incident returning with vivid distinctness.

Norah's eyes fell—her lips trembled slightly.

"I heard your child was born—you had him—you had your wife. Was it not enough? A strange revulsion of feeling rushed over me. Why should you ruin my career? I argued. What right had you to come between me and the man to whom I had pledged my word? They talked of your son and heir that night at dinner—how pleased you would be—what joy he would bring in the Ravenscroft household. I was nothing in your life; by your marriage you had thrust me out beyond your reach. I had broken enough hearts. I stayed my hand at Victor's."

A look of love stole into Norah's eyes as she mentioned her husband's name.

The Duke had conquered the frivolous affections of his wife *after* marriage, and Sefton had lost them for ever. He stood now regarding the Duchess of Malvern gloomily, with jealousy and despair in his face.

Her words had made the recollection of his son bitter to him. So John Reginald came between them just at the crucial moment. John Reginald was to blame for Norah's sudden change. But for his interference she might still have been Norah Cannington, faithful to the memory of their past love, mourning for the heart she so ruthlessly destroyed. He laid his whole grievance at the door of that innocent babe!

The old pangs of misery returned tenfold as the fascination of the fair Duchess's presence wove its deadly web.

"What is he like?" she asked.

"Who?" answered Sefton vaguely.

"The child."

"Oh! I don't know. I have not seen him half-a-dozen times, except at a distance."

Norah experienced a wave of shocked astonishment and disgust.

"You cannot love him, then?"

"There is nothing worth looking at in a bundle of white clothes and a small, indescribable face. I am told he resembles my father, but I see no likeness save a very strong one to my wife."

Sefton laid his hand on Norah's arm as she turned to go.

"I wish to heaven I had not seen you to-night," he muttered. "You are making a devil of me."

"I don't understand," she answered, rearing her head.

"Yes, a devil, Norah, a man who loathes his child, and curses his wife."

She shrank back. His words appalled her. She was accustomed to the rose paths of life, and the prick of thorns was strange and hurtful.

She walked slowly towards the drawing-room, where Lord Macphairson's daughter was singing in a rich contralto. Yet through the passionate accents of her stirring voice, and the wail of a pianissimo accompaniment, the Duchess of Malvern only heard that cruel murmur—"a man who loathes his child—and curses his wife!"

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Sefton slept little that night, his brain was too disturbed. He was trying to solve the mystery of his mistaken conclusion in regard to Norah and her broken promise.

"I thought I was mad then, but now I am certain of it," he said, "or I *must* have known! To confuse facts with fancies is worse than confounding fancies with facts. The latter is excusable if the fancies are vivid, the former merely insanity when the facts are plain."

Norah felt saddened by her interview with Sefton, but the effect soon wore off under the cheerful influence of her husband, and the other guests at Castle Dermott. She avoided visiting Laurieston Hall, after the dinner party, and really hoped that chance would not throw Sefton across her life again.

It was so harassing meeting these discarded lovers—especially when her own heart had suffered sorely at Sefton's hands.

Yet he was not the same as in the past; a very noticeable change had come over him. She could not exactly define it, but a dreadful presentiment whispered that the man she had thought so much of was gradually losing the hold and stay of reason, which would leave him disarmed and defenceless on the battlefield of life.

CHAPTER XXI.

Her Ruling Hand.

Sefton, having no desire to rejoin his wife, prolonged his visit in Scotland, and afterwards went to Ermyn Way.

Georgina ceased corresponding with him, only letting him know by wire six weeks later that she had returned to Ravenscroft Park.

The thought of his home grew daily more distasteful; but eventually a short pencilled note aroused him from these happy-go-lucky hours of leisure to the stern realities of life.

He read it twice before he could fully grasp its meaning.

"You must not return later than the 20th," she wrote, "as I have a large ball, to which all the county people are coming. You see, they are willing enough to take my hospitality now that I am rich, or perhaps they accepted out of sheer curiosity. I think I shall open their eyes.—Your wife, Georgina."

Lady Ravenscroft was correct in her surmise anent curiosity. No one approved of Sir Sefton's wife, but they could not resist her invitation.

"Won't it be nice meeting at Ravenscroft Park again?" they said. "Just like the old days! We could not hurt poor dear Sir Sefton's feelings by refusing. It's really quite a charity to go—his wife has been so cold-shouldered!"

Sefton knew Georgina's hospitality would be received with condescension, and the thought maddened him. At first he decided not to be present, but his pride overcame his momentary inclination. Why should he publish their estrangement to the world? The name of Ravenscroft must be guarded; the tongues of scandal should not be set wagging by his voluntary action. He had sacrificed himself for the family honour, and must bear his burden to the end. His father's last written command ran still in his head. He heard it repeated in the night watches. All the dead Ravenscrofts rose from the family vault to group themselves about his bed. Some of them spoke bitter truths. They whispered that the noble strain was tainted, reminding him that the blood of a Pluff ran in the veins of his heir. He would awake in a burning fever, crying aloud John Reginald's name.

Georgina's independence was a fresh anxiety. It staggered him to hear she had arranged this ball, and sent out the invitations without consulting him. Why, last time he was at Ravenscroft Park it was a funeral! now he must return to dancing, music and frivolity.

"I've got my marching orders," he said to Douglas Shirling, with a gloomy smile. "My wife is giving a ball next week, and this is the first I have heard of it."

He folded the letter, and lit a cigar, with an ill-acted air of unconcern.

"Really," replied Douglas, raising his eyebrows, but purposely speaking in a cheerful tone, "that's rather in your line; you used to be fond of dancing."

"My dear fellow, what I 'used to be' is quite a different matter. Fate has danced all energy out of me."

As Sefton spoke Dr. Merriman joined them and the subject dropped. He heard these last words, however, and when Sefton eventually went off to answer his wife's letter, he turned to Douglas with an abrupt question.

"What's the matter with that chap?"

"Oh, home worries and general depression all round! His wife is rather a trial."

"Ah!" said the sceptical young doctor, rubbing his clean-shaven chin. "These giddy young wives go a step too far occasionally without knowing exactly what they are doing. I should advise Lady Ravenscroft to look out, or her husband will go off his head."

"I say, Merriman, you don't mean that—you're only gassing!"

"Not at all. That's the very last subject I should joke about. I'm making a special study of the brain."

Douglas was silent. He did not like his friend's tone. It was too genuine for chaff.

"Poor beggar!" he said at last. "What an awful thought!"

"I say, Douglas!"

It was Sefton's voice calling him from the library door.

"Yes."

"You'll come back with me for this show?"

He joined Sefton, and closed the door.

"I'm awfully sorry; I wish I could."

"Why can't you?"

"I am booked for the Blandfords, and I can't throw *them* over."

"No, I suppose not," answered Sefton dolefully, knowing that in the face of such an engagement persuasions or arguments could not prevail, Douglas Shirling being head over ears in love with pretty Dolly Blandford.

"You see, Sef, old man," he continued confidentially; "I am going to try my luck this time."

Sefton grasped his friend's hand and wrung it sincerely.

"You will win her," he said in a perfectly confident tone; "and she'll make you a ripping little wife!"

Then he went back to the writing table, and finished his letter to Georgina.

It was with mixed feelings of excitement and resentment that Lady Ravenscroft awaited her husband's coming. Excitement because she had transformed Ravenscroft Park to her liking—resentment because she could not forgive his visit to Laurieston Hall.

She posed herself in a lazy, lounging attitude on a low divan in the drawing-room, which had been entirely redecorated. Superfluous gilt gleamed in brazen profusion everywhere, while the gaudy blue chairs from Queen's Gate House reared their obtrusive shoulders under the beflowered ceiling.

She could hear the carriage wheels on the drive, the loud clanging of the bell, but she did not rise or go downstairs to meet her husband. She was wondering how the footmen in their powder and silk stockings would impress him.

At last came footsteps up the stairs, the door was flung open by one of the new menservants, who announced to Sir Sefton: "Her ladyship is in the drawing-room."

Was it his old home, this flashy apartment he had always associated with the gentle presence of his mother and her household gods? He felt like a stranger in his own domain. The bright paperings on the walls of the hall and staircase gave the place a tawdry air, instead of its stately old-world appearance, which in the past appealed so forcibly to Sefton's romantic nature.

Georgina gave him her hand, and said: "How are you?"

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stiffly, as if addressing a casual acquaintance who had dropped in for afternoon tea.

He waited till the door closed, then his eyes roved round at will.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Georgina, hoping he was lost in admiration.

"I can't say I admire your taste," he replied. "You've ruined the room! I should hardly know the place, it is so altered, and the whole looks positively vulgar!"

"I thought you would say something pleasant," she sneered. "But I can't wonder at anything after the open insult you offered me in visiting your uncle, Lord Macphairson."

"Tell me, who is coming to the ball?" he asked.

"*Everybody!*" and an exultant light flashed in her eyes. "See, here is the list."

She handed him a sheet of foolscap. He ran his eye over the names in silent astonishment. So his wife spoke truly, and had forced herself on to Society by the aid of the golden calf.

"I can't remember if I told you it is to be a fancy-dress ball."

Sir Sefton started.

"I hope you don't expect *me* to dress myself up like a popinjay?"

"Of course you must be in costume. I have ordered a dozen different dresses from town for you to choose from, hired ones, but of the best."

"If I'd known, upon my word I would have left you to hold your revels alone. It is perfectly ridiculous, a set of grown-up people decking themselves out like children, and fooling about."

"Well, your friends quite appreciate the fun; I hear it has caused no end of talk and amusement. Not everybody is so staid and stupid as you! I think the house is immensely improved, and I want to give it a show. Besides, a fancy dress ball is more likely to be noticed by the papers. I have sent the names of the guests to some of the most fashionable periodicals."

Sefton said nothing. He felt abjectly, stonily miserable. His home disgusted him now as much as his wife. The objects familiar in his childhood had been crowded out by John Pluff's modern furniture, all things spoke of Georgina. Her ruling hand was visible at every turn.

When eventually the day of the dance arrived, Sefton felt like a guest in his own home, having been consulted in none of the arrangements. He did not even know what costume his wife would wear.

During the afternoon she asked him which dress he had selected.

"I sent them all back," he replied.

Georgina's brow darkened.

"You are surely not going to spoil the effect by your ordinary evening clothes?"

Sefton smiled a little oddly.

"Oh, no," he said.

She could get nothing more out of him.

The Humpherys had been invited to stay; but this also was not previously mentioned.

Sir Sefton received them courteously, but more than ever felt as if he were on a very boring visit with unpleasant people not congenial to him.

"My dress is divinely picturesque," Georgina confided to Mrs. Humphery. "I'm going to receive all these swell folks in rags, but most bewitching tatters, for all that. I may be an ordinary, commonplace woman, without any looks to boast of, but at least to-night I will be beautiful."

Georgina prophesied truly about herself. She had studied her face for hours before creating her make-up.

She brushed her hair as flatly down as possible, and donned an exquisitely curling black wig, flowing almost to her feet. She had sent it back three times before it suited her to perfection. Then with the addition of rouge, dark eyelashes and rose-leaf powder, Georgina felt she could hold her own amongst the youngest and prettiest girls.

"I feel I've got twice the cheek and the go in me," she told Mrs. Humphery, "when I am touched up. But wait a moment," as her friend went into raptures over the gown, "I am not a true gipsy yet."

She whispered something to her maid, and the girl left the room. A moment later she returned with John Reginald in a basket, his poor little face stained brown, yet wrapped in unconscious slumber. This she slung upon Lady Ravenscroft's back.

An exclamation of delight broke from Mrs. Humphery.

"What a lovely idea!" she cried, "and how sweet that infant looks! Are you going to receive with him across your shoulders?"

"Rather! Is it not a novelty? and such a chance to show off the heir."

"But dear, he will wake to a moral, and cry the house down."

"Oh! no; he won't," replied Georgina confidently, giving Mrs. Humphery a knowing wink. "The basket is all cushioned and comfortable, as good as if he were in his cot."

"Still the talking and the music must rouse him."

"No," drawing her friend aside and speaking in an undertone. "I had a little soothing, and quite harmless, mixture put in his bottle. He will sleep like a top, the darling, till mother has done with him."

Even Mrs. Humphery drew down her lips and looked shocked.

"Drugged!" she murmured, touching the unconscious child.

But John Reginald seemed to smile in his sleep, and his breathing was peaceful and even.

"Was it not a good idea?" said Lady Ravenscroft, as she sailed downstairs.

She met her husband in the hall. For a moment she stared at him in silent horror, then the words broke from her parched lips in deadly terror: "Sefton, is that *you?*"

He stood so still she could hardly believe he was alive. On the wall hung a painting of Sir Reginald in fancy dress (the costume of a courtier), beneath it his son in the very same garments and wig which long ago had been laid away in sacred remembrance of the dead. That he should have unearthed the clothes and appeared in them to-night horrified Georgina. Tears started to her eyes, for in this pale-faced apparition she saw again her lover of the past.

He watched her emotion with a smile on his hard lips. It pleased him to think he had pained her, as she drew back, and gazed reproachfully upon the faded lace. He glanced from his wife to his child, and thought of Norah. John Reginald's birth had dispelled the love that was still his, and made the wavering girl the wife of another man.

"Have you no feeling," said Georgina slowly, "that you can make sport of your father's memory?"

"None. John Reginald killed my heart," he answered enigmatically.

"John Reginald? What do you mean?"

She asked the question fiercely. Her eyes, with their darkened lashes, looked splendid in the heat of passion. She raised her hand as if she could have struck that rigid figure masquerading as dead Sir Reginald.

"Better not ask," retorted her husband.

He turned away, leaving Georgina gazing at the life-like portrait beneath which he had planted himself at the foot of the stairs.

(*To be continued.*)

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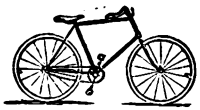

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NERVES AND FIDDLE STRINGS.

I USED to hear a man say that when he got excited his nerves were stretched tight as fiddle strings. No doubt he felt so, but as a matter of fact the nerves are as little like fiddle strings as you can imagine. Still, there is a resemblance in the point of general results: Unless the strings are tight and in tune you get no music from the fiddle, and unless your nerves are in good order we get but small comfort in living.

Hence, when Mrs. Ward says: "My nerves became quite unstrung," we shall agree that it is a good comparison. Yet what malignant power was it that unstrung those white cords wherein depend all our feelings and movements? Possibly we may gather the answer from Mrs. Ward's letter:

"A short time before Christmas, 1889," she goes on to say, "my health began to give way. It was not easy at first to say just what ailed me. In answer to questions of my friends I could only say that I felt tired, fagged, and weary. All my energy and ambition were gone out of me. I did a little work from necessity and habit, but took no interest in it. My appetite had usually been good, but now it failed, until I not only had no desire for food—I loathed the very sight and smell of it. The few mouthfuls I did eat at any particular time gave me intense pain at the chest and around the sides. After even the simplest meal I felt puffed and blown out.

"I got no proper sleep, and in the morning was more tired and exhausted than when I went to bed. I soon got so weak I could scarcely walk, and if I went only a few yards I felt fit to drop down. My nerves became quite unstrung, and sounds which ordinarily I would pay no attention to now worried, startled, and upset me. My mind would conjure up all sorts of absurd notions, having no sense or reason in them, yet I suffered much misery from them. I seemed somehow to have lost the protection which healthy people have against small annoyances; and this I knew was on account of my nerves.

"I will merely say that none of the various kinds of medicines that I took had any effect. Eating little or nothing I got thinner and weaker all the time, and month after month it was just the same. To be sure I could get about in a feeble way, which made the contrast between my condition and that of others appear all the more striking and sad to me. At this time we were living at Ash, in Kent.

"Well, one day in April (1890) I called at Mr. Hill's, the grocer, and fell to talking with his wife about my illness, and how discouraged and miserable I was. She listened to my tale, and then said: 'Mrs. Ward, if I were in your place I'd give up everything else and just take Mother Seigel's Syrup.' Then she told me more of what it had done in complaints that acted like mine.

"On this I got a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup, and began taking it. In three days I felt so much better I made sure it would finally cure me. My appetite commenced to pick up, and I could eat without having any pain or distress to follow. Every day I was stronger, and I slept better and better at nights. I was coming to be like my old self; my nerves were all right, and the noises and fancies vexed me no more. After taking three bottles of Mother Seigel's Syrup I was well as ever. You are welcome to publish my letter. (Signed) (Mrs.) J. Ward, Maison Dieu House, Dover, July 9th, 1895."

We see now what unstrung this woman's nerves. It was a trouble of the stomach—the disease invariably known as dyspepsia, in which the poisons from the fermenting food in the stomach are carried to every part of the body, the nerves suffering with the rest. The nerves were half starved, too, and no hungry nerves can be sound, strong nerves.

Hence, if we would have healthy nerves we must have a good digestion; and it is by giving us healthy digestion that Mother Seigel's Syrup has come to be so famous as a remedy in nervous complaints.

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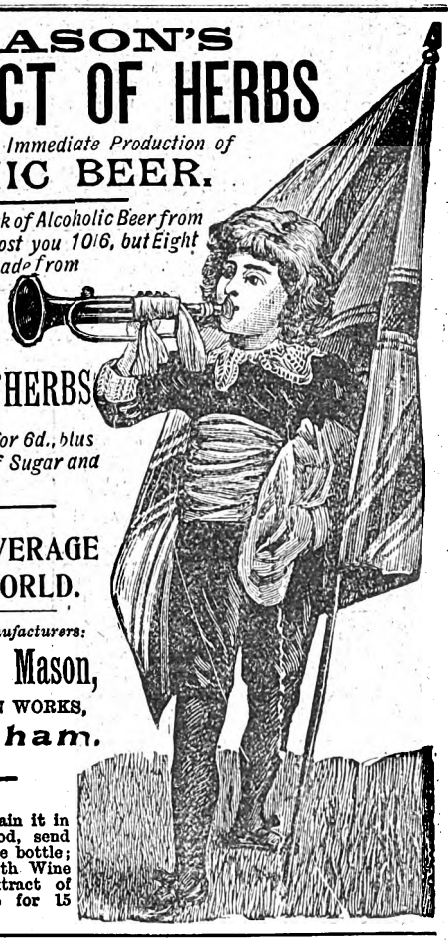

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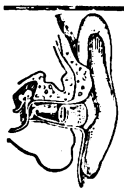

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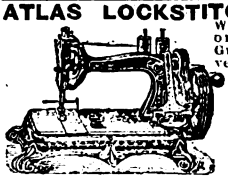

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SHORT STORIES

No. 402.] For the Week ending Sept. 12th, 1896. [1d.

All was Hurry and Giant Effort.

(See next page.)

EDITED BY C. Arthur Pearson

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THE SINGING FISHERS.

"A FINE sight, is it not, monsieur? but not without sadness."

It was the Curé who spoke, tall and lean, with a thin, ascetic face, and a crop of silvery hair brushed back under his broad-brimmed hat. He was always to be seen in his well-worn *soutane* moving about among the fisherfolk, exhorting, and commending, nor disdaining to crack his little joke with some burly *patron* or wizened old sea-dog.

The boats were putting to sea, and now especially was he sought after for final hand-shake and benediction.

I was vainly trying to sketch the scene of life and colour and movement, trying to fix on my canvas the masses of boats, with their tanned sails and painted masts.

"Yes, *mon père*," I made answer, "and it is quite beyond my feeble efforts." As I spoke I had to move my easel to make way for a string of burly Jacques and Simons, staggering along with a heavy warp which was the last to hold some stout trawler to the old quay.

A fresh west breeze was blowing across the old grey roofs of Tréport, the tide was high, and the heavy-built smacks were grinding and bumping against the quay as they got under weigh. The great sails flapped, *patrons* shouted frantically to their crews on board and on the quay, and ropes ran creaking through the blocks as each vessel set her canvas, and cast off her warps.

All was hurry and giant effort. The sun streamed down on painted mast and hull; green, scarlet, and bright blue rails and blocks; on scrambling crews in guernseys and tanned overalls, while above the great sails swung to and fro, or bellied out with a crash as they caught the pouring wind, and forced each vessel through the smooth green water, out between the wooden piers, to where the white horses were tumbling in the wind-swept channel.

Along the quay the women in their short kirtles and quaint caps were helping their menfolk, pulling and hauling with no mean strength, and even assuming the direction of operations. Here an old crone hobbles in her clattering *sabots* with Jacques' great sea-boots under one arm, his *vin ordinaire* under the other; here a good wife pushes back the crowd with an officious "*s'il vous plaît, messieurs*," and proceeds to demonstrate her importance by issuing commands to a string of buxom mothers and laughing lasses who are helping to put a huge trawl-beam on board her good man's vessel.

As the old priest and I watch the scene together, a big curly-haired lad swings himself into the rigging of the vessel nearest the quay, and as he drops to the deck, turns his laughing, sunburnt face in our direction and waves his *béret* with a farewell gesture. Beside us stands a girl in her quaint Picardy cap and short kirtle, her eyes following intently his every movement.

"Ah, Jeannot," she says, so low that he cannot possibly hear, "be careful, *mon ami*." Then to my companion: "*Mon père*, they are so rash, and now they fear nothing; it is we who stay behind that suffer; we who have to await their return with every anxiety. But he is a good lad, my Jeannot, is he not, *mon père?*"

The old priest shook his head kindly. "Aye, aye, Marie," he said, "as good as most of them—here to-day and gone to-morrow, gay and careless, thinking only of the moment. They tell me at least they are not dull on the *St. Firmin* with your Jeannot—a gay rascal—always joking and singing. They have all followed his example, and sometimes they sing hymns, but that I am afraid is not often; and thou hast had a hand in this, little one, for I hear thou hast put on Jeannot a promise that he will sing the Fisher's Hymn when things go badly with them—*hein!*—is that so, little zealot?"

"True, father! but *le bon Dieu* knows if he will keep his promise at all. Aye, even when the sea is angry and they catch nothing."

"Well, well! may they have good luck in their fishing, and I suppose I shall be marrying you up at the old church when he comes back from sea!"

With a blushing "Yes, my father, when he comes back!" Marie leaves us to hurry to the pier-head and wave a farewell to her beloved.

The *St. Firmin* is one of the last boats to make her way down the harbour. As she passes the little Calvary on the jetty, I notice the *patron* at the tiller, and the crew clustered round the mast, among them Jeannot, doff their caps and cross themselves, there is a last wave

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of the hand to the women gathered on the pier, and presently the *St. Firmin* is plunging her blunt nose into the breakers on the harbour bar. Long after the little vessel had become a mere leaning shadow on the plain of waters, I saw the girl Marie, the last to leave the old pier, watching the tossing shape, her eyes filled with a world of sadness.

Some few days after, at eventide, I was passing the old church overlooking the quay. The poor folk were flocking up the steps, old wives and young widows, with here and there a grey-haired veteran and a few children wandering aimlessly. I followed them through the lofty porch; the quaint interior was unlit, save for the sanctuary lamp and a few candles in front of a side altar.

The St. Firmin is plunging her blunt nose into the breakers.

One by one the little congregation clattered up the aisle, presently the organ boomed forth its mellow notes, and the *salut* proceeded. Those around me, praying with a moving piety, were one and all related to the fishermen now far out on the wild North Sea, and few among them but had learned to dread that sea as their worst enemy. They sang a quaint hymn in their *patois* French with a strange old-world melody, but I could only gather from the words that this was the fisher's song of which I had heard.

One woman's voice, sad and sweet, caught my ear. I turned, and in the dim light, I recognised the slight figure of Marie. She raised her head, her lips trembling with a passionate earnestness in prayer, as she half leaned, half knelt on the old high backed *prie dieu*. My thoughts went out to the sea, and, with the old chant ringing mournfully in my ears, I wondered if Jeannot remembered her last behest.

The music ceased, the lights went out one by one, and slowly the poor folk returned to the world and its cares.

As I passed down the steps to the quay, the oil-lamps flickered with the fitful gusts of the wind; the light was fast fading, but one gleam of the parting day threw up the horizon with an angry light, against which showed black the shapes of several fishing-vessels pitching wildly as they made for the little lighthouse which watched over the entrance to the port.

The old Curé passed me in the twilight. "Ah, monsieur!" he said, "a wild night, is it not? Aye! aye! I have seen that look in the sky too often not to know what it means: bad weather to-morrow, and a rough time of it for all our lads at sea. *Le bon Dieu* send them safe back." With a gentle "good-night!" he hastened on and left me.

As he had foretold, the next day broke grey and wet. A westerly gale was driving the white horses in tumbling masses up channel, to shatter themselves into sheets of spray against the shuddering black timbers of the old pier. The warning flag was flying from the little lighthouse which stood out stolidly and bravely amidst the mad waste of waters all around.

A few struggling smacks, under a shred of canvas soddened with wet, were making for port, and presently came surging in, swept from end to end as they crossed the bar, their crews in glistening oilskins holding on to the rigging for dear life.

I recognised Marie among the little group of women huddled together for company at the foot of the pier, and gazing anxiously seaward.

But I knew the *St. Firmin* was not among the lucky vessels which had been near enough to run for shelter

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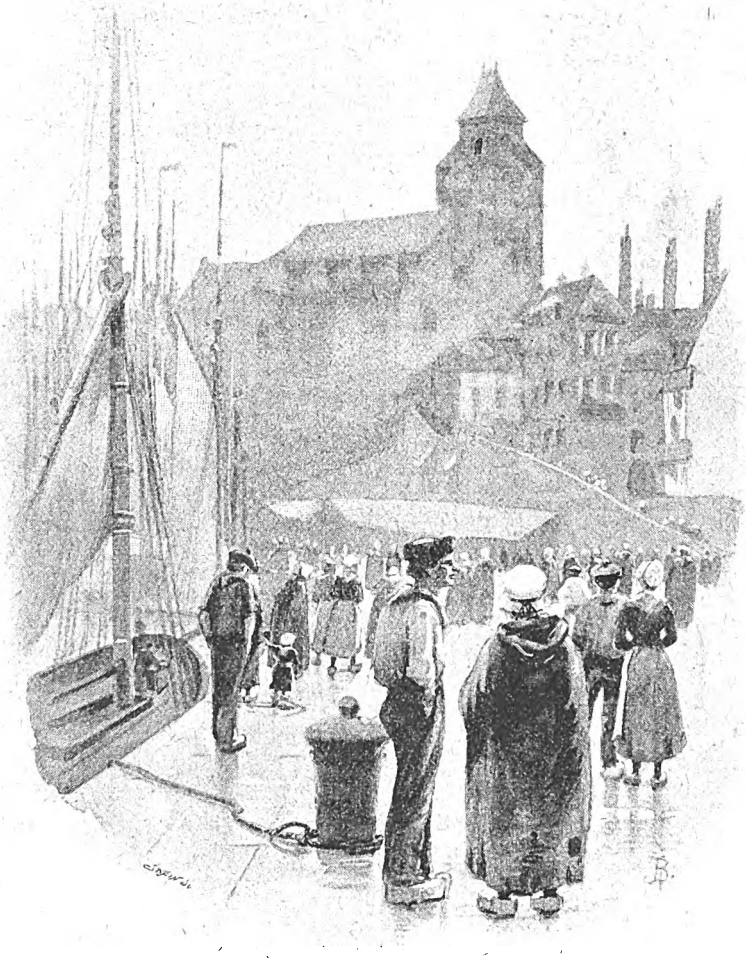

The poor folk were flocking up the steps.

when the gale broke. In the old town the air was salt with the driven spray, and many a tile from the peaked roofs came clattering down to the cobble-stones.

For three days the gale lasted, and on the fourth day the storm-driven fishers began to return slowly as if wearied, and there were few but showed some marks of their long struggle with the waters. Many did not come back for days, and then creeping along with the scant shred of canvas the winds had left, and in some cases with their little crews sadly diminished in number.

The fair days rolled by, and each afternoon the women, young and old, borne down with sorrow, and weary of waiting, climbed the hill of the Calvary behind the town.

Far out on the leagues of blue sea were the brown sails of the boats going their different ways, but the *St. Firmin* was not among them.

At length I finished my sketches and got together all my impedimenta to return to England, and one beautiful evening sailed out from the little port to take the mail-boat at Dieppe. As we passed between the wooden piers for the last time, I saw Marie and the aged parents of Jeannot, bound together with a common dread, gazing out across the calm sea, but among the few vessels we passed working slowly in with their sweeps, still I could not see the missing one. The bells were ringing for *salut* in the old church on the quay, and within its grey walls I knew that the hymn of the fishers would be sung with a new and keener sadness.

* * * *

The following autumn I was sketching on the Suffolk coast, working my way along from seaport to fishing village, setting up my easel wherever fancy led me.

At the close of a dull day I was walking along the sand-banks, at the edge of the flat land which borders the North Sea. The day had been stormy and changeable, and now the sun was setting behind the marshes and banks of reeds, and against it a few clumps of trees were breaking the level of the skyline. The wind had gone down, and though the banked-up clouds still seemed threatening, a strange calm had settled across land and sea, and nothing was heard save the low sigh of the retreating tide and the cry of a gull, floating with poised wings over the glistening sands.

I was nearing a little fishing hamlet, and stopped to light a pipe, and put down my sketching case. Close to me, lounging against a battered capstan, was a rugged old seaman who looked at me inquiringly.

"It's turned out a quiet evening after all," I remarked.

The old mariner gave a keen look over the sea, removed his pipe, and rubbed a horny hand across his lips, before he made reply.

"Ay, it's coom over calm, but I dunno as it'll last! you be goin' to village?"

I answered in the affirmative, and we set out together, my companion lurching along with a true seafarer's gait. I suppose the silence of the evening impressed us, for neither spoke, and my thoughts went back to that evening at Tréport when I last saw Marie and the old folk still waiting on the pier for Jeannot.

I wondered if he had returned and if perhaps even now the two re-united were singing the Fisher's Hymn in the old grey church. The notes of the melody came back to me, but I could not remember the last few bars, and racked my memory for some little time in puzzled silence. We reached the village churchyard on the edge of the shore, just a quaint scattering of white stones, rounded by rain and spray, and patched with lichen. A little Saxon church stood in the corner, unaltered through the centuries, as if mounting guard between the dead and the sea. Our way lay through the churchyard, and as we went down the path, between the mounds of rolling turf, again the Fisher's Hymn recurred to me

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with startling vividness; it was even as if some voice in the air, near, and yet distant, had sung it. I slackened my pace, and my old companion noticed my hesitation.

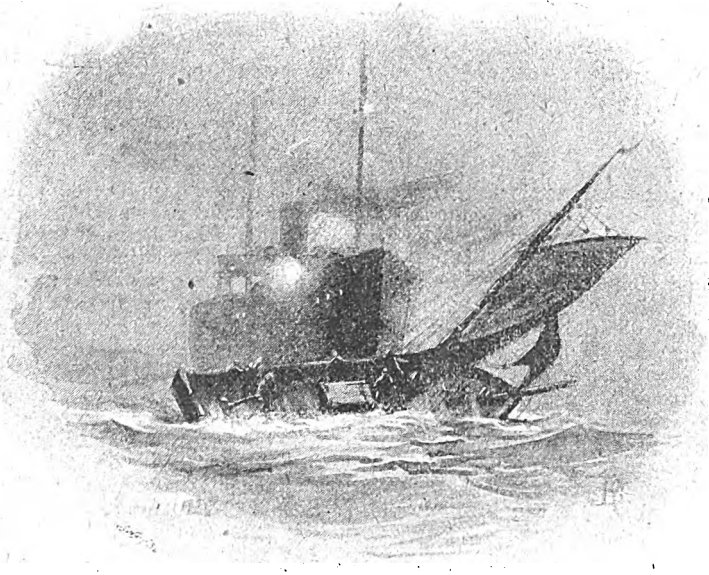
"Seems like as if ye were listening to summat," he said inquiringly, giving me a keen glance from under his eyebrows.

"No! no! it was nothing," I said, and walked on, puzzling at my fancy; but he was not to be put off. "Like someone a-singin'?" Again I stopped, but the melody seemed to go on, rising and falling with its weird cadence on the still air, waxing stronger and dying away as the wind seemed to carry it to our ears. It reached the part I had forgotten, and I wondered vaguely whether it would stop, but no! rising louder and louder I heard the voices of men singing, I even fancied I could catch some words of the *patois* French which I had never remembered before. "What is it?" I cried. "Do you hear nothing?" The old sailor shook his head gravely.

"Folk do say that there's some as sings over yonder, but *thee* hears it?" eagerly.

"Yes," I said, "where does it come from?"

He led me a short way across the turf, the hymn ever growing stronger and clearer, and with an imploring note in it, such as I had never heard, till at last it reached the end, and with a long-drawn wailing "Amen," it ceased, and again all was still. In front of us at the head of a grave was a quaintly wrought iron cross, such as may be seen in any country churchyard in Normandy and Picardy. Instinctively I uncovered, and stooping down, read the following painted on the cross in rough characters: "*Priez pour le répos des âmes du capitaine Jean-François Plouhon et de l'équipage du bâteau pêcheur 'St. Firmin' du Tréport qui a fait naufrage le* 28 *Septembre* 18——"



"Cut the trawlerman nigh in halves."

Marie and the old folk had waited in vain.

The sailor and I stood for some minutes by the grave and then moved away in silence; but I still seemed to hear that far-away hymn, like an echo, trembling on the air.

"How did it happen?" said I. "How came these poor fellows to be buried here?"

The answer came slowly: "Five o' their bodies was washed up at Overstrand. Three died on board the steamer as run down the French trawlerman. Sex o' them still lies at the bottom o' the sea."

"So there was a collision?"

"Aye, sir, I was aboard the steamboat, the *Kestrel*, from Bremen for the Tyne. We wor two days out and near the trawlin' grounds. 'Twas my watch on deck, and I was on the look-out. It blew hard from the west for three days before, and the wind was on'y just lightenin'. We'd passed several trawlermen, some of 'em furriners, an' I was a-kapin' a sharp watch for 'em; a rain-squall blew over sudden an' yo' cudden't see anything twenty yards from the ship, it was that dark. Seemed to me like I wor' hearin' someone a-singin' out ahead, an' after a bit I asks another o' the watch if he could hear it. 'Ay,' ses he, 'plain, like as if they was singen' a psalm or such-like; some o' they furriners, I reckon.'

"We was just a-goin' to hail the bridge and tell 'em, when we sees the trawler wi' no lights burnin' not thirty yards ahead. We both see her together, and sings out, but 'twas too late! The old *Kestrel* was rippin' through it a good eleven knots, and cut the trawlerman nigh in halves. She sunk like a stone. We lowered a boat and picked up three poor fellows; but they wor' spent, and didn't live long, any o' them. We buried 'em here in the churchyard wi' those as was washed ashore, and their poor folk over in France sent over that iron cross as yo' seen. Nat Hensby as sailed wi' me in the *Kestrel*, he comes fro' these parts, and heard the singin' same as yo' did. He says 'tis the same as the poor Frenchmen wor' singin' when they wor' run down. Parson says 'tis nowt but the wind soughin'."

The old sailor stood as if listening, but we heard nothing but the soft rise and fall of the sea, and the rustle of the wind through the long grass of the little garden of sleep.

"Nay, sor," he mumbled, "stranger nor that, stranger nor that. Seems like there's things as folk'll nivor understand this side o' the grave."

He looked at me as if seeking my opinion, but I answered nothing, and presently with a genial "good-night, sor!" still shaking his head doubtfully he left me.

The day was nearly done. One last glimmer of light lay just above the dark line of the North Sea, and my thoughts went out across the leagues of cruel water to the quaint Picardy town nestling between the cliffs.

The old folk were just coming out of church, with the hymn still ringing in their ears—as it was in mine. Marie had waited in vain for the return of her fisher, but I wished she knew, as I did, that in the cold grey dawn, when the crew of the *St. Firmin* went to their death, Jeannot had kept his promise.

J. R. Bagshawe.

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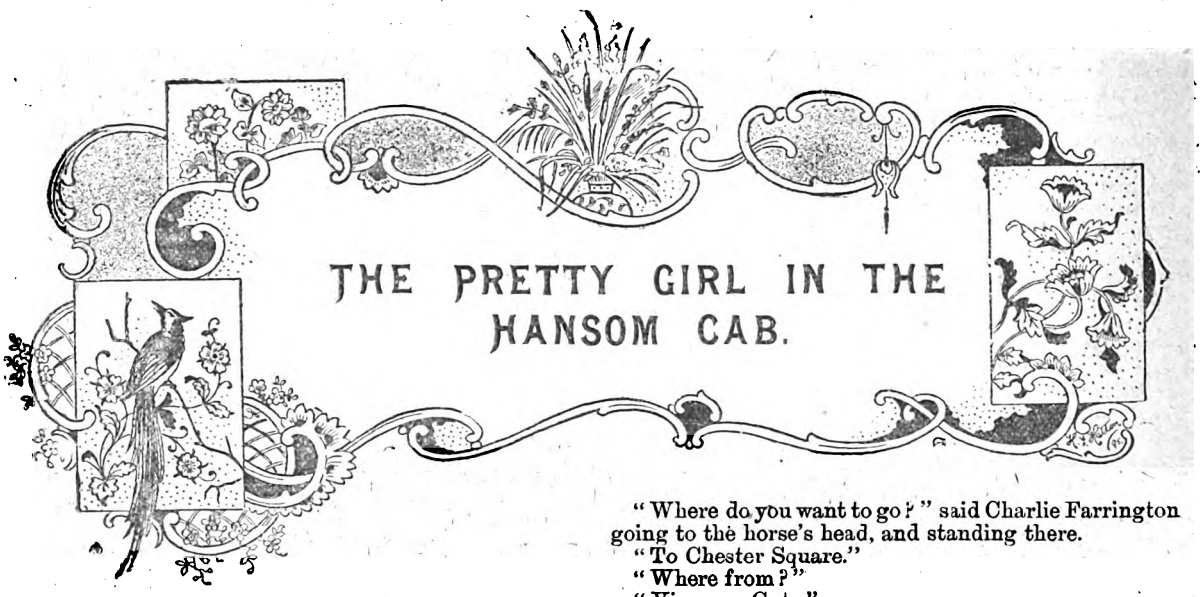

THE PRETTY GIRL IN THE HANSOM CAB.

In London, not many hundred yards from the rows of tall houses and trim squares which contain all that is most respectable in Bayswater—and very awe-inspiring that respectability is—lie some very gloomy, very dirty, and very much neglected slums, which, if they do not contain as large a proportion of the criminal classes as do some of the courts and alleys of the East-end, contain a good many members of that class whose means of living are too precarious to leave their integrity absolutely above suspicion.

Charlie Farrington felt this as he picked his way through the puddles, and wished he had waited half-an-hour for his train at Latimer Road instead of making a short cut. He had been playing the banjo, with a view to relieving the monotony of the slum-dwellers' existence, at a penny reading—so called because nobody read and admission was free—organised by the energetic incumbent of St. Cuthbert's.

Short cuts, as everyone knows, are often the longest ways; and Charlie very soon found himself in a blind alley between two dark rows of squalid cottages, with a blank wall, four costermongers' barrows, and a heap of rubbish at the end, which last he could feel and smell only. He now began to wish that he had taken his wife to the penny reading, in which case they would have gone home together in a hansom; whereas now he was trying to return on the cheap, as a dutiful young husband should. There were some very nasty-looking customers slinking out of that cottage—should he ask them the way? Better not, perhaps. A banjo is not an effective weapon, and he was all alone, and had his gold watch and chain on, given to him by his friends at the bank when he married. If only he could get a cab now! And then, as if in answer to his wish, there came a hansom trotting into the blind alley till the horse nearly struck the wall at the end with its head, and the driver pulled it back on its haunches.

A pretty girl was in the cab. She saw Charlie by the light of the lamps, and called out in a frightened voice: "Can you tell me where I am, sir? I think the driver is taking me the wrong way."

The driver was turning his horse rapidly, and using the whip.

"Where do you want to go?" said Charlie Farrington going to the horse's head, and standing there.

"To Chester Square."

"Where from?"

"Vicarage Gate."

Charlie Farrington whistled to himself. He stood where the driver could get a full view of his stalwart frame by the light of the cab lamps. He was six feet two in his stockings, an ex-captain of a football club, and he said to the driver:

"Look here, my friend; this is not the way to Chester Square, and you know it."

The man grunted that he had lost his bearings.

"Then you had better find them again," said Charlie drily; "or you'll have a cup of tea with me. Will you allow me to come with you?" he continued, raising his hat to the girl in the cab, and as she said nothing, he got in and sat beside her.

She trembled and clung to his arm, which he rather liked. "Where was he taking me to?" she said.

"Due west instead of south," he replied.

"Should I have been robbed and murdered if you had not come?"

"I don't know. I always thought yarns about wicked cabmen and their victims were all nonsense till now. Certainly it looked rather queer."

"I've heard they sometimes stab you through the little trap," she said, clinging still more closely to him in her agitation and apparently going to faint.

"I never knew them to do anything worse than look down," he answered, thinking of his engaged days.

"Curious," he continued; "very curious. You say you came from Vicarage Gate, and I could have sworn I saw this grey horse and cab with yellow wheels standing outside the concert-hall I've been singing at."

She did not answer. Was she really going to faint? How awkward—he had better put his arm round her waist to steady her. A jolt made her lurch very near him, and he felt the little gloved hand fall upon his. He pressed it slightly for a few moments; then he thought of Mrs. Farrington sitting up waiting to give him his whisky-and-soda, and he repented it and dropped it. Still he rather enjoyed the drive; more perhaps, than his good little wife would have done, if she had seen him. The driver evidently was on his best behaviour, and was taking them straight to Chester Square. "I shall write down the man's number and inform the police of this," he said presently; "what is

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it, 00156?" the little plate was rather blurred and hard to read inside the cab. "I'll call a policeman now, I think, and take you on in a fresh cab."

"Please don't," she said quickly, though in a rather timid voice; "the truth of the matter is, my people think I have been in the country for the day; but I have really been to see a friend whom I, who—you know one has private pals. A good fellow like you will understand."

The slang rather jarred on Charlie Farrington, and the voice was not quite a refined one.

"You mean you would rather have no fuss made?"

"That's it," she answered: "I thought you'd understand. The cabby may have meant to murder me, but to give him into custody and have to give evidence of where I took him from, would be worse."

Charlie looked inquisitively at her. She had ceased clinging to his arm and was lying well back in the cab. Suddenly, she peered out of the window, lifting the little blind at the side to see the houses better.

"Here is the square," she said; "he has come along well: do you mind getting out? We must not drive up to the door together."

He got out.

"Thank you so much," she said, pressing his fingers rather hard. He reciprocated slightly, though he was a young married man, and a good husband, too. "You have saved my life, perhaps."

"Does the driver know your number?"

"Yes. I told him when I got in."

And off she drove.

"She must live right at the other end of the square," said Charlie, as he walked in the same direction, and saw the hansom steadily pursuing its way. "By Jove, they are passing the church! The villain can't be playing more tricks; he must know I should have his number. Phew! I must go home before I do anything. I wish I'd not got out."

And home he went to his little house, and his wife was very glad to see him back so early; but before he could tell her anything about his drive—and he meant to tell her something—she exclaimed: "Why, where is your watch?"

Sure enough, it was gone—presentation watch, chain, and all, and all his money, and his pearl studs, nipped clean off at the setting as if with a pair of shears.

Then he managed to tell his story—more of it perhaps, than he originally intended, for there was some reproach in his wife's eyes as she tried to console him, and they talked over what they should do.

But the constable on duty outside the concert-hall knows nothing of the man who drove a grey horse in a yellow-wheeled hansom, and who was waiting there when the people came out on the night of the penny reading.

And there is no cab licensed with the number 00156.

HARRY ROGERS.

AN ASTRAL EXPERIMENT.

"And may I ask," said Allen, still gazing out of the window into the wet, dreary twilight, while the other man turned about on the piano-stool and looked at his friend's back—"and may I ask how long you have been playing with this nonsense?"

"You may, certainly," returned Grant good-naturedly, clasping his hands about his knees and half closing his eyes; "two months or more."

"And may I ask," persisted Allen, raising his voice a trifle, but otherwise remaining as before, "how long you intend to keep it up?"

"You may," said Grant, smiling slightly and closing his eyes a bit tighter, "and I will answer, as long as I find amusement in it. Come, Allen," he added briskly, as he pulled his trousers up at the knees and leant forward earnestly, "you know quite well there is nothing impossible in this thing. Other people have proved the existence of astral bodies; why, then, do you deny me the possession of one?"

"Deny you?" repeated Allen, turning about slowly on his heel and gazing languidly at his friend, "my dear Grant, I do not deny you anything. Take your astral body by all means—two or three of them if you like—but don't, I beg of you, insist that I shall believe it can be made your messenger and body servant on this earth to fetch and carry material substances like a good dog. The next thing you'll be asking me to do will be to witness the astral portion of your being playing valet for the material part, or else rushing off to town to attend to business, while the worldly half indulges in some worldly pastime, like tennis or golf. Take all the spiritual twins you want, my dear boy: have one for every day in the week, and two on Sunday, if you must, but for Heaven's sake do not expect me to be always on the look-out that I do not step on them or run over them on the stair. And, above all, don't go round the town talking about your experiments like a drivelling idiot, if you want to keep any of your friends."

"As to the last, you need not be in the least alarmed," said Grant, quite unruffled by his guest's remarks, "for I've mentioned this subject to no one but yourself—and as a friend, you know, you never did count. As to the other, I haven't asked you to believe half as much as you say, and I certainly have not declared I could send my astral existence on material errands, for I cannot as yet. That I hope to be able to do so in the future I acknowledge is true; but you needn't be a witness to the performance if you do not care to be, Allen."

Allen shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "Thou wert ever a fool, Grant," said he, "and a faddist of the rankest type. What you haven't had a shy at in the way of odd things isn't worth mentioning. I acknowledge you have achieved some rather startling results with one or two of your weird amusements, but this——" And he shook his head, as if there were nothing further to be said on the subject, while he picked up his hat and umbrella.

"Going?" asked Grant calmly, ignoring what had just been said.

"Yes," returned Allen, "I must be wandering

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homeward. You'll be round to-morrow will you not? That's a good fellow. It's lonesome now with everyone out of town, and even you and your coterie of astralites are preferable to one's thoughts for company. By-the-way," he added with his hand on the door knob, "if you get that errand-running, material-handling existence of yours trained to do something worth while in a month or so, I speak to manage your tour, for, of course, you'll go on the stage. *Au revoir!*" and he was gone before Grant could answer. As he ran lightly down the stairs, and out into the wet dusk, the other man turned from the window, where he had stood for a moment, watching him go, and putting his thin hands behind him, he fell to staring at the cheery fire upon the hearth.

"In a month," he repeated thoughtfully, "yes, in a month, or less. For even now——" He paused, straightened himself suddenly, and concentrated his gaze upon the piano at the further end of the room. A moment passed, and then the ivory keys of the instrument were depressed as if by visible hands, and a wild minor chord floated out on the still air. This was followed by another and another, until the strange melody seemed to fill the room. Grant's pale face grew whiter as the seconds passed, and his hands shook nervously at his sides, while his thin lips moved and twitched now and again. Then, as the strains died away and finally ceased altogether, he sank into the chair near him with a hysterical laugh, and wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead.

When Allen had said his friend was a faddist of the most pronounced type he was not exaggerating matters to any great extent, for certainly no one he knew had dabbled in the Unknown as much as Grant. Hypnotism, occultism and a hundred and one other inexact sciences had been investigated by him, and more than one of his friends had seen cause to remark: "Grant has a finger in every mysterious pie going, and one of these days he will be making a mysterious end of himself." As for Allen, he regularly lost his temper over him, and quite as regularly lectured him on the evil of his ways.

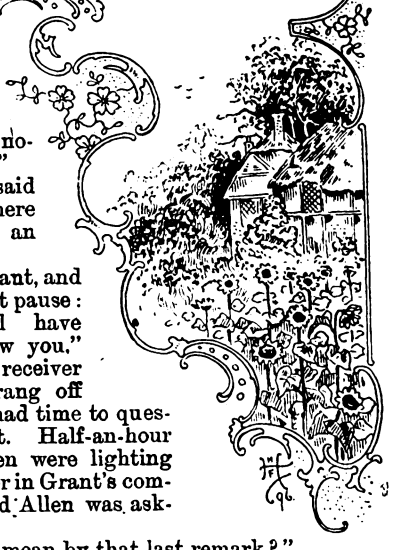
"It makes no difference how you go at it, religiously or otherwise," he would say, with unfeigned impatience, "it is tempting Providence to put an end to you, and that is all there is to it. You're juggling with things you have no business touching, and I tell you you'll get hurt one of these days, as sure as you persist in your foolishness. And because you're a passably good chap when you're in your right mind—which is not very frequent nowadays, Heaven knows!—I want you to cut it all and behave like a sensible animal."

At all of which Grant would smile indulgently, as he always did at Allen's harangues, and answer soothingly: "There, there, old man, don't worry about me; I'll take care of myself."

A month passed, during which the two men saw each other for a few moments each day only at the club. It was that time of the year when Allen was busiest, and he had quite forgotten his last talk with his peculiar friend, when, one evening, just as he was beginning to congratulate himself that the hardest work was over and he would have an evening off occasionally, the telephone rang, and answering it, he found Grant himself at the other end, inquiring if he had forgotten where he lived.

"Certainly not, youngster," returned the older man, "unless you have recently moved."

There is an excellent story by Mr. George Griffith just commenced in "Pearson's Weekly." It is entitled, "Briton or Boer?" and deals with the fight for supremacy in South Africa.



"Then come round and see a fellow, can't you? Come to-night, if you've nothing better to do."

"All right," said Allen; "I will be there in the course of an hour."

"Good," said Grant, and added, after a short pause: "By-the-way, I'll have something to show you," and, placing the receiver quickly up, he rang off before his friend had time to question him about it. Half-an-hour later the two men were lighting their pipes together in Grant's comfortable rooms, and Allen was asking:

"What did you mean by that last remark?"

The other laughed and answered: "Well, I've succeeded in my astral experiment, and I thought you might like to know about it."

"What are you talking about," demanded Allen, in mild astonishment; "do you mean to say you've kept up that idiocy I was lecturing you about a month or two ago?"

"Yes," replied Grant, "and if you want the managership of my tour, as you once hinted, now is the accepted time to apply for it. I've got that astral body of mine to work."

Allen said nothing, but sat looking at the other man as if he doubted his sanity.

"It handles material things," continued Grant quietly, without noticing Allen's disgust, "and does quite as well as a valet. Occasionally we have a difference of opinion, I must admit, but usually we work together in fine style. It acts independently of me at times, or almost so, while——"

"Never mind, old chap," interrupted Allen, placing one hand upon Grant's knee, and smoothing it, "that's all right. You'll feel better in the morning."

"Don't imagine I'm off my head," returned the other, "for I'm quite sane, I assure you. You don't believe it? Very well, I'm here to prove it—in fact, I asked you to come to-night that I might show you how my astral twin gets on. Are you willing to look?"

"Go ahead," said Allen shortly.

"Certainly. Sit perfectly still and watch that magazine upon the piano, for instance; we'll bring it to

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you," and he turned his gaze upon the book that lay face down twelve feet away. Suddenly Allen, keeping his own sceptical eyes upon it, saw the magazine lifted quietly from the piano and brought across the room, as if by invisible hands and laid on his lap. Grant had not stirred an inch or even ceased smoking. As the book dropped upon his friend's knee, the latter imagined he felt a movement in the air near him like a tiny draught, but in a second it was gone, and he was staring in turn at his host.

"What does—how in——" he began, and then stopped. "I verily believe you are the devil himself, Grant!" he exclaimed at last, picking up the book gingerly and dropping it on the table beside him.

"Not quite," replied Grant quickly, while his eyes seemed to brighten and his voice trembled a trifle with excitement, "but akin to him. Watch the rapiers there next," and turning his deep-set eyes upon the thin swords that hung crossed upon the wall opposite, he held out one hand towards them. For a minute there was a deep silence in the room, and Grant seemed to be having an internal controversy of some sort, for he frowned and shook his head once or twice; but in another moment his face cleared, and a second later the slender weapons of steel were jerked down from their resting place and floated across the space between it and Grant. As they came, he laid down his pipe quietly and held out both hands for them. Immediately the handle of one was thrust into his outstretched palm, but as he reached for the other it was abruptly pulled back, and quick as a flash a savage thrust made at his breast with the point.

Grant saw the blow coming, and sprang aside, and then, like another flash, his own weapon was in position and parrying the succession of murderous cuts and thrusts that were rained at him by the other sword as it leapt about before him.

"Good Heavens!" screamed Allen, springing to his feet, his blood running cold at the strange scene and realising that something was terribly wrong, "what is it, Grant? What are you doing?"

But there was no reply. With perspiration already dripping from every pore, Grant thrust and parried and parried and thrust like mad, while the other rapier, as if possessed of an evil spirit, swung about in mid-air, and strove to get beneath his guard and wound him. Up and down, above, below, it flashed and flashed again while the two slender blades clinked together, one upon the other, and the man, his face wet and eyes filled with a nameless horror, fought desperately for dear life.

Allen, after the first few lightning-like strokes, sank back into his chair and watched the fight with fascinated horror, hardly realising what it meant, yet gathering something of the reason for Grant's evident fear from what he had said before. For several minutes the fierce duel raged, and in the terrible excitement Allen noticed that Grant was wounded in several places. Then suddenly the swords were locked at the guards—an old trick of Grant's—and a second later the bewitched weapon rang upon the floor. As it did so, Grant lunged forward, twice in rapid succession, and the rug in front of him stirred as if moved by a falling body, and then all was still.

Without taking his eyes from the spot, Grant moved backwards until he stood beside the table again.

"The decanter, for pity's sake!" he whispered hoarsely, and, without a word, Allen pushed it across the table to him and a glass after it. Once—twice—thrice—the trembling man filled and emptied the glass down his throat; then he laid the rapier he still held across the table, and turning to Allen, looked at him with an expression that sent the shivers up and down his friend's spine.

"You saw," he said slowly, while his breath came fast and hard.

"Yes," replied Allen, passing his hand over his eyes uncertainly, "but—but——"

"It is hard to understand," finished the other man grimly. "It—we—had a quarrel before you came, and when it saw the chance it attacked me—and you saw the rest."

"But where is——" began Allen, shivering again as he spoke.

"There," answered Grant, pointing to the rug, "there, where it belongs! You cannot see, yet look!"

As he spoke he walked steadily across the room a few steps, and touched the invisible body with his foot. "Yes," he said, with a curious smile upon his deathly white face and lips, "it's safe enough now. Rather odd experience, was it not? A sort of psychological suicide!"

Allen staggered to his feet, and backed to the door. Grant remained motionless, staring straight before him.

"Yes," replied Allen hoarsely, "a kind of soul-death. But if the soul die, what becomes of the——" He paused a moment, and then shrieked: "For Heaven's sake, Grant, are you mad—or am I?"

There was no reply.

Without a sound from its set lips, the body of Grant, who had died upon his feet, fell heavily across the rug to the floor.

J. E. Cook.

The September MELODY is worth buying if only for a new song by Mr. F. E. Weatherly which it contains. As a matter of fact, eleven other splendid compositions are included in the sixpennyworth.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEAD FAILURE.

"HUMPH!" ejaculated Emsworth. "Show her in. We will soon know, Murray," he continued, as the door was closed; "he plays the queen of trumps."

Murray turned cold as he started up, and the next moment, looking eager and bright, Lady Braetoun entered the room.

"Ah, papa dear," she cried——"and Dr. Murray! This is a surprise. I am so glad to see you."

She gave him both hands, which he took awkwardly, and quickly released.

"Can't get up, my dear," said Emsworth, as his child passed one hand round his neck, raising her veil with the other, and kissed him lovingly. "Very tender, my pet, and——"

"What's the matter?" cried Olive excitedly, as she looked from one to the other. "Oh, father, dear, don't say you're ill."

"No, no, can't be very ill, because I made a hearty breakfast. Nothing, my dear; Doctor here's going to set me right."

"But what—what is it?" she cried wildly, as, tearing off her veil, she dropped upon her knees by her father's chair, to clasp her arms about him, and nestle to his breast.

"See this, Doctor?" cried Emsworth, drawing his child closer; "title and fashion and society, and all the rest of it, but she hasn't forgotten her old dad. Gently, my darling, though. Oh!"

"And you don't tell me what is the matter," cried Olive piteously, as her hands began to play about the old man's breast, as if something were broken there.

"No, no, no, my pet," he cried fondly, as his eyes grew a little dim. "Nothing much, only one leg won't go. Been overwound, eh, Doctor?"

"Dr. Murray," cried Olive impatiently; "is that it? You're keeping something from me. Why don't you speak?"

"There is nothing to excite alarm," he said quietly, as he gazed upon the impassioned face before him, with every nerve quivering. "Mr. Emsworth, I will go into the library and write a prescription, and give it to the servant to have made up."

"No, no," cried Olive, springing to her feet and running to a side table, to return with ink-stand and blotting-pad; "write it here. There, there. I'll ring and have it sent to the chemist's at once. The brougham is waiting, and Barnes can go in that."

Murray took a chair at the table, and began writing, while Olive hurried to the bell and rang, before going back to her father, bending over him and kissing him tenderly again and again.

The butler entered, and she held up her hand to him to be silent, motioning to him not to stir, while Emsworth held her hand in his, feeling proud and pleased to be the object of so much solicitude.

There was silence in the room—a silence only broken by the scratching of the Doctor's quill pen.

"That is all," he said, turning to the butler. "Will you have——"

"Yes, yes," cried Olive, running to him and snatching the sheet of note-paper. "Take it at once, Barnes."

"Me, miss—my lady?"

"Yes, you; don't waste a moment. My carriage is waiting, get in, and wait till the medicine is made up, and bring it back yourself."

"Yes, my lady," said the butler smiling, the mention of the carriage in which he was to go having a mollifying influence, and he quite hurried out upon his mission.

"I will say good-morning now," said Murray. "It will not be necessary for me to see you this evening, but if you feel the pain increase, send to me and I will come."

"Oh, Doctor!" cried Olive, "surely you ought to come again. Pray, pray do!"

"I would if it were necessary, Lady Braetoun," he replied in measured tones; "and you must excuse me now. I have patients waiting."

He shook hands hastily and went out, leaving Olive looking piqued.

"If I did not know how good and clever Dr. Murray is," cried Olive petulantly, "I should think he was very careless about you, papa."

"Then you would think very wrong, my dear. He has been here ever so long, and knows exactly what he is about."

"Did you send for him, papa?" said Olive quickly.

"Yes, telegraphed this morning."

"Ah, then it is worse than you both make out, and you're keeping it back from me."

"No, no, my dear."

"But I'm sure you are; and you didn't send for me."

"There was nothing to send about. But you had heard something? No, of course not. What made you come so early? Why, Olive, what is the matter with your lip?"

"This?" she cried, colouring, as she clapped her hand to her mouth. "Oh, nothing: a little accident. Rod was bending over the table, and I went behind him—he raised his head sharply, and knocked against me—that's all."

"Then you did not come about that?"

She shook her head, and looked very conscious.

"There, out with it. What is it?"

"Are—are you well enough to be told, dear?"

"Oh yes, anything. Now then: he has been talking to you about our letters?"

She nodded quickly.

"I expected as much. Well?"

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"You are not to be cross, papa dear, because it was my doing to come and see you. Rod is very ill from care and worry."

"Over betting and losing money at races, eh?"

"I don't know—I think not, papa dear," she said caressingly, "but, poor boy, he is dreadfully upset through some man pestering him for seven thousand pounds."

"Yes, and you have come over to ask me to lend it to him."

"No, dear, not to lend it to him, but to enable me to give it to him—my husband—out of the money you settled upon me when we were married."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, dear. You see it looks so foolish for me to have all that money, and yet not have it so that we can use it when we want some."

"That's his opinion, of course."

"No, dear, not only. I think so too."

"Poor, silly little darling! Now, being a man who knows a bit about money, let me see if I can't make you think differently."

"I never could think differently, papa dear, because it is such a peculiar position."

"Humph! and so fresh too, isn't it?"

"I don't know, papa, but it is fresh to me."

"Very well then, look here: I settled one hundred thousand pounds on you, my dear, when you married."

"Yes, papa dear, for both of us."

"The interest or dividends, my dear. We business people don't live on our capital."

"But Roderick is not a business man, papa dear, he is a nobleman."

"Yes, pet, and cuts up his estate and sells it bit by bit, till it is all gone, lives on the proceeds, and when the money is spent he becomes the worst kind of beggar—a gentleman beggar!"

"Papa, don't talk like that, please, of my husband. A beggar!"

"To be sure; he has been begging of me."

"Only for his rights, papa."

"His rights! Ah, those are what the laziest, talking working-men are always mouthing about, what they call their rights. Braetoun has all he is entitled to share with you—the dividends that well-invested money brings in—seven thousand pounds a year. Quite enough with what he ought to have to keep you both in affluence. The capital is yours."

"Yes, papa, I suppose so, but I want to help him by giving some of it entirely to him now that he is in trouble."

"I see. And next month a little more—five or ten thousand—and then a little more, till it is all gone, and the interest with it. And what then?"

"I had not thought about that, papa dear?"

"Well, fortunately, I had, my child. Money is valuable and very hard to get. I made that with which I endowed you by sheer hard work. It is yours, for your benefit, to insure you a comfortable income when I am gone."

"But it would be so much more useful now, dear."

"According to Braetoun's ideas. These are not the same as mine. When I was his age my income was a hundred a year and I saved money. He has a wife with seven thousand a year in her own right; he gets in debt and sends his wife begging."

"He does not, papa," cried Olive indignantly. "It was my own idea, as I told you, to come and ask you to help us."

"If Braetoun had been unfortunate, my dear, I would have helped you."

"But he has been very unfortunate indeed," she cried earnestly.

"No, not in the least. I don't call a man unfortunate who loses his money in gambling. He takes his chance, and loses or wins. One wins: a thousand lose. No, my dear, your settlements are very just and right. The money is carefully tied up, and——"

"But you will untie it just a little for me, dear," she said, kissing him.

"No, not a knot," he said, smiling.

"Papa?"

"You are very fond of your husband, I suppose?"

"Of course," she cried proudly.

"Though he does strike you and bruise your lips."

"What nonsense, dear!" she cried, blushing. "It was indeed an accident."

"And he is very fond of you?"

"He loves me very dearly."

"Well then, tell him from me to show his love for you by remembering that you are his wife."

"How absurd! As if he did not know, papa," she said smiling.

"That's right, my dear; let him keep to that."

"Now you're beginning to be cross, papa dear. You don't know what trouble he is in, or you would not hesitate for a moment."

"But I did know what trouble he was in, before you came, Nolly."

"Oh yes, of course, he wrote and told you."

"But I knew long before that."

"You knew? How? I did not know till this morning, when he was so upset about your letter."

"Perhaps it was as well that you should not, but I did, and you may tell him from me that I know all his affairs better than he knows them himself."

"Oh, papa, this sounds terribly cruel. You don't know how ill and worried poor Rod is through wanting the money."

"I am ill and worried too, as you see, my dear, through knowing that he wants this, and why he wants it."

Olive looked at him in a bewildered way, then she brightened up.

"Papa, dear, let me help you by telling you how to make it all come right."

"Tell me, then," he said, looking at her sadly.

"Untie some of this money that you say is mine; I would gladly give it to make you both happy."

"If I did as you ask it would make me far worse, little woman, and do your husband harm."

"Papa!"

"It is quite true, my dear, and some day you will know it. There, I am a decisive man, and I do not say things lightly. What I say I mean. I am sorry to hurt your feelings and make you unhappy, but not one shilling of my hard-earned money shall go to pay your husband's gambling debts."

Olive looked at him with her eyes full of indignation and reproach, till he made a quick movement, and then uttered a low groan, his face turning sallow, and the drops forming upon his forehead. Then everything else was forgotten in horror and dread, and she caught his hand in hers.

"I'll send for Dr. Murray again," she cried.

"No, no, little one," he said, wiping his forehead; "I'm better now. It was speaking like that brought it on. Go home now."

"But you can't be left like this."

"Oh, yes, I can, my dear. The servants could help me if I was bad."

"The servants! And I not here."

"Yes, and you not here, my dear. You're a married woman now, and belong to someone else. There, kiss your cruel old father and go. You must try and make a better man of your husband."

"Better, papa! He is all that is good and true."

"Very glad of it, my dear; the easier for you to bring him to reason, and make him see that seven thousand a year from his wife is as much as he ought to expect."

"But, papa, dear," she pleaded; and she sank once more on her knees by him, to lay her head upon his breast, "must I go home and tell him how hard and cruel towards him you have been?"

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"No; go and tell him that my hard earnings are not to be given to betting-men. I am perfectly just, and if he is harsh and cruel with you, come back home here, where I wish you were still. Now, good-bye; I can't bear any more."

"Must I go?" she said faintly.

"Yes. You have an unpleasant scene to go through with your husband: make haste and get it done."

She kissed him, and hurried out for fear that she should burst into a passion of sobbing, forgetful that she had sent her carriage with the butler, and was thus constrained to take the first four-wheeled cab she saw. Then she pulled up the glasses and drew her veil in folds, so as to hide her tears.

"I just tell Master Braetoun this," growled Emsworth when he was alone, "that for two pins I'd fetch her home, and he might go to law and do what he could, but he shouldn't have her again."

"What shall I say?—what shall I say?" moaned Olive, as she rode back, and made the servants stare as they saw the shabby old cab in which she had returned.

Olive felt as if her emotion would suffocate her as she entered the breakfast-room, to find her husband sleeping uneasily, and she sat down to wait.

It was not long before Bractoun awoke and stared vacantly about for a few moments before his eyes lit upon his wife, and a sensation of confusion passed away.

"Olive!" he cried. "Ah! back again. Well, will he let me have the money?"

She shook her head mournfully.

"What! A part of it then?"

"No, Rod; he is ill, and he refuses absolutely. Oh, my darling, I did everything I could, but he was as stern as could be. Rod, Rod, dear, I am so, so sorry."

"Curse your sorrow!" he cried repulsing her. "A mean, grasping old hound!"

"Rod! husband! he is my father."

"Yes, and you are his daughter. A nice mess I've made of it. Here! Have the goodness to tell me why I married you?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE DOG RETURNS."

"No!"

"It's true, Auntie, as you sit there. Poor boy! He has been in sad trouble—nearly ruined—he told me all about it—his father-in-law wouldn't help him; his wife turned against him, and just then if that dear mare didn't win him a lot of money."

"Think of that, now!"

"Yes, Aunt; and he says that his getting married was all a mistake, and if I'd look over the past he would never behave bad to me again."

"Ah, just like 'em!" muttered Aunt Duncan.

"What did you say, Auntie?"

"That it ain't true."

"But I tell you it is."

"There, take off your cloak, and sit down and have a few oysters and some stout. They're only just in, and the bottle's fresh opened."

"Oh, Auntie, I can't eat oysters to-night, nor drink stout. We've been to Dillitanti's and had supper, him and me, and little Mr. Daines."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the Thespis. Mr. Daines came in and asked me to go while you were out."

"Well, of all! I couldn't have believed it, Baby. Then he's quite off with her?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. Don't talk about her, please."

"But, tell me, what did he say?" cried Mrs. Duncan, pushing back her plate and drawing her chair aside, so as to face her niece, who, charmingly dressed, had thrown off her mantle and sat flushed and happy.

"He said he'd never known a happy moment since he behaved so badly to me, that he had been ill nearly ever since, that I was the only one he had ever really cared for, and that if I would forgive him and come back to the old house we'd never part again."

"And you believe him?" cried Mrs. Duncan, breathing hard and looking hot and flushed.

"I don't think I believed him, Auntie," said the girl dreamily, "but, oh, it did sound so sweet—so sweet for him to tell me he loved me once again!"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Duncan, tightening her lips, "and what about Mr. Cyrus Daines?"

"Poor little man!" she said sadly.

"Are you going to behave as bad to him as that fine my lord did to you?"

"Mr. Daines never told me he loved me," said the girl quietly; "he respects me too much."

"Yes, and why shouldn't you respect him? He isn't rich, and he isn't a man who'd keep carriages for you, and be always pouring out champagne. But even if he has got such a sharp, saucy tongue of his own, he about worships you, miss, and he'd marry you any day, as sure as I stand here."

"Yes, Auntie," said Lucy softly. "I believe he would."

"Then it's 'orridly wicked of you, Baby, that it is, and I'm ashamed of you; there, that I am."

"Auntie, dear Auntie, you don't know; you don't know."

"Yes, I do. I know that my lord's got no more 'art in him than a threepenny bit; and after the way he's served you, I'm ashamed of you. You make me mad to see you so ready to listen to his soft soap and stuff as soon as he sees you again."

"You don't know, Auntie; you don't know."

"I do know, miss, and I won't have it. Why, if I was Mr. Daines, I'd—I'd shoot him, that I would!"

"Mr. Daines is nothing to me, only a friend who has always been very kind ever since the trouble."

"But what did he say to-night? Was he at supper with you?"

"Yes, Auntie; I wouldn't go without him."

"My lord didn't want you to, I suppose?"

"Yes, he did, Auntie."

"And what then—what did he say?"

"Nothing at all, Auntie."

"Nothing, and him as clever with his tongue as he is! I wouldn't have thought it of him. Said nothing?"

"No, Auntie; only sat there and looked bad."

"I should think so, indeed."

"I was very sorry for him, but I seem to belong to Rod."

"Then let me tell you that you don't. Let him go to his wife. Pray, what about her?"

"I don't know," cried the girl, and her soft, dreamy look gave place to one of angry animation. "What is she to me? Why should I think of her? See how she has made me suffer. He's mine—mine once more. Let her try to get him away again if she dares."

"And I suppose my lord came home with you to the door?"

"No," said the girl, calming down again and speaking softly, with the dreamy love-light coming back into her eyes, "I wouldn't let him."

"And lucky you didn't. Then you came home alone?"

"No, Auntie, with Mr. Cyrus Daines."

"Ho! Then why didn't he come in?"

"He wouldn't, Auntie."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing, Auntie, nothing; he looked at me for a few moments under the gas lamp, after I'd rung, and then he walked slowly away."

"Ho!" exclaimed Mrs. Duncan, tightening her features more, and letting the newly-opened oysters dry, and the stout grow frothless and flat, "so that's how it stands is it? Very well, my dear, then you listen to me. I've loved you, Baby, ever since you were the bit of a wild girl who come to me all those years ago, and I've petted and spoiled you,

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and when you come back after Lord Braetoun had pitched you over I welcomed you with loving arms, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you; but if you haven't got no pride and self-respect in you, I shall have to give you some of mine. I won't have such goings-on as that."

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie, you don't know, you don't know."

"I know that you've got on a silly fit, and want someone to bring you to your senses."

"Auntie, darling," said the girl, rising, to go behind her chair and place her soft little arms about her, "don't be cruel and cross to me now I'm going to be happy once again."

"Happy, in going and breaking the heart of someone else!"

"What is it to me, Auntie? What is it to me? He don't love her, and he does love me. My poor little heart's been nearly broken ever so long, and I've often felt that I should like to die. I should have died that night when he was so very bad. Yes, you may shake your head. You don't know, Auntie, but if he had died I should have gone off the bridge, and you'd never have seen me more."

"Oh, Baby, Baby!" sobbed her aunt, as her arms gradually tightened round the soft, *svelte* figure, "if all women were as weak as you, what would the world come to then? It's weary, it's wicked, and something will come like a judgment on us all."

"Yes, Aunt, perhaps," said the girl softly; "but that is all behind a cloud, and it's so light here, just where it has been so cold and black. He loves me once again, and I'd go to him, Auntie, when he calls me—yes, if it was to die."

CHAPTER XIX.

How to Spend a Happy Day.

"WELL, Baby, I dare say it's very conf'table and it's very nicely furnished, but you get the papers and deeds and let me put 'em in my lawyer's 'ands along o' mine, as 'll all be yours some day, my dear; and whatever happens my lord won't never get it again then, and so I tell him."

"Whatever happens!" cried Baby, as she stood there in her own little drawing-room, as charming as diaphanous drapery could make her, and wearing an indescribable bonnet fresh from Paris for the special day. "Whatever happens! Oh, Auntie, you'd better have stopped at home."

"Well," said the old lady tartly, "didn't I want to stop at home? Do you think I wanted to go gallivanting down to Bunsbury races outside a nasty, dangerous four-in-hand? I hope it won't break down."

"Not so heavy as that, Auntie."

"Ah, it's of no use to try and hide it, Baby, I do get terrible stout, and my breath's that short it seems as if there isn't room for it."

"Who minds you being a bit stout, Auntie!" said Lucy, stroking her face.

"You may just as well leave off, my precious, for you can't rub out them wrinkles, they've got in too deep. But don't you think I'd better stop, and have a nice cup of tea ready for you when you come back?"

"No, I don't, Auntie. You're always sticking over your work, and never have a change."

"What! Didn't I go to 'Ampton Court last year?"

"Hampton Court!" said Lucy scornfully; "what's Hampton Court?"

"A ve—ry nice place, my dear, and as pretty and old-fashioned as can be. Don't you despise old friends."

"I don't, Auntie, but when Rod said he was going to drive down in the country where it's lovely, I thought it would do my dear old darling Auntie good, and I told him I should take you, and that if you didn't go I wouldn't, and that settled it."

"Well, it was very good and nice of you, Baby—bless you! I say, I wish you wouldn't wear a veil when I want to kiss you. I always seem to taste the arryphane, and it puts me in mind of cutting up gauze for ballet dresses."

"But I can't take it off now, Auntie."

"No, of course you can't. But, I say, Baby, you do look lovely this morning. Reg'lar Covent Garden bouquet, out o' the Central Evenue."

"Silly old Auntie."

"Well, it was very nice of you to think of me, and I've put on my best manners. Do I look all right?"

"Lovely, Auntie."

"That's right. I was afraid you might think me a bit too red."

"Oh no, Auntie, you'll do capitally."

"That's a comfort, my dear, but I wish you'd go in for a bit more colour. You are so fond of those washed-out blues."

"Rod likes to see me in pale blue, Auntie."

"Oh well, my dear, that settles it. Well, your 'ouse looks very nice, but you must spend a lot in flowers, pussy."

"Well, I do, Auntie; they are so sweet. Rod sent me this bouquet this morning ready. Isn't it lovely?"

"M'yes, my dear, but there's no colour in it. You couldn't see one like that across the footlights."

"Well, I'm not going behind them, Auntie," said the girl, inhaling the perfume. "Oh, I love 'em. When I die I should like to be buried in white lilies."

"Baby! Oh, my dear child! You've given me a cold chill all down the back. You shouldn't, my dear," said the old lady, who kept on peeping about the place. "That's a nice 'andle and sunshade. My lord give it to you?"

"Yes, Auntie. Isn't it a beauty?"

"Cost a lot I know. But, I say, my dear, you've made this place look very nice, but I don't think much of Brompton Square."

"Oh, I love the little place."

"Well, it is dramatic, as you may say, and seems to smell Keeley and Albert Smithy, and puts you in mind o' lots of 'em as have gone; but it is squeezy. Well, ain't it time for us to start?"

"Very nearly. He's going to pick us up here, of course."

"But, Baby, are you sure he can drive proper?"

"Why, Auntie, doesn't he go regularly to the coaching club, and doesn't he drive me round the Park often?"

"Oh, well, if he gets coached like that he ought to be able to, but it always seems hard enough to drive two horses, without sticking two more, as you don't want, out in front. It's all very well to call it four-in-'and, but those front ones never look to me in 'and at all."

"Oh, you'll be all right, dear. You're going to sit on the box seat, between me and Rod."

"What! Box seat? Not me."

"Why, Auntie?"

"Do you think at my time of life I'm going to climber clamber up a set o' iron door-scraper things, to sit in a dangerous place like that, with the 'orses 'eels half their time in your lap? No, my dear, I'm going out for a day's pleasure, and I'm going to sit inside."

"But, Auntie, there's no danger, and you'll have a step-ladder to go up."

"Scaling ladders won't tempt me, my dear."

"But you can't, Auntie. Nobody goes inside a four-in-hand."

"Then what's the inside for? I'll show my lord I can."

"Now don't be a dear, obstinate old darling," cried Lucy, "I'll take care of you. You must come on the box; and Auntie, darling, I've got a surprise for you."

"'Ave you, my dear? What is it?"

"Well, I wanted you to be very comfortable, so there'll be an air cushion."

"What! Well, you are a pet. Now, I do call that nice of you, Baby. I—I—Well!"

"There, there, you mustn't cry about it."

"It's only just a show'ry drop or two, my dear. It does seem so nice of you. But I must look at that there cushion first."

"Why, Auntie?"

"Why? Oh, I know 'em by 'eart, my dear. Why, if they're blowed out too full it's like sitting on a Hashley's

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'orse in a circus. But I think you'd better let me go inside."

"You can't, Auntie. Fancy you sitting inside along with the luncheon hampers."

"Luncheon? Oh, then there'll be a bit of a snack."

"Of course. Hampers from Forthum and Mason's, and champagne."

"Champagne! H'm, I don't think much of that. Poor watery stuff, not 'alf so warming and good as a drop of real old-fashioned ginger beer out of a stone bottle."

"There'll be ices too, Auntie," said the girl with a mischievous look in her eyes.

"Pah—h—h!—Ugh—h—h!" shuddered the old lady. "Not for me, my dear. Not going to make myself a bear on a North Pole, eating snow-balls, thank you."

"But there'll be something else, Auntie."

"I dessay, my dear, but I've lived long enough to know what's good for me and what ain't."

"So have I, Auntie, dear, and I ordered what you'd like."

"Not——"

"Yes, Auntie, oysters—a whole barrel."

"Lucy!"

"And fresh bread-and-butter and stout."

"Well!"

"Then you are pleased?"

"Pleased, my precious? All those preparations for your poor old Auntie! I know as we must be going to have a 'appy day."

Just then there was a sharp tootling on a post-horn, the trampling of horses, and Braetoun pulled up close to the kerb, a couple of smart grooms running to the horses' heads, and a little knot of passers-by pausing to see the gay party who filled the seats make their start.

"What ho! within there!" shouted Braetoun, who was carefully got up as an imitation of the old stage coach driver, including the white beaver broad-brimmed hat.

"Quite ready," cried Lucy. "Come, Auntie."

"Oh, my dear, I feel that nervous as ever was."

"How are you, old lady?" cried Braetoun merrily; and several cheery salutes from artistes to whom her face was familiar, came to her as a man out of livery drew a step ladder from beneath the brake, fixed it securely in front, and Mrs. Duncan was helped up to her seat by the driver, to plump herself hurriedly down in her appointed place.

Lucy followed nimbly, a light dust protector was thrown across them and secured, and the steps stowed away.

"All right?" cried Braetoun.

"Yes," came in chorus.

"Give 'em their heads."

The two grooms stepped back, the horses—a handsome team—started at once, the men caught the handles on either side and mounted to their places, one of them drawing a post-horn of the longest growth from its leathern bucket and sounding a long blast. Away they went, turned out into the main road, and trotted steadily on as fast as the general traffic would allow.

"You'll excuse me, Lord Braetoun, won't you?" said Mrs. Duncan breathlessly from excitement.

"Of course, old lady. What is it? Not comfortable?" and he looked sidewise and down at her with good-humoured contempt before giving Lucy a merry wink.

"Not quite yet, my lord; but it wasn't that. I only wanted to ast you not to drive too fast. I'm a bit short of breath. Don't make 'em gallop, please."

"Never fear," he cried laughingly. "You'll be all right. Steady, Beau! Ah, Slasher! Quiet!"

Phizz, whizz, went the whip, the off leader received a flick which made it shake its head and give a plunge, but it steadied down directly and away they went pleasantly along.

"Tell him not to whip 'em, please, my darling," whispered the old lady, who was panting heavily.

"You leave it to Rod, Auntie," said Lucy, "he knows exactly what to do."

"Thank ye, my darling, I know he does. He drives lovely, and I—I'm enjoying it as never was," she continued, with her face wearing a pitiful look of despair, as she held tightly on to the rail of the driver's seat on one side, to her niece's arm on the other.

"Why, Auntie dear, what is it?" whispered Lucy, who saw plainly that something was wrong.

"Hush, my darling. Be quiet. Don't let 'em hear. Have you got a pin anywhere's 'andy?"

"I'm afraid not, Auntie. What is the matter? Are you coming undone?"

"No, my darling, it isn't that—it's the air cushion. I knowed how it would be—they've blowed it out too full."

"Oh, Auntie, hush! Try and manage with it for the present."

"But I'm afraid it will bob me off on to the horses, my dear. I don't feel safe."

"How are you getting on, old lady?" said Braetoun just then. "Why, you're not sitting comfortably. Sit more as I do, with your feet well forward on the board. That's the way. How is it now?"

"That's better," panted the sufferer—"yes, much better. Yes, I'm more comfortable now."

Away they went, with the park looking bright and green. Kensington Gardens with its old elms giving vista-like glimpses; then through Kensington and transforming Hammersmith, and onward for the pleasant west with its promise of genuine country, garden, field, and hedge.

But the best laid plans are often defeated, as we know. The horses were going with the regularity of a machine, the wheels spinning round in a glittering haze, and the varnish of the coach shone in the bright sunshine, when one of those surly kill-joys of the suburbs came in sight in a narrow portion of the road—narrow by comparison, but with ample room for three vehicles to run abreast—and, according to those drivers' custom, the whole road was taken up by one.

Granted that the man was tired and drowsy from his journey to Covent Garden, from which he was returning with his team and waggon piled up high with empty baskets, British obstinacy came in, for on hearing the rattle of wheels behind, and the warning "toot" of the horn, he slowly turned his head and tried to look round from his perch in front, but took no further notice, keeping steadily along after the custom of his kind, right in the middle of the road.

"Confound him! Hi!" shouted Braetoun, and his voice was half drowned by a furious blast from the horn, but the man paid no heed, and, flushing with annoyance, the driver gathered up his reins a little to prepare to pass the great swaying load.

"Mind the varnish of his carriage," cried one of the party, and there was a merry laugh. "Don't take off any of his bark."

"I just will if I can get a cut at him," said Braetoun meaningly, as he gave the lash of his whip a *whish* through the air.

There was just room for a clever driver, and, with his horses well in hand, Braetoun would have passed easily, but as fate had it, unseen by the driver of the brake, a cart was drawn up to the kerb on the near side quite hidden by the pile of baskets on the waggon, and just at the critical moment a lash from the waggon-driver's whip turned his team partly in the front of the brake.

To avoid collision Braetoun bore to the right. As he drew rein the off fore wheel ran partly up the blunt, rounded stone which protected a lamp-post, there was a wild shriek as the top-heavy brake hung in the balance and then came over with a crash, and the next instant the waggon was leaving behind a horrible confusion of broken glass, woodwork, twisted iron, and shrieking women, amidst whom frightened horses entangled in their harness were kicking and plunging. The happy day was spent.

(To be continued.)

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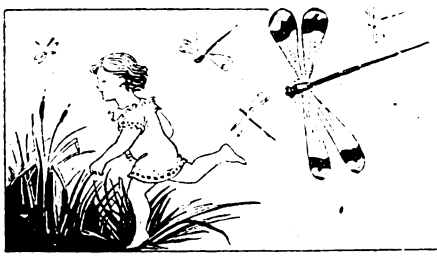

THE STORY OF A PICNIC.

Frank Mahew woke with a headache. This he ascribed to the heat of the Braginton ballroom the night before, and the lobster mayonnaise which he had eaten at supper. His familiar friend, Jack Welman, who shared his quarters, remarked that the lobster was splendidly served, of a very good brand, and would not hurt a baby unless consumed in excess. "Talking of which," he added, "shall you run to fizz at your picnic?"

"Picnic!" said Mr. Mahew, in a careless voice; "what picnic? I remember something about a beanfeast to which someone has asked me to go next Saturday. I fancy I accepted; but my headache makes me forget. Where is it?"

Jack Welman, who always presides at breakfast, poured him out a third cup of tea and shook his head.

"My dear fellow, were you as bad as that? Really, don't you know that you are giving a picnic, and have invited twenty people at least—seven girls to my knowledge—on Saturday next, and have got to provide boats and lunch?"

"Jack!" said Mr. Mahew, in a confidential, if rather nervous, tone, "I believe you are right; it's coming back to me now," and he laughed uncomfortably; "I'm not quite sure it will suit me. All the same——"

"Can't you get out of it?"

"I really must if I can; I am awfully short. It will be a matter of ready money, too, for most of it. What am I to do? Tell me a good excuse. You've not got a headache."

"Write and say you can't find a chaperon. You have only asked girls and a lot of young fellows; you must have someone to give an air of respectability, though you did issue your invitation in rather an informal way. How many boatfuls will there be? You might say you must have a dowager in each."

Mr. Mahew went to the writing-table and wrote a little pile of notes, drank some Apollinaris, and went to his office for the day.

The next morning Mr. Welman pointed with an air of friendly concern to a little pile of envelopes, directed in ladies' handwriting, which lay beside his friend's plate.

"Tender regrets," said Frank Mahew airily.

"Offers of chaperonage, you mean," replied Welman; and Frank Mahew read the first aloud with a lengthening face which would not have flattered the writer.

"Dear Mr. Mahew,—It will be *all* right about the picnic, as *I* can *easily* find a *chaperon*. Hoping it will be fine.—Yours very sincerely, Blanche Smythe.

"It may not be fine," he muttered; "but what is the next?

"My dear Mr. Mahew,—We are looking forward to your picnic on Saturday, and shall come, whatever the weather. My cousin, Mrs. Thomson, will be my chaperon. Are there many coming? I thought you only wanted me.—Yours very sincerely, Rose Jones.

"Confound Mrs. Thomson! Here's another of them.

"My *dear* Mr. Mahew (Wonder why she underlined the dear. What can I have said?),—You have forgotten you asked mamma to chaperon us at your picnic, and she has ordered a new hat on purpose.—Yours in haste, May Robinson.

"Old Mrs. Robinson in a new shady hat—my prophetic soul! Look here, Jack, don't grin—it's no joke. I've over-drawn already, and the quarter's only half through."

"There's another," said Welman grimly, "in a pink envelope."

"One of the Currey girls," said Mahew with his teeth set; "I fancy I asked both.

"Dear Frank (Frank, forsooth!),—Don't you forget you promised Ethel you would have plenty of boats and let Captain Maudslay scull her. I think I'll go in your boat, as you want me to so much. Get one of your young married friends to chaperon the party, and give her someone to entertain her in a separate boat.—Yours in frantic haste, Dora Currey.

"Nice style of girl that," said Mr. Welman; "you seem to have made the running all round. Mrs. Robinson will be particularly glad to chaperon the Curreys! I heard her saying to Mrs. Jones she wondered how Mrs. Braginton could invite such girls to her ball."

"My dear Jack," said Mr. Mahew, with a still longer face, "I don't want to offend Mrs. Robinson, and I don't want to go in a boat with Miss Currey. What am I to do?"

"Can't say. Drown yourself, or have some lobster before starting—to keep up your spirits. Any more letters?"

"Only one from the governor."

"Is the old man friendly!"

"Severe rather—paternal reminder of the shortness of life, as instanced by the death of an elderly relative at the age of ninety-seven."

"Who was your dead relative?"

"General George Mahew; retired, cracked, distant cousin; lots of money, cuts with his family. Shall I write to the Curreys and say I won't take them?"

"When is the funeral?"

"Saturday next. Dash it all, old man! don't call it that; we'll make it lively somehow."

"The *funeral*, my gentle ass! I mean the funeral—your deceased cousin's?"

"I'm not going to it; I never saw the old fool; besides, it is Saturday."

"The very thing, my dear fellow! If you really want to cut this picnic, write your regrets all round. 'Sudden mourning,' and 'duty to your family.' He must have been rather a swell in his way once, and your name as a mourner at his funeral will be in the papers to show it was a genuine business."

"It's some distance in the country."

"All the better. If it's anywhere near my people, run over and have half-a-day's fishing."

"Are your people *all* at home?"

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"If you mean Maggie by *all* my people, she's there; and if you don't take care, she'll hear of your picnic and the Currey girl. She knows Blanche Smythe."

Later on that day Mr. Mahew duly regretted that the sudden death of his relative, General Mahew, and the necessity, etc., caused the inevitable postponement of his proposed picnic. He had it engraved on black-edged cards, and the printers sent in a hundred and fifty—he uses them for book-markers still.

It was a very fine morning on Saturday when Mr. Mahew started by a very early train, and the river looked so lovely he almost regretted his picnic. A carriage was at the station to meet him, as he had written to say he was coming, and as no one else turned up, he found himself figuring as chief mourner. His cousin's elderly attorney came to him in the garden as he was smoking a cigar, after the funeral.

"I have found an envelope," he said, "labelled 'Will,' and I think, as you are going away, I had better open it in your presence."

"I suppose you had," said Frank Mahew carelessly; "it's a pity no other relatives are present. Where are they all?"

"Well, you see," said the attorney, "they never came near the General of late years, except when an uncle of yours came down to make investigations whether the General had married his housekeeper, a Mrs. Jenkins, by name. She died a few years ago, and latterly they seemed to have made some advances towards him. He would have nothing to say to them; but had some circulars printed of a more or less abusive character, insinuating that they had designs on his fortune, and sent them to everyone whom he could discover who was in any way related to him. I wonder you did not get one."

"Not worth it, I guess—if he ever heard of me," said Frank Mahew; "open that envelope, though, I want to get away."

The attorney opened it and read the contents of half a sheet of note-paper.

"I must congratulate you, Mr. Mahew!" he exclaimed; "I must congratulate you! This is, indeed, the fitting reward of your affectionate reverence for the deceased testator."

"What's that?" said Frank. He had been blowing cigar-smoke at a bumble-bee and had not quite heard. "Is that the will? Short and sweet, is it not? Who drew it?"

"I did not, certainly," said the attorney, with a rueful eye.

"So I should imagine," said Frank to himself, holding it at arm's length; "it's his own writing by the signature, witnessed by the cook and the gardener."

"But read it, my dear sir!" said the attorney, "read it!"

"It's so very badly written, I don't think I can."

"My dear sir, allow me," and the gentleman took the paper.

"The last will of Mr. George Mahew. I leave everything I have to leave to be divided between those of my relations who have the decency to attend my funeral.—Signed, etc.

"That means about sixty thousand pounds for you, Mr. Mahew, besides this house."

Welman always said that his friend had no sense of decency, and he would have thought his opinion confirmed if he had seen him then seize the grey-haired old solicitor round the waist and waltz him across the lawn-tennis court, with a whoop like a red Indian's. The undertaker was just starting to drive back with the hearse and equipment; he had seen grief manifest itself in many forms, and was quite touched—it took him back to his Irish home and his father's wake.

The attorney looked rather ruffled, but, being a prudent man, he consoled himself with the prospect of managing the estate, though he did not for the moment see how he could include dancing with the residuary devisee in his bill of costs. No doubt Frank paid for it eventually.

"Good old Jack," he said, as he told the history of the funeral to Welman on Monday evening over an excellent dinner: "never forget to be dutiful to the aged, and show respect to your relations, even at the expense of a day's pleasure with the young and lovely."

"I think," said Mr. Welman, "you had better let me finish that magnum."

Harry Rogers.

NEW CONDITIONS.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. II.

In order to lessen the amount of work undertaken by competitors in pasting up the separate lines of the story in these competitions, each line is now numbered, and all that readers need do is to write clearly on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order they believe to be correct.

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the reader whose solution first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Six Prizes—one of £5 and four of £1 each—are
5 *September 14th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reaches this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose key is most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

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JUMBLED STORY NO. 11.

THE MOUO CLUB.

"Another madman," exclaimed the native genius.
"By St. Gudula, this is too much!" exclaimed my audacious ignorance."
"Nonsense!" exclaimed the critic, as he snatched the handle of a brush, he sketched, in masterly but with a foreign accent. "I will give a hundred "one hundred guineas for the sketch just as it is.
Meissonier laughed heartily; and, taking his daughter as a marriage portion, because he spends liberty to sell it to anyone I please."
Early on a fine summer morning, an old man said, in that tone of forced calmness which an insulted artist, crossing his maul stick over his portion. I leave it to our English friend's but, if I were to make a trial, I wouldn't put in too pains this time to conceal his anger; "I should like a sign suitable to its name, "The Rising Sun."
The old man commenced walking backwards down on his knees before the great French painter. Namus.
The whole party were quiet enough now, for they could endure it no longer, and exclaimed severely: "Hang me, but all these foreigners are mad!"
"No such thing; my Susette is betrothed to an honest, poor man, who can scarcely make both ends blue!"
"What roguery!" exclaimed the innkeeper.
"I tell you what, old gentleman," cried the keeper, uncommonly interested.
"I don't pretend to much skill in sky-painting; but the picture is my lawful property, and I am at their hands, drinking to the rising sun, which was walking on the road between Brussels and of the 'Flemish Ass!'" In his indignation he frantically clasped his hands together, and fell once.
"Forgive me!" he exclaimed, "forgive me for "he is an old miser. I am the father of a family; I will gladly give two hundred for it if the painter made his way through the crowd.
"What do you mean, monsieur?" said the inn-ladder, when a gentleman, riding an English horse, of a greyish morning sky. One of the faces for that painting," answered the young Englishman, who, mounted on a ladder placed against the front wall of my house, how can it belong to anybody getting off his horse.
The Englishman replied:
"Meissonier."
The old man was about to descend from the supplanted sign-painter.
"That picture is not to be sold," said the sign-artist; "that quite alters the case. I am content she is, will marry her next September."
"Don't believe him, brother," cried the painter; "I am certain you would not wish to deprive an spendthrift, who has no money left to give his generosity to fix the sum."
"No," quoth mine host, "for it is already sold, and, being a painter, you ought to help a brother to see how *you* would paint skies without blue."
"Oh, my dear monsieur!" said the innkeeper, you should not be let out—alone."
"Not at all, not at all," rejoined the Flemish honest young French cabinet-maker, who, poor as myself has the smallest right to it."
"What I say—I will give one hundred guineas to have your portrait painted, to serve for the sign of Gerald Douw's great grandson's third cousin.
"Oh, yes, I see very well you are trying to paint admiration.
"But suppose that *I* don't choose to have it a sky."
"Monsieur does not perceive that I am painting himself by watching the operations of a painter, artist, and give me the preference. Besides, I am sold?" said its real author.
Then, using merely the point of his finger and brightest blue, which appeared to aggravate the old outline, three Flemish boors, with beer-glasses in hand, shook it with fraternal cordiality.
The painter looked down from his perch, and presented a strong and laughable caricature of the shoulder, and looking very fierce, "I dare say you were struck dumb with astonishment. The sign-artist here gave me a little help out of friendship; gentleman very much.
"Bravo!" and even Gerard Douw's cousin nine guineas for it!"
"That painting is mine!" he exclaimed in French, and even partly paid for in advance. However, if with the palm of his hand, effaced the *chef d'œuvre* of a wayside inn, was busily employed in depicting it, it is with me that he must treat."
"A daughter to portion!" exclaimed the stranger painter, with an air of as much pride as if it had appeared above the horizon, dispersing the gloom and forwards before the inn, the painter, meantimes removed felt his fury calming down into the palette from the painter's hand. "You deserve me to lay in a good stock of wine and beer."
"I have already offered," replied the best bidder, that the picture should be sold for a marriage time, continuing to lay on fresh coats of the angry man sometimes assumes:
At length, when the sign-painter took another ready to share the money with you."
The owner of the inn was the first to cry much blue."
"Too much blue!"
"What word?" exclaimed all the disputants at meet, of this windfall. Why, it would just enable the painter, coming down from his ladder, at no word."
"He!" said Master Martzen. "Why, he's an old painter of signs, "it belongs to me. My fellow-painter held his breath, glared with his eyes, been his own work.
Having a good deal of time to spare, he amused "'Rising Sun' is my property. Fastened on the else? Isn't it painted on my boards? No one but monsieur wishes to come to an arrangement about a sky; but I tell you again there is too much brush full of blue paint to plaster on, the spectator are a very worthy fellow when you are at home; but will consent to sign it in the corner with one mounted the ladder with the activity of a boy, and, all he gets on himself."

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HONI SOIT QUI MALY PENSE.

BY GERALDINE BONNER.

MR. BERTRAM LAMAR sat on the arm of a chair in the hall of the hotel, and idly swung his foot. Mr. Lamar was bored. An extended acquaintance with this young man forces me to confess that he was not often afflicted in that way. We know that no man can aspire to be of the highest fashion without constantly experiencing the pangs of this distinguished ailment, and yet Mr. Lamar was unquestionably of the highest fashion. The most cursory glance would tell you this. Anyone could see that he belonged to the best people, that he was used to the best people, that only the best people would be bearable to him. It was therefore with humiliation that he confessed to himself how seldom—how singularly seldom, considering all his advantages—he felt the inspiring throes of boredom.

But now he was genuinely bored, and he felt joyously that anyone could see he was. Ladies passed—old ones, who swept up the dust with their trains, and who creaked as they moved as if they wanted oiling; young ones, in light frocks and wide, flowered hats, which cast a shadow over the clearest eyes. They kept banging open the glass doors and going out into the blaze of sun beyond, with a bursting into bloom of lace parasols, or coming into the cool of the hall, with the rustling, silken sheathing of the parasols suddenly furled, and the tapping of little heels on the hard floor.

He never glanced at them. But they did at him—swiftly, obliquely—from under the hatbrim out of the shadow. He looked away, with raised chin and indolently drooped eyelids; but about his heart he began to feel a little creeping, warm titillation of interest, a premonition that he was not going to keep bored very much longer.

There was one girl—she kept on going to and fro—and, as he looked on the ground he could see the hem of her dress and her feet They were pretty feet in yellow shoes, small and pointed. Mr. Lamar found himself ruminating: "Suppose the head is as pretty as the feet. But it never is. There's a law of compensation which prevents that. The head which belongs to those feet is thirty-five——" And he looked up.

The head matched the feet to perfection. Mr. Lamar felt that he did not look bored any longer. Rather, however, than sacrifice this dearly-bought and enviable condition of being, he turned his back on that enchanting head, and sauntered into an adjoining room. There would be no one to look at here to destroy the aristocratic vacuity of his mind.

The room was empty, cool, and dim. As he entered he saw something on the floor near the table. He picked it up. It was a band about an inch and a half wide, covered with a puckered yellow ribbon, and with one end through a clasp of dull silver, showing a monogram in small diamonds. There was a bunch of narrower yellow ribbon beside the clasp, each end finished with a little tongueless silver bell. It appeared to Lamar, from some hanging filaments of thread, that the two ends of this band had once been stitched together. He looked curiously at his find.

"What can it be?" he mused, staring at it. We have said that he was young, and came of the best people, and with the best people there is always a doubt as to whether they wear such vulgar things as stockings or possess such unmentionable things as legs. "Wings, not legs and feet, shall move them," as the poet gracefully expresses it.

Lamar first thought he would take it to the office. But curiosity impelled him to study it. It might be worn round the neck; but no, it was not long enough. He drew the severed ends together, and held it off from him, eyeing it dubiously, and reflectively pulling his small moustache. Oh, yes, of course. Now he saw. How dense he had been! A bracelet. Holding it together, he pushed his hand through it, and it swung on his wrist.

"What can it be?"

"I don't think I ever saw a bracelet just like that before," he thought, moving it round and looking at it with his head on one side.

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And then, as he looked at it, a sudden flash of waken-ing light, and for a moment he stood staring at it in stupefied horror as it hung over his wrist. With the return of consciousness, he crumpled it up and crushed it into his pocket. What should he do with it? If he took it to the office its owner would never dare to claim it. If he found out who she was, he would never dare to offer it.

He could imagine the scene: A lovely and youthful lady is discovered walking in the corridors. To her appears Mr. Bertram Lamar in full evening dress, with a white pink in his buttonhole. Making towards her, he executes one of those majestic yet easy bows for which the Lamar family have been famous. Then, drawing a package from his pocket, Mr. Lamar presents it to her, murmuring: "Yours, I believe," and vanishes through a trap-door. He might give it to her, and then pretend to be prostrated by the heat, and fall on the floor with his eyes shut, to avoid embarrassing her by witnessing her inevitable confusion. The Lamars were also famous for their chivalrous attitude towards the sex. But can a man be prostrated by the heat on a day when the thermometer in its most ambitiously soaring moments can only struggle up to seventy-five degrees? What should he do to spare her feelings and his own? And he turned the cause of his perturbation over in his pocket.

Just then he heard a step outside—a feminine *frou-frou*. With a guilty start he retreated from the table, fell into a chair, and seized the morning paper, in which he buried his head. Anyone noting this fact would of course imagine that he slumbered, and feel themselves safe from espionage.

"It is she," thought Bertram, seized with guilty tremours; "she has come to hunt for it," and he remained motionless.

So did she. There was not the smallest vibrating rustle from her silent figure. Bertram rattled the paper, stabbed little hole through it with his finger, and peeped at her. She was standing in the doorway, peering about the room, and she was the young lady with the yellow shoes. She was charmingly pretty, in a light dress of striped flannel and a loose shirt of thin silk made like a boy's. As to her head—that lovely head with strong brown hair curling crisply under her sailor hat, delicately rounded cheeks, and gravely pouting lips—it was an image of soft, delicious beauty. At her side was a little pug dog on its haunches, gasping and rolling its eyes.

She cast a hurried glance at the gentleman reading the paper and walked into the room, looking intently about the floor.

Threw one last reluctant look about the room.

"What would she say," thought Bertram, as she passed nim in her search, "if I were to innocently ask her what she is looking for, and gallantly offer to help her to find it? But I'll spare her that, even though I do appear a clown," and the hero peeped again.

She was certainly hunting thoroughly. She moved several of the chairs, drew up the lace curtains and looked under them, peered into all the corners and under the tables and round the desks.

"What on earth could she have been doing?" thought the young man; "she must have been playing puss-in-the-corner or forfeits: I'll burst with curiosity soon and hit her with one of the pieces:"

When she had searched everywhere, she straightened herself with a sigh, threw one last reluctant look about the room, and calling to the pug: "Come along, dearest; it isn't there," departed.

Bertam laid down the paper, and looked after her. She appeared to him to have a singular amount of *sang-froid*, also a very graceful back. How well she walked! How proudly she carried her small, dark head!

Mr. Lamar was not bored that afternoon. He was consumed with perplexity. How could he return the lost treasure to its owner without causing her embarrassment, without making her his enemy for life? If it had been anything else how delightfully he could have broken the ice with it. But to break the ice with that—impossible! It would have exactly the opposite effect, and cause the ice to form as beneath a breath from the Arctic.

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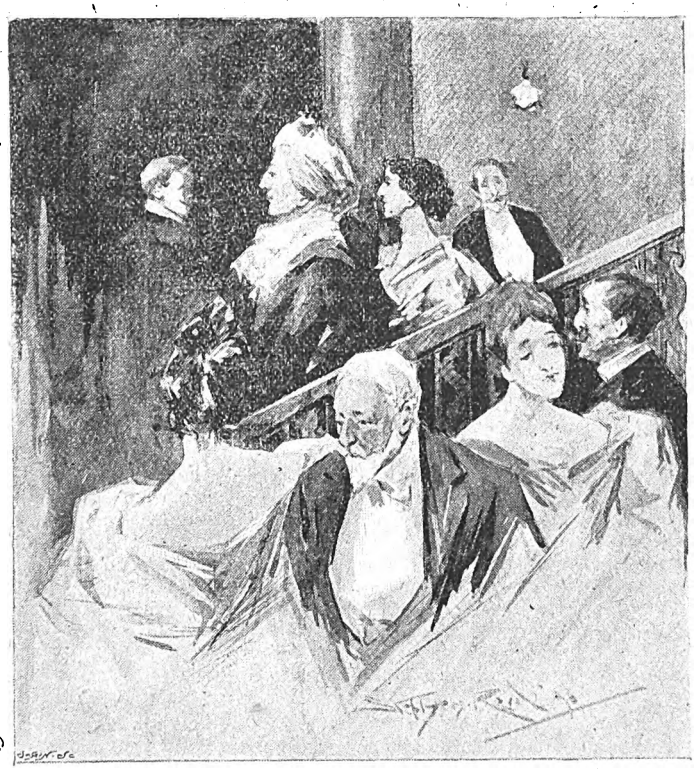
"I must give it to her this evening," he thought. "I'll wrap it up in paper and tie one of the ribbons round it that are on that case Milly gave me. Then, if she asks me — as of course she will—what it is, I'll say carelessly:

"'Oh, nothing; just a little trifle I think belongs to you. Don't hurry to open it. Have you noticed what a beautiful night it is?' And so I'll engage her in absorbing conversation. But if the conversation is not sufficiently absorbing and she begins to open it, I must flee from the wrath to come. And when next I meet her, dying to speak or even bow to her, there will be a wall of ice raised between us. She will turn her profile towards me and become engrossed in the beauties of the landscape. Such is the irony of fate."

The languorous afternoon burnt itself away in loitering stages of deepening light and colour to a smouldering crimson sunset. Dinner loomed in the near distance, and was awaited with fond expectancy. At seven o'clock, Mr. Lamar came slowly down the broad stairs, looking as handsome as the young Dionysius in his dress-suit, his shining shirt-front, and a white pink in his buttonhole.

The hall was full of moving figures and a blaze of light and colour. Gay running laughter and broken



The hall was full of moving figures.

ends of sentences detached themselves from the hum of voices. Splendidly dressed ladies passed and repassed in couples, in threes, in long lines, or stood in groups, with the gaslight breaking in myriad little splinters on their tumbled trains of soft silk, and sliding with glossy radiance along their half-bared arms. There was a fluttering and sweeping of fans, a rustling of rich crushed fabrics.

Mr. Lamar was too perturbed in mind to care to mingle with the gay, loud-voiced, laughing crowd. He wished for solitude, and directed his steps towards the little writing-room. He had not wrapped the treasure in paper, nor tied it up with a ribbon from his mouchoir case. He had not done anything with it. He did not dare. The sight of its owner might inspire him to the desperate pitch of boldly offering it to her or suggest to him some succinct way of returning it without betraying the identity of the finder. With these ideas in his mind he carried it still in his pocket, in company with his keys, jingling on the end of a chain.

The gas in the writing-room was not lit. Red gleams shot in from between the great holes of the cedar trees, and touched the sea-green walls. Mr. Lamar liked the softened light and the pensively faint prospect, and went to the open window. Just outside it, on the balcony, in a rocking-chair, was the young lady who had worn the yellow shoes. She was reading and rocking her pug in her lap; and if she was pretty in her flannel morning-dress, words cannot describe her in a mist of the black gauze, cut square round her neck, and showing her arms to the elbow. Her skin was as white and flawless as a blanched almond.. There was a gleam of a gold pin from the shadow of her dark hair, and a jewel, hung round her neck, rose and fell with her quick breath. As she read, she absently pulled the pug's ears, which drowsed with its eyes half-open and his head against her arm.

Lamar looked. She turned the page. The pug, disturbed, rose to its forepaws, gazed at her with an expression of idiotic fondness, and tried to lick her chin. She avoided this demonstration of affection by moving her chin from side to side, keeping her eyes still on the book. The pug continuing, she struck it gently, observing:

"Don't, you bad little abominable dog!"

"I beg your pardon," said Lamar suddenly from the window.

The lady looked up, with the raised eyebrows of polite inquiry.

"I have something of yours," said the young man desperately, and in a low tone.

"Yes? What is that?"

"I—I—don't quite know. Or, rather—well—but—um! I didn't like to leave it at the office. I thought—yes—I thought——" he leant out of the window, with his closed hand extended. "Here it is."

She held out her hand, and he dropped it in. She looked, and gave an exclamation of joy that caused the pug to jump to the ground.

"Oh, how glad I am. Thanks so much. Thanks awfully! I was so afraid it was lost. Isn't that lucky?" And she looked affectionately at the returned treasure, with her head on one side.

There was light enough to see her face distinctly. She did not exhibit a sign of embarrassment, not the ghost of a blush Lamar felt a sudden chill of disappointment and disapprobation.

"You found it in there?" she said, indicating the writing-room, and looking up at him with frank, candid eyes; "yes; that's where it was lost."

"I—I supposed so," said Lamar, with a wan smile.

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"I looked for it myself all this morning," she continued; "under everything; but it was gone."

"Yes?" said the young man, with a fatuously inquiring air. ("If she knew I was behind that paper, she'd ask me why I didn't give it to her then and there; and what on earth would I say? I couldn't tell her that I was afraid she would be embarrassed, for such an idea has apparently never entered her head. I must dissemble," thought he.)

"I value this very much," she went on, turning it over in her hand.

"I should imagine so."

"You see there is only one like it. There is not a single duplicate anywhere."

She looked smilingly into his face. Lamar stared at her in stupefied horror.

"Only one—did you say?" he managed to articulate in a faint voice.

"Only one," she repeated, nodding her head; "it was made to order."

There was a moment of silence. Lamar made no comment, but continued to stare vacantly at her. He was thinking: "It must have been an accident. She can't be a veteran liar. Yet I might have known it—the law of compensation again. Such a lovely face as that must have some counterbalancing defect."

"When you have only one—and that such a pet," she continued, not noticing his silence, "you like to have everything as pretty as possible."

"Yes, yes. Of course, of course," ejaculated Lamar, laughing idiotically. "If you have only one, I expect it must be somewhat of a treasure," he thought. Then he added boldly, but with the air of confiding a piece of news: "I have two."

"Two?" said the young lady, with vivacious interest; "what kind?"

Lamar looked askance at her, in alarmed silence. Was she doubly afflicted? She was stroking the pug with the tips of her fingers, and there was nothing in her placid expression to suggest mania of any form.

"The same as everybody else's," he answered with some hauteur; "are the people in this part of the country in the habit of managing with one?"

"As a rule they have only one; it's so much less bother. Though, to be sure, I have a friend who has—let me see—yes, eleven."

"*She* must be a centipede," thought Lamar; "I seem to be encountering remarkable freaks of nature. There is a fortune waiting here for anyone who wants to start a penny gaff." Then he remarked aloud, regarding her with his head on one side, a tolerant, fond smile on his lips: "That must be quite an *embarras de richesse*, especially when you're walking."

"They do get rather in the way," admitted the young lady; "but most of them are very well trained."

"Very clever of them, I am sure," murmured Lamar, leaning against the window-frame, and feeling that he was about to swoon.

There was another short silence during which the girl continued to examine her restored treasure. Presently she said, musingly: "I see the threads are broken. She has broken them once before, though I don't see how she can possibly do it."

Lamar only stared. She held his glance with a horrible, eerie fascination.

"You know she loves to run about so," she prattled on; "she ran away from me this morning, and when she came back it was gone. She must have crept under the table, and not come out until she had got it off."

The lady looked up.

"Who is *she?*" asked Lamar, in a voice from the tombs.

"She? Why, Bobo—my pug. Isn't she a beauty? Come up here, Bobo"—patting her knee—"I want to put your collar on, and show this gentleman, who was kind enough to return it, how pretty you look when you're dressed up." She held the band round the dog's neck, and, turning to Lamar, said with laughing archness:

"Isn't it becoming?"

Lamar sat down on the window-sill. He was not bored, but he took up the morning paper, which lay on an adjacent desk, and began to fan himself with it, though the evening had grown cool.

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THE COMMANDANT'S STORY.

"AND you wish me to tell you," said the old Commandant B——, a shade of sorrow crossing his worn visage, "you wish me to tell you of my *entrée* at Saint Cyr in 1812? Ah, well, I will do it, though it is a story and a memory so painful that it clings to me even yet."

Now, judge for yourselves, my dear readers, the emotion with which I heard it that stormy evening, seated beneath the arbour of the pretty garden that surrounded the dwelling of the old veteran at Choisy-le-Roy.

* * * * *

"I was but sixteen years of age when I departed from Charlemagne. As you have heard before the story of those brilliant days, it is only necessary to recall to mind the state of feeling between the scholars of the Prytaneum, all sons and grandsons of officers, and the scholars of the Lyceum, all sons and grandsons of the *bourgeois*. Add to this that the moment of my arrival was immediately following a decree of the Emperor's which had called to the Grand Army, as candidates for sous-lieutenancies, every scholar who had completed a six-months' course at the school, and that all the Charlemagnes of the previous promotion had already been dispatched towards Moscow. I was, therefore, alone, without a single comrade able to protect me against the Prytaneums or to serve as a guide for me across the unknown breakers of a new life.

"As in all the training schools of that epoch, where it was necessary to turn out soldiers as fast as possible, the days were entirely consumed in studying and putting into practice the tactics that we were there to learn. And truly it would be hard to depict to you the determination, the ambition to excel, if possible, those captains of twenty, returned from Bohemia or Spain, whom daily we elbowed in the streets of Paris, with crutches under their shoulders and the star of gallantry upon the breast.

"A portion of the evening, however, was given us as our own, and spent, as a rule, in the depths of the Café Turc, that is to say, the special nook most frequented by the school cadets, its malodorous atmosphere operating as a check upon the interference or appearance of l'Ecole *surveillants*. Lounging there as usual one evening, among the rest of them, I suddenly remembered that I had entirely forgotten a commission that I had promised myself to attend to, and that, close upon the hour at which we must be in quarters, there was but little time in which to do it. Necessity driving me, I forgot to be prudent, and failed to see, as I scurried through the doorway, that I had knocked against a corporal of the Prytaneum at that moment coming into the café, and that his pipe had fallen to the ground.

"'What do you mean, blockhead?' with a formidable oath, 'what do you mean,' he cried, 'upsetting me in that way?'

"But I hurried on; in fact I scarcely heard him in the haste I was in to finish my errand.

"'Didn't you hear me?' he shouted, 'you miserable little poltroon; you, who pretend to be a Parisian; stop, I say, stop!' and he darted after me, calling at the top of his lungs.

"How I found myself before him, how he parried the blow that I gave him full in the face, is more than I can tell you. I foamed with rage, and recall nothing save that they ran from the café at the noise, and that ten vigorous arms held me at a respectful distance from the corporal.

"'So, my little one,' he said to me, when he could speak again, 'so that is your humour, is it? But you are not at the Lyceum now; at l'Ecole it is not with blows of the fist that one regulates these little affairs. Go, you others, seek instruments; the "blue" since he wishes it, shall have a lesson to remember.'

"Two of the seniors ran at his bidding, while a third, almost as much of a child as myself, approached and questioned me in a low voice.

"'You are here without friends,' said he; 'and fencing—do you understand it?'

"'Fencing? Of course—I was three years at the iron.'

"'So much the better,' he replied, addressing the corporal, 'then I will be his second!'

"At this moment the seniors returned, bringing with them a couple of bayonets, upon the ends of each was tied with stout wrappings of cord an open compass. It was a weapon hard to handle, but supple, light and dangerous.

"'And now, my brave one,' said the corporal, throwing himself into position, 'look to your skull, if you know what is good for you, look to it well, or you will have it broken.'

"Everything that had occurred had passed so rapidly that it seemed to me as if I were the victim of a dream, a nightmare from which I must soon awaken; but it was no time to hesitate now—nay, my adversary was waiting, the seconds, in order to give us all space that was possible, drawn close against the wall—from which the caricatures done in charcoal and the ribald inscriptions scratched upon its surface seemed to leer at and mock us.

"'Begin,' cried the friends of the corporal, 'begin; it is late, and the hour for quarters!' We obeyed, and the duel began.

"And the corporal, I see him now—the yellow rays of the single lamp falling full upon his mocking face, his sneering lips, his clear blue eyes. He was posed swaggeringly, according to the fashion of the day, the left hand behind his back, and well opened, the knee bent, the point of the compass at the proper height. This adventure amused him—he was going to belabour an Imperial Conscript, and this conscript who had resisted him, a corporal of the Prytaneum, he was going to send him to the infirmary for a week at least, but not until he had

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taught him a lesson. He had done it before, during the last season, and they had not expected him, the little *bourgeois* whom he had belaboured as he was going to belabour this one, they had not expected him to live!

"'One—two—three!' counted the seconds, and our weapons crossed—he attacking me.

"'Well done, conscript, well done, and parried—you have been in the hall before! But, behold, a stroke you have never heard of; heed it well—I recommend it!' I parried it as easily as the others.

"'So!' cried my adversary, a little astonished; 'so—but I'll give you a fourth—you are a novice, by no means—now, parry this, my *garçon*, parry it if you can!' and he came at me again. I obeyed, and following up my momentary advantage, responded quickly with a hasty feint and a forward thrust.

"'Ah! but you have touched me,' he cried, 'you have wounded me—you have——' and all at once, without another word, the corporal threw up his arms, his weapon fell from his hand, a red foam frothed from his mouth, and he dropped upon the floor, dead! The compass had buried itself in his breast to the tying!

"Describe to you that moment! No! I cannot. I remember it only as one remembers the horrors of a dream—there was noise—there was confusion—a heated wrangle between the seconds—a wrangle that would have ended in another struggle but for the rest of the witnesses and the necessity for hurrying to quarters. After that, no more! The blood had mounted to my brain—my head whirled—and I swooned away!

* * * * *

"When I returned to myself I was alone in the Café Turc. Alone? No! for extended beside the door, bolted from the outside, the corporal slept his last sleep! Ah, that handsome and martial figure, that an hour ago had laughed at death, the death that had taken him at twenty years of age, and for the sake of a foolish schoolboy's quarrel.

"I was afraid—his wide open eyes made me shiver—and I got upon my knees beside him, striving, with quivering fingers, to keep them closed. My childhood's prayers came back to me, and I recited them, some vague and wild idea of atonement revolving in my brain, while the *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine* rolled from my lips like a dirge. Above us—and how often, in moments supreme, as this, similar trifles catch and fix the attention—I noticed that the blood had spattered upon the wall beside the body, tattooing from head to foot the figure of a grotesque Kaiserlich that a grenadier of the Old Guard was in the act of piercing with his bayonet; also that more red drops were falling from a wounded heart pinned to the corner of the frame, across which ran the motto: 'I love Josephine!' And on my knees beside the dead I continued my lugubrious prayer: *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine.* A quarter of an hour more of it and I would have been mad.

"Happily at this juncture the door opened. It was the sergeant in command, an ampute from Egypt, followed by a file of cadets under arms; behind them a litter.

"'Carry it,' said the officer, motioning to the body beside which I still knelt—'carry it to the infirmary. As for you, conscript, come with me at once to the Governor;' and, turning upon his heel, the officer went out again, evidently expecting me to follow him.

"'Keep up thy heart, conscript,' my second murmured as I passed him—he had returned with the others—'keep up thy heart! *Sacré bleu!* but thou hast no reason to reproach thyself.'

"No reason to reproach myself, when even then I was walking in the wake of that funereal litter, that ghastly burden, through the darkness of the night, the courts white with snow, and to the *cabinet* of the man who was to judge me for my deed! No, truly, I had naught with which to reproach myself!

"The Governor to whom they were conducting me was the General of the division, a certain Baron Bellavene, a *grognard*, as they already designated the conquerors who had planted the flag of revolution at the four corners of the Europe Coalisée, and who had left a leg at Radstadt. He was seated as we entered the hall in the immediate circle of the lamp light, late as it was—the clocks of the city had just sounded three—engaged in writing, and sorting over a mountain of reports and papers piled upon the table before him.

"'The conscript, M. le Général,' said the sergeant briefly, 'he is here by order!'

"'Very well,' replied the General, 'wait in the other room; and you,' he continued, suddenly turning the shade of the argand till the rays fell directly upon my face—'you regard me!'

"In the meantime, the walk through the biting atmosphere of the night had in a measure brought me to my senses; the bloody apparition of the Café Turc was effaced from my thoughts. I was unfortunate, but not criminal, and I saw myself in the fulness of my right before the judge who was to pronounce upon my deed. I raised my eyes to the General as he had commanded.

"'Tell me the truth,' said he; 'you insulted the corporal?'

"'No.'

"'You struck him?'

"'No. I was not able.'

"'But you threatened him?'

"'Yes, he called me a poltroon.'

"'And you killed him—with a compass?'

"'Yes—but he also had a compass; we were fighting honourably.'

"'But you fenced better than he?'

"'Yes, but it was not my fault.'

"'How old are you?'

"'Sixteen years.'

"'Have you parents?'

"'A mother only.'

"'Your father?'

"'Killed at Austerlitz—he was to have been a captain!'

"'Do you know what awaits you?'

"'Perhaps——'

"'And repent?'

"'No, my General!'

"'What!' cried the General, 'not repent in the face of the court martial, the platoon of execution!'

"'So much the better for me—no one will call me a poltroon again!'

"'Ah,' said the General, 'I see——' and for a moment, a moment that appeared to me a century, seemed to be lost in reflection.

"'Sergeant!' he called at last; 'sergeant, conduct him,' pointing to me, 'conduct him to the side of the corporal whom he has killed. At daybreak justice shall be done! Once for all we will finish with this mania of the compass!'

* * * * *

"Twenty minutes later I was in the infirmary looking upon the face of the man whose life I had taken. The corporal rested upon his funeral bed between four lighted tapers. On a table at the head of it was a crucifix; a saucer

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with a sprig of boxwood steeping in the holy water; at the foot of it a Sister of St. Vincent de Paul kneeling in prayer. I dropped beside her, my face in my hands, my body, in spite of all that I had said to the General, racked with sobs. Ah, the anguish of that funeral watch!

"Day came at last, and a pale wintry sun lighted the scene of mourning, more and more lugubrious as it freed itself from the shadows. The smile of the dead, however, no longer seemed to be a menacing grimace, and behind the half-closed lids I saw the eyes, blue, clear and charged with light. How willingly would I have changed the *rôles*, and placed, burning with remorse, shivering with fever, upon the *prie-dieu* where I leant in agony! How willingly have taken his place, as cold, as rigid, beneath the winding sheet, upon which my tears ran silently!

"A hand suddenly laid upon my shoulder made me tremble. It was the good sister, a bowl of broth in her hand.

"'Take it, my child,' said she, 'and a little of this Bordeaux with it—it will give you courage!' But I pushed the glass aside—it seemed to me like blood!

"'You must,' she persisted; 'you must! You have prayed, you have expiated—God is merciful—He will pardon! Drink, my little one, drink as I bid you!' I protested no longer, but drank as she told me; and was still on my feet when the door opened and the sergeant reappeared.

"'It is the hour, conscript,' said he; 'come, the picket awaits you.'

"The hour! The hour for what?

"Drawn up before the door of the Infirmary, in the centre of the Grand Alley, under the trees white with frost, the picket did await us—a dozen of my own classmates, armed from head to foot, in full uniform, their guns upon their shoulders, their bayonets shining in the morning light, I had guessed aright—it was the platoon of execution.

"At the sight of it, explain it as you will, a reaction took place in me, a salutary reaction; my agony left me, my vision cleared, my speech returned to me.

"'So much the better,' I said, aloud; 'so much the better; this torment will soon be ended!' and loosening my vest and the collar about my neck, so as not to impede the bullets, I sought the tree against which they wished to place me. At this moment, a tall and well-known figure detached itself from a group of officers behind the pickets and stepped in front of me. It was General Bellavene wrapped in his military mantle, his hat pulled close about the eyes that had more than once made the enemy tremble.

"'Have you nothing you wish to say to us, conscript, nothing to demand of us before the execution?'

"'No, my General, nothing—unless, as I was the officer of the exercises this morning, will you allow me to command the platoon now—I wish to die like a soldier!'

"'To die like a soldier! Well, so be it! Receive your orders,' turning brusquely to the motionless picket, 'receive your orders from the officer of the day!' and he returned to the rear again.

"What did I think of as I faced the muzzles of those guns? What did I expect, hope, or pray for? Nothing—absolutely nothing, save that I was a soldier and must die as one—that I must wedge myself firmly in the snow at my feet in order to remain upright upon the slippery earth—that I must give my orders, even to the last, in a voice clear and strong.

"But the moment had come—the General and the platoon waited—I hesitated no longer!

"'Attention!' drawing myself to my full height. 'Attention—load!'

"'No!' cried the General, stepping to the front, 'the command is useless—the guns are charged already!' And he darted upon me an angry eye. His anger, however, or the technicalities of the manual mattered little to me now. Carried away by the exaltation of my atonement, I was insensible to terrestrial impressions—wandering already in unknown realms—I, too, like the corporal, smiled at the death that called to me!

"'Ready!' I cried again. 'Ready!' and the clicking of the locks resounded through the stillness.

"'Aim!' my heart throbbed to bursting, my eyes turned to the heavens above me—but my voice was still unshaken, my pose erect, as with a thought to mother, a hasty sign of the cross, I gave the last command—'Fire!'

* * * *

"A heavy detonation followed—a blinding smoke from the powder, then—nothing! I was still upright against the tree, without a wound or scratch; in front of me were the lowered guns, the smoke curling lazily from the barrels, behind them the waiting officers and the General himself.

"'You have tricked me!' I cried, almost weeping in my rage; 'you have tricked me—load and fire again at once—I order it!'

"'And I, the contrary,' said the General loudly, placing himself before me. 'Ah, thou wicked conscript,' his voice softening into tenderness, 'come, embrace me, for thou art a *gamin* of sound sense!' and, stooping quickly before I knew what he was about, he had lifted me in his arms and kissed me upon both cheeks.

"'But, my General,' I urged, with honest bitterness, 'didn't you see—don't you know—that they had put no balls in the guns?'

"'Of course not. *Parbleu!* but thou art hard to comprehend! Dost thou take me for an ogre of the fairy tales? But fret no more, my boy; thou art truly a soldier who remains at school no longer. This evening thou goest to the Grand Army. I shall send thee to the care of a friend who will see that thou art placed above the lower grades. Return with epaulettes upon thy shoulders—I wish it—but no more duels—they are criminal and take away the gallant men of whom the Emperor has need. And now I must go; they await me for the evidence—later on they will bring thee to me—till then, my child, adieu!'"

* * * * *

"Behold," said the Commandant, as he finished his story, "why I made the campaign of Russia at sixteen years of age, why I was wounded at Beresina, and why, at last, I was sous-lieutenant six months before my comrades by promotion. Come with me," he added, rising to his feet, "I wish to show you the portrait of the man who saved me, and who addressed to me his last regard before dying for the good of his country. It hangs beside the crucifix above my bed!"

E. C. WAGGENER

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THE MORTAL COIL.

These two, Allan and David, were brothers; and, what is often more than brothers do, they loved one another.

While they were mere boys they had been left orphans, friendless, alone with the world and with necessity. They were industrious and frugal, their purse was common, and working thus together they managed to keep off starvation and debt.

They were now in the period of early manhood. Allan, the elder, was twenty-three years of age, and David twenty. They occupied two pleasant rooms in a respectable lodging-house, lived well, and had some money saved in the bank.

"At first I used to be afraid that we could not make it," Allan would say to his brother, when they talked in the evening of their life and their affairs; "it was such a hard struggle. But there is no longer any doubt that we are going to succeed in the world."

To this prophecy, which Allan rejoiced to speak, David would always assent, with an enthusiasm that came not from any confidence in his own powers, but solely from his belief in his elder brother. The difference between the brothers was more than that of years, as each of them well understood. Allan was strong, keen, and determined. David was gentle and sympathetic, but a little dull. They were alike, however, in their intense devotion to one another.

It happened in the midst of this which they regarded as prosperity that Allan was suddenly beset by a grievous illness. It had been written down in the pitiless law-book of Nature that he should pay for the sins of some ancestor, of whose very existence he was ignorant. The disease ran its slow course through many weeks, and there were now and again critical times when the heart of the younger brother, watching by night, stood still.

At last it came to an end. The sentence of Nature was fulfilled. The life of the young man was spared, but the disease left him blind and a cripple.

As Allan began to recover his strength, and the dumb consciousness of suffering gave way to active thought, he demanded to know how soon the bandages were to be taken from his eyes. To this and to other questions of a similar nature, the doctor who attended him returned evasive answers. Thereupon, Allan, half-guessing the truth, became silent. In the meantime, David, also silent, clung desperately to a fragment of hope.

One morning the doctor, as he was about to leave, motioned across the sick man's bed to David that he wished to speak with him alone. They went out into the hall, where the physician sat down upon a chair and David leant back against a corner of the wall.

Presently Allan heard the confused murmur of their talk. He climbed out of the bed and dragged himself with difficulty across the floor into the sitting-room. Placing his ear against the hall-door, which was not quite closed, he heard all, unseen and unsuspected.

"It is useless for me to continue these daily visits," said the physician; "hereafter I will come only when you send for me."

"Well, what shall we do about—about his eyes?"

"They will probably not pain him any more. You can take off the bandage whenever you are ready to tell him the whole truth."

David's lips grew very white. "You mean that he will never recover?" he said.

The doctor looked up at him suddenly with a frown. "Really," he said, "I thought I had made the state of things pretty clear to you."

"Yes," said David; "I know—but I kept hoping."

"My dear boy, I am sorry, but I cannot even let you hope. If your leg was cut off, would you expect another to grow in its place? A part of the eye is gone—and that ends it."

"And the lameness?"

"He will always walk with crutches."

Perhaps it was well that no mortal eye saw the wan face pressed towards the opening in the door. There was a shuffling across the floor, and Allan drew himself upon the bed again, where he lay motionless and silent, though all his body seemed to quiver and his thoughts to cry aloud.

Presently the footsteps of the doctor sounded on the stairs and the lower door opened and shut. But nearly an hour passed before the younger brother came back to the room. When he came, it was with the belief that he was prepared to speak to Allan and tell him all. He looked for a moment at the figure curled up on the bed, and shook his head. He would wait.

Several days passed. Then in the evening Allan said suddenly to his brother:

"David, what is the matter? Perhaps I imagine it—but is there not something that you want to talk to me about?"

"Yes," said the other, startled.

"It is about my eyes and my lameness, is it not?"

"Yes."

The time had come. He sat down by the bed and took his brother's hand. His own trembled violently, but that of the sick man was quiet.

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"Poor boy," said Allan, as though not he but David were the one upon whom misfortune had fallen. He stroked his brother's arm gently for a moment, and then whispered: "you need not tell me, David. I know all. I listened when you and the doctor talked about me."

David spoke, also in a whisper: "I could not bear to think it—and so I could not speak to you."

"Poor, dear brother," said Allan, but with perfect calmness. They sat in silence for a few moments, and then Allan said: "Now, David, we have looked the worst of it in the face; let us examine some of the smaller troubles. What about money matters?"

"Oh, Allan," cried the other, "don't ask about that yet."

"Yes," said the elder brother firmly: "you must tell me all. Be frank and fair, as I would be with you."

So David told. The money in the bank was all gone, of course, and there were debts—to the doctor, the chemist, and the landlady. Having explained thus far, David hung back, and it took determined questioning on the part of Allan to bring out the rest of the story. Their friends at the club, knowing the trouble of the brothers, had raised some money—a considerable amount—for their benefit.

"It just paid the nurse," said David.

The proud lines in the other's face deepened to harshness. After a momentary struggle he managed to say aloud: "It was very kind of them."

But to himself into his pillow he muttered: "My God! This is the beginning!"

"I am afraid," said David, "that it will be some time before we can pay up these debts. Everyone seems to be good about it. The doctor says he will wait years if need be."

"Yes," replied Allan absently.

"Of course, you know what my pay is," continued the younger brother, "and you also know what our expenses are. Well, they don't fit. I have been thinking about it. We must move into one room and must economise in various other ways."

"Yes," said Allan.

"The worst of it is," David went on, without looking at his brother, "that we cannot get you the things you ought to have. It is so hard for you to be all alone here——"

"Never mind about that, Davy," said Allan quickly; "what we must think about is how to clear up these debts and how to live on your pay."

After this the old confidence seemed to be restored between the brothers. What small part of the day David was not at work he spent with Allan, and they talked of their affairs just as they had done before the misfortune came. Yet there was one thing David failed to understand, although he studied over it a great deal. Why was Allan so calm and undistressed? It was not like him.

"Can it be that he does not really appreciate what it means to be blind and helpless?" thought the younger brother; "he was always so proud, ambitious, and full of hope. And he is sensitive. I thought he would suffer."

The sick man's strength gradually returned. Presently he was able to move about the room, and then, accompanied by the landlady's little daughter, he managed to make short excursions into the street. He wore a dark shade over his eyes and walked on crutches.

The various economies which the brothers had talked over were practised, and yet every day they ran more into debt. David's pay was very small; it was not enough to keep two people in comfort—one of them an invalid needing medicines and a physician's care. Yet Allan remained apparently unconcerned.

At last David found work to do in the evening. He now earned enough to cover their necessities, but Allan was left alone most of the time.

One evening David had an unexpected vacation. An accident caused the establishment where he worked to close early, and he hurried to the room, eager for the pleasure of a few hours with his brother.

When he came to the street-door, he said to himself: "I will go up quietly and surprise him."

He ascended the stairs with a quiet tread. The door to the room was open, and he saw Allan seated at the table, moving a pencil slowly over a large sheet of paper.

"The poor fellow is trying to write," said David. Then he noticed that the edges of the sheet were notched at intervals and that it had been folded in creases. As the blind man wrote, he felt for these notches, and then ran his finger along the crease in advance of the pencil.

Full of tender sorrow and pity, David crept up behind, that he might put his hand on Allan's shoulder and thus make his presence known; but happening to glance down upon the paper, he saw the words "My dear brother," and he knew that the writing was for him to read.

He did not give himself time to wonder that Allan should be writing to him, but began instantly to decipher the misshapen characters on the paper. In a few moments he had overtaken the pencil:

This is what he read:

MY DEAR BROTHER.—You will find this note fastened up on the outside of the door. Please read it through to the end before you enter. Perhaps you will then think it best not to enter alone.

David, my brother, these words come to you from the dead. I have destroyed the pitiful fragment of life which fate left me. You were wont to be so strong and brave—can you read on calmly now, and try to understand me when I tell you my reason? Can you love me and trust me as you always have done? I believe that you can and will, and that is why I have dared to take this step.

Several days ago I procured some poison, which I have kept concealed from you. Through it death comes swift but painless.

David watched the slow, laborious making of the last few words, and it gave him time to think. Where was the poison? He glanced across the room to the chest of drawers. There was a small drawer at the top which Allan had used exclusively, and which was now half open. With noiseless step, the younger brother crept over the floor to this chest of drawers. The guess was correct. Hidden under some handkerchiefs lay a small phial, filled with a colourless liquid.

David took it up, shook it mechanically, and then turned it over and over in his hands, while he tried to think what he had better do. At any moment Allan might finish his writing and come in search of the poison. It would then be necessary for David to speak aloud and explain, and his brother would suffer the torture of humiliation. That would not do. Better to carry away the phial and make no explanations, unless they were demanded. He was about to steal out of the room, when the thought struck him that his brother, if determined, could secure death by other means than this one bottle of poison. There was a loaded revolver in the drawer—that must be taken away. But what was to prevent Allan from obtaining more poison?

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He was accustomed to buy his own medicines, now that he was strong enough to get about. Ah, there were so many ways!

The blind man seated at the table wrote on, feeling his way carefully along the folds in the paper. David crouched upon the edge of the bed, watched him and thought:

No; merely to remove the means of death would not save Allan. The only hope lay in appearing to him, in pleading with him for his own life, in conjuring him by the love which held them together, not to do this terrible wrong. What should he say? David was not easy of speech. His very thoughts were blunt, ill-assorted, and confused. Deep in his soul he felt that his brother was about to make a mistake—one of the most awful of which life contained a possibility. This feeling was independent of religion or of superstition; it was a part of David's very existence. But how was he to speak of this to Allan, who seemed to understand everything so much better than he?

And now it suddenly occurred to him that he really did not know his brother. Evidently this design of self-destruction had been in Allan's thoughts for many weeks, and yet he, nearest to him of all beings on earth, had never been allowed to suspect it. This was why Allan had been so calm and had accepted his misfortune so lightly. Tortures of sorrow there must have been, unspeakable agonies of ruined hope, all endured in secrecy and silence. It seemed to David that he himself, and not Allan, must have lacked the power of sight.

But what was to be done now?

The pencil was still moving slowly over the paper. David rose from the bed, and, resuming his place behind the blind man, read on:

This concerns you and me, and no one else; is it not so, brother? The world is far away from us; we are alone together.

Now, what has existence for me? When first I learnt that I was to be always blind and a cripple, there came with the knowledge an impulse for death. But I put it away and said: "No, let me think of this more fully. The calamity seems now to sweep over all of life. Perhaps when I am more calm I shall find that much remains untouched." So I waited and thought—and in the end I found one thing, the happiness of being with you. That is real and lasting; and for a time I asked myself if it were not enough. But I remembered that my existence, wretched and useless as it was, meant more of labour and of hardship for you, and I thought, too, of what sorrow you must feel for me; and the pleasure of being with you turned to bitterness. There was nothing left.

But you—you love me, and you have a right to my life. It is for your sake that I have spent these long weeks in silent, solitary debate, after every other doubt was cleared away. At one time I had almost decided to beg my life of you, as I might any other favour—but I dared not. Yet I am begging it now—after I have taken it.

Dear brother, I know that you are unselfish. I believe that for my sake you would give up the greatest happiness which life affords—as I would for you. Can you not then allow me the little that I take when I deprive myself and you of my existence? If, now, the conditions were reversed—if I were the one to be strong and well, while you were crippled and blind—I try to think of it in that way, in order that I may understand it better and judge more fairly—I should, of course, feel an intense sorrow——

What was the matter? The pencil was moving slower and slower. At last it stopped. David looked up at his brother's face and saw it working with strong emotion. Then, after a moment the pencil went on:

——that you should suffer so, and it would be an unspeakable happiness to help, to work for you—you would be dearer to me then, a thousand times, than if——.

"Oh, what am I saying!" exclaimed the blind man, aloud. The pencil dropped from his fingers, and he threw himself back in his chair. "*I could not let him go,*" he cried; "it would be cruel in him to leave me. But I—what will he—oh, Davy!"

He leant upon the table with his face resting in his open hands, while David stood watching almost breathless in the struggle to keep silent. At last, Allan caught up the sheets of paper on which he had been writing and tore them to fragments.

"It is over," said David. He restored the bottle to its place, and crept past his brother out of the room. Presently Allan heard the street door noisily open and shut, and David's tread sounded upon the stairs.

That night, as the brothers were about to retire, Allan said:

"David, there is something that I want to promise you. I have already promised myself, but I want to assure you of it also."

"Yes," said David; "what is it?"

"I think I had best not tell you what it is. You would—you would be distressed, perhaps. But I promise you."

"Very well," said David; "let it remain a secret; then. But I accept the promise."

CHARLES DWIGHT WILLARD.

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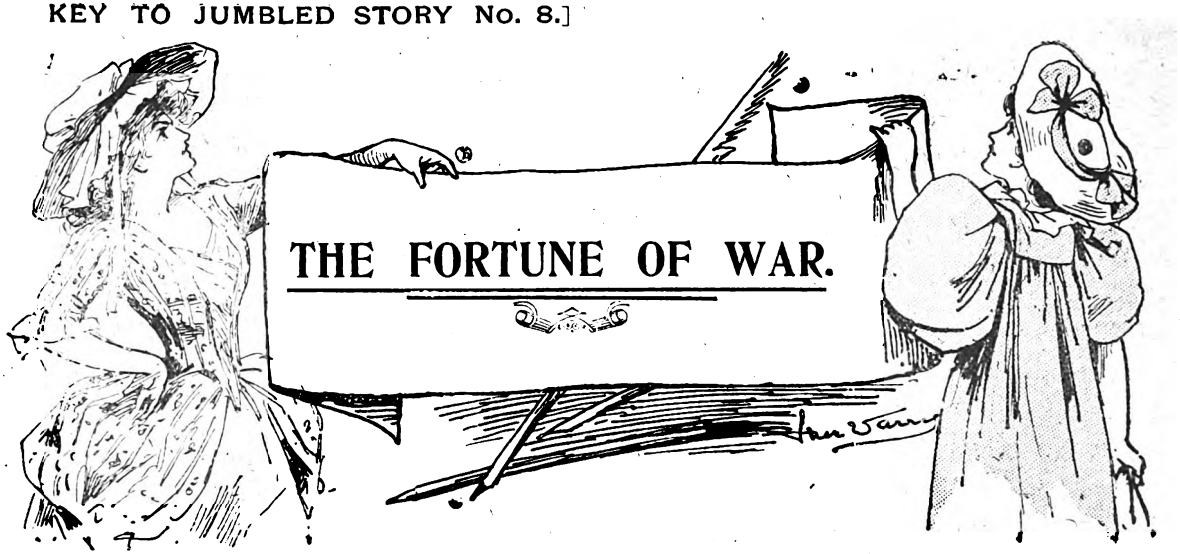
KEY TO JUMBLED STORY No. 8.]



THE FORTUNE OF WAR.

THEY had caught him red-handed, absolutely red-handed, prowling about within the French lines, in the vicinity of the regimental stores.

He was a miserable enough looking specimen of humanity, in all conscience, small and thin, with a dirty beard, which evidently had not been trimmed for weeks past.

It was easy enough to guess his nationality; he was a Jew, and the Jews have never been a popular people in France.

So they brought him before the general, a bluff, hard drinking, hard-swearing soldier, with as much feeling in his body as there is in a plank board, and about as many qualifications for acting the part of judge.

"Where was he found, do you say?" he asked.

"He was sneaking about near the bread waggons, general," was the reply of the lieutenant who had made this important capture.

"What were you doing there?" thundered the general.

The miserable Jew whined and wept, and protested that he was doing no harm—that he was only looking for a bit of bread to bring back to his wife and childen.

At least that is what he tried to tell them.

But they were not disposed to take much trouble in attempting to understand him.

They were in no humour just then for sifting the excuses made by a dirty little Polish Jew.

"Bread!" sneered the general, who had dined well that day, "a likely story, I must say. Where are his wife and children, I should like to know. He only speaks German: and it is clear that he is nothing but a German spy. Take him away and let him be shot at daybreak. It will encourage the others."

Sedan had fallen but a few days before; and all Frenchmen felt that nothing but blood could wipe out the national disgrace.

Of course, the blood of this weedy-looking wretch could not be reckoned as very much; but it was something.

It would make a beginning, as it were.

Besides, he was easier to deal with than most of the Germans whom they had met up to the present had proved to be.

They took him away, and on the following morning, as the sun was rising gloriously and pouring his rays down upon the small valley, they led him forth, put him before a platoon, and bound his eyes.

The unfortunate wretch implored them for mercy; but his cries fell upon deaf ears. Mercy!—after Sedan!

A likely thing, forsooth.

The word was given, the rifles rang out, and the little Jew fell forward upon his face, dead.

"So perish all enemies of France!" exclaimed the general, when they told him that his orders had been duly carried out.

The sentiment was a truly patriotic one.

And it was so much easier to overcome a diminutive Polish Jew than the German armies.

They threw him into a hastily made grave; and then prepared to retreat further before the advancing enemy.

Later in the day a poor-looking woman with one child in her arms, and leading another by the hand, came into the camp, and began to make anxious inquiries about her husband, who had left her the previous evening to try and obtain food for herself and the children.

They questioned her; and after some time they found that the missing husband was none other than the Jew whom they had just shot as a spy.

So they took her, and showed her the newly-made grave.

The general was told about the mistake they had made.

"*Sacré nom*," he exclaimed, "the little fool. Why did he not say so?"

In the hurry of departure they soon forgot a little incident like this.

After all, it was only the fortune of war.

They marched away from the little valley with bands playing, colours flying, and the various other accompaniments of "glorious war."

And none thought of the woman with the ragged shawl around her head, lying beside the mound where the sod had been recently disturbed, and who was weeping bitterly; while her two children looked on with wide open eyes.

They did not understand.

R. JOHNSTON.

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BY MISS WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

PAUPER BLUE BLOOD.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Death of the Heir.

Lady Ravenscroft knew that Sefton had thus garbed and disguised himself for the purpose of wounding her, and calming down, determined to disappoint him.

For this reason she adopted an alarmingly boisterous manner, laughing and talking loudly as if from bravado, and appearing in such hilarious spirits, that the sedate county magnates looked askance at their bouncing hostess.

Sefton saw and felt it. It seemed to him that Georgina was forcing her hospitality upon these people. She could not contain her delight at their presence, the splendour of her own entertainment had turned her head. She did nothing quietly, but rushed hither and thither introducing men to girls they had known all their lives, and thus revealing her ignorance of near neighbours. She exclaimed at each fresh costume, and poured profuse compliments into the ear of every new arrival, and all the while John Reginald slumbered sweetly in his basket to the bewilderment of all beholders.

"He is just like a doll," declared a group of baby worshippers gathered round Sir Sefton's heir. "What a marvellous child to sleep so soundly!"

But the elderly ladies cast up their eyes, and murmured it was shocking to treat a young infant so carelessly. Eventually, however, when Georgina began to dance, she tossed the basket with her offspring upon the sofa, from whence it was borne away by an extremely elegant nurse.

Throughout the evening Georgina felt as if the ghost of Sir Reginald were haunting her. Every glimpse of Sefton among the gaily-attired crowd goaded her on to nosier excitement. Once he hissed in her ear:

"For goodness sake, control yourself!" But she glanced up defiantly, flung back her wild black locks, and laughed.

"We are all on the razzle-dazzle to-night!" she cried. Yet her mirth was somewhat hysterical and overdone.

Not until supper, however, did Lady Ravenscroft's crowning offence occur.

Down the centre of the room was a long table, while smaller ones were grouped round the wall. She had gone in amongst the first batch of guests, and was making herself conspicuous by chaffing old Lord Curgenven, one of the leading lights of the county, in an unpleasantly familiar strain.

Sefton, who had shadowed her from the first, hot and ashamed of her vulgarity, which wealth increased and brought out, instead of concealing, now listened silently scornful, looking his disapproval.

In the midst of her aimless and frivolous talk, she gave a little scream, and upset a plate of trifle.

"Something touched my legs!" she cried, "it did truly! Oh! please look to see if there is anything under the table."

Her partner bent down and lifted up a fluffy cat.

"What a dear thing," said a fair girl next to Lord Curgenven. "Do pass it this way, Lady Ravenscroft."

Sefton was close to Georgina, and his presence was like a red rag to a bull. She knew he was watching and criticising her actions aversely.

She snatched the cat out of the young man's arms, and called out loudly:

"Here you are! Catch it, Lord Curgenven!"

With these words she flung the unfortunate animal across the table, and in its dizzy flight, it scratched Lady Curgenven's delicate white shoulder, landed somewhere among the valuable lace of her skirt, tearing wildly away with the torn fragments in its claws.

Nobody smiled, nor yet spoke for a moment.

"I say, awful hard luck on the poor beast," muttered her partner, as Lady Ravenscroft turned laughingly away, to make room for fresh comers.

"Do you mean the cat or Lady Curgenven? I did not intend it to land upon her neck and scramble off with the dress trimmings."

"How horribly cruel!" said the fair girl, as Georgina vanished through the doorway. "I should be sorry to be Lady Ravenscroft's tame cat."

Sefton apologised as best he could; and Lady Curgenven, really sorry for the husband's strained look and evident annoyance, made light of her scratches. But, in reality, she was seriously offended, and determined never to enter Georgina's house again.

"And that woman," thought Sefton to himself, "is the mother of *my* child!" If only it were not for John Reginald, he would sell the place, that he now hated, over Georgina's head. He could part with it in its altered condition without a pang; but that living tie was still between them—the son whose entrance into the world had brought misery upon his father.

The whirl of the valse tortured Sefton's brain; he pined for a moment's reprieve.

In his musty garments he wended his way upstairs to

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the bedside of that tiny creature—the boy given him by Georgina.

The room was in half darkness, and the swing cot stood near the lowered gas burner. He approached it on tip-toe, a weird figure in wig and ruffles.

Ah! John Reginald, it was well for you that you could not see the light in your father's eye, the queer smile flickering round his nervous, twitching lips, nor yet read in his black heart the urging devil whispers of madness.

No one was sitting by the child, the nurse had been lured away by the sound of enticing dance music.

At that very moment she was whirling down a distant passage in the arms of a powdered footman.

The brown gipsy tint had been greased off the baby's face, he still lay dreaming, his small fists clenched, his mouth open.

"So you're sleeping under the Ravenscroft colours, are you?" muttered Sefton, and the curtains shook as his trembling figure leant against the silk frilled drapery. "Poor John Reginald, what a life you will have with Georgina to rear and train you in the way you should go. She will make you hate me."

He bent down till his hot breath fanned the infant's cheek.

"She sported you to-night for a show, flaunted you as our joint property with your skin stained, and a red spangled wrapper about your head. That's what she will do till the end; swagger at our expense," he told the child in laboured gasps. "You sleep like the dead, John Reginald. Is it the influence of your two namesakes? Do they whisper from their restful tombs?"

He waited, but John Reginald answered not. The power of the drug was still upon him. Suddenly an inspiration seized Sir Sefton, one that brought no horror to the man's heart, only a sensation of unutterable delight. It would be sweet to embitter Georgina's cup on this, of all nights—to rob her of the son who kindled the light of pride in her eyes—to give John Reginald back.

"It was all a mistake, little chap," he whispered. "You should never have opened your eyes and looked upon Georgina Pluff. She cannot be a Ravenscroft. She obtained the name by threats; she is worse than the lowest woman in the land. Her treachery will flow in your veins; the offspring of such a mother is not fit to live!"

He bent lower over the cot, his hand, outstretched, spread its burning palm across the rosebud mouth, the lace falling from his wrist swept the white sheets and lay upon the spotless baby gown. These old world garments seemed to have transformed Sir Sefton into a living fiend.

He stood there, a smile upon his lips, destroying Georgina's flesh and blood, which was his own, glad beyond measure.

A faint movement, he fancied, of the unconscious child, then a convulsive struggle, and John Reginald breathed no more.

It was dark, he could not see the still features of his murdered son. He only cowered back, and let his arms fall to his sides limply. Then stealing softly across the room with the cunning of madness, Sir Sefton passed unseen down the stairs, to rejoin the merry throng below.

Georgina was still dancing, she did not know her child lay stiff and dead in the room above, killed by her husband's hand. Life was all music and laughter to her in that hour of triumph.

"Where did your husband get his costume?" asked a Pierrot with whom she was valsing.

"Out of the box-room," she answered lightly. 'It looks like it, doesn't it?"

She turned to get a better view of Sefton as she stopped dancing. What a spectre he appeared, with his pale, haggard face and frowsy garments, the sight of him dispelled Georgina's smiles.

As she passed out of the ballroom he laid his fingers on her arm and drew her back.

"I *hope* you are enjoying yourself, darling," he muttered.

She started, half frightened at his words, for his tone was ribald and the look in his eyes sinister.

"Yes," she retorted, "and so is everyone but you."

"Oh, I am quite jolly!" he replied. "Never felt happier in my life."

Georgina did not believe him, but she nodded and slipped away.

Sir Sefton had not danced that night, but now he selected a partner, and seemed quite impatient for the music to commence. He had always been known as the best dancer in the county, and as he steered an exquisite snow queen through the crowd of whirling figures his pulses beat fiercely, for he thought of his son's soul.

"It has gone back," he told himself, "to the God that gave it and the name of Ravenscroft shall likewise die. It has brought a curse upon me and upon my house. John Reginald, good-bye."

The music wailed and he fancied he heard the joyful shout of a child-angel wafted through the air.

"Really, James, you mustn't keep me longer, upon my word!" declared John Reginald's nurse, panting from her impromptu hop upon the upper landing. "It is as much as my place is worth, to risk being caught dancing here with you at this hour, when that blessed baby's all alone. But there! men don't consider what they lay us women open to."

James protested that he required Susan far more than the "hinfant," for Susan had a lofty bearing, and the slimmest waist at Ravenscroft Park. But Susan was firm in her conviction that enough was as good as a feast, and hurried away with a shake of her head, and a glance of admiration at her pointed slippers.

She sailed majestically into the nursery, half hoping James would venture to follow, turned up the light, and regarded herself in the glass. Her cap was decidedly crooked, and she righted it with a muttered protest against the clumsiness of the stronger sex. Then, with an impatient sigh, turned to her charge.

The stillness of the child, and the look on his white face staggered her. She raised him in her arms and felt his heart, then laid him back with trembling hands, while a flood of hysterical tears drenched her cheeks. She was a very excitable woman, and hardly knew what she did as she rushed from the room and down the stairs into the huge hall. The lancers were being played, and Lady Ravenscroft was the centre of the liveliest set, when Susan hastened in among the dancers, wringing her hands.

"Oh! my lady! my lady!" she cried, grasping Georgina's flowing garments, and dragging her towards the door.

"What is the matter?" asked Lady Ravenscroft wildly, then seeing the nurse's wet cheeks, she beat her hands together frantically, and exclaiming: "John Reginald!" flew at lightning speed towards the nursery.

A moment later and her bloodshot eyes were staring in horrified amazement upon the body of her lifeless child. She could not speak, scream, or move, but her teeth rattled in her head, and her knees knocked together.

At last a question broke from her livid lips:

"How did he die?"

"In a moment, my lady—a convulsion—I had only just left the room—hardly a second before."

Georgina raised her hands with a gesture of despair, staggered back, and fell prostrate at her husband's feet. He had followed her mechanically, apparently too dazed to notice what had happened. He never looked at the small, cold corpse, but bent over the fainting figure of Georgina, in her long black wig and carefully designed dress, raising her with apparent ease, and bearing her away to her own room.

The chill horror and dread of sudden death crept over the large assembly below as the music ceased, and cloaked figures crowded out through the open door. They all thought of the sleeping infant which only a few hours ago

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had been so conspicuously in their midst, and murmured each their individual opinions in hushed undertones.

The empty rooms and deserted supper tables presented a mournful aspect in the dim rays of the early dawn, while the carriages rolled solemnly down the long drive, fleeing from the grim abode of death.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Soul's Awakening.

When Georgina opened her eyes Mrs. Humphery was bending over her.

"Is it true," she asked, "that John Reginald is dead?"

She half expected a shocked and hasty "No." Surely that immovable infant face must have been the outcome of a fevered dream!

But Mrs. Humphery bowed her head in silent assent, and the mother's heart grew cold, hardened by her great sorrow.

"Are we alone?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Don't say a word, I intreat you," clutching Mrs. Humphery's arm; "I killed him—oh, God!—by my wickedness! It was the drug which I called harmless. He slept so soundly, he lay so still—like a waxen image; but I little thought I was putting him to sleep for ever!"

Georgina covered her face with her hands, and her friend expected to hear her stifled sobs. But no convulsive weeping shook her frame; her features remained passive and white. She *could* not cry; the blow had stunned her. Henceforth she must be childless, unloved and alone; widowed, yet fettered—tied to a living man who was worse than dead to her.

"Could he suspect?" she wondered. "Did Sefton know that his son had been tampered with, drugged by the mother's hand? If so, what would he think of her now?"

"Do you imagine my husband guesses?" she asked.

"No, dear, not for a moment. You had nothing to do with the poor little dear's end, so don't trouble about that soothing mixture. I shall say nothing, and do not think of it again."

"But it is so terrible I shall never cease thinking of it. Oh! why did I name him Reginald?—that unlucky name! There is a fate against it. I have never known a happy, or fortunate Reginald, they live to suffer, or else die young."

"Happy! fortunate! your child is both. He is safe from the world and its temptations."

"But I cannot spare him," cried Georgina fiercely. "He was mine, my very own, part of myself. In his death the centre of my being is destroyed, cut off. Think of it all, he was to inherit my money, now there is no heir, the title will die out, there is nothing worth living for, nothing left."

But Mrs. Humphery kept her own counsel as she listened. She knew that Georgina's passionate nature must rebel for a time, and chafe against its loss. But when the first agony of grief wore off she would lift up her head again and as freely crave for the wine of life and the pleasures that were now swamped by the night mists of bereavement.

The following morning the Humpherys left.

"I am afraid to look at the child," Georgina whispered as she wished her friend good-bye. "I dare not face him again."

Later in the day Sefton came to his wife's room. They had not spoken since John Reginald's death.

"I came about those flowers you sent to the nursery," he said abruptly. "Why did you not take them yourself? You have not seen the boy since last night."

"No." She shook her head mournfully, raising her tearless eyes to Sefton. "I shall never see him again."

Her husband leant against the bed-post with a queer expression on his face that Georgina could not understand.

"I wonder," he began, speaking slowly, "what caused his sudden death. I suppose it was quite natural."

Lady Ravenscroft whitened to her very lips. Was it possible that a sneering smile lurked for a moment round her husband's mouth? If so he divined the truth, and the awful stillness of John Reginald at the ball had not escaped the father's shrewd wits. She felt like a convicted criminal before the judge.

"You don't reply. Have you no theory on the subject?"

"He—he—died in a convulsion," she answered faintly. "The nurse said so, and now the doctor confirms it."

A long silence, in which Georgina's eyes were lowered.

"That is the statement I accept, but not the one I believe," Sefton retorted grimly.

He wished to arouse her curiosity. He expected a flow of excited questions, but they did not come.

Georgina stood with tightly-folded hands, voiceless, and apparently unmoved. Only the sign of deeper feeling past the power of words lay revealed in her dry, burning eyes, opened widely, and raised at last to confront her husband.

"All I know," she muttered, her fast breathing half choking her utterance, "is that our son lies *dead!* I care to hear nothing more. I only want him back. That is impossible. No amount of talking will bring him his life again. The child, the one tie between us, has been severed. God willed it so, maybe as a judgment, a punishment! I am not resigned; I can never be that. Only one thing I ask and pray of you, my husband, both now and in the future, never to mention John Reginald's name. I could not bear it. All trace of him must be put away—out of sight. Our child is dead, indeed; let us, if we can, forget him."

She spoke excitedly, her hands clasped over her heart, a crimson flush standing out in streaks on her hitherto pale skin.

Georgina was commending her son's memory to unbroken silence for a special purpose. She believed now that her husband suspected her of drugging the child and being thus connected with his mysteriously sudden death. Hints and half-veiled suggestions would be intolerable. In the face of remarks such as Sefton had just made her life must become a spell of dread, warding off the hateful innuendoes of her husband.

He bowed his head.

"So be it," he answered, the curious look in his eyes hidden. "For the last time, I mention his name. John Reginald, you are no more, and henceforth there is a seal set on your memory. You have gone into realms of forgetfulness; it is better so."

As he spoke he grasped his wife's hands with a cruel grip, and she beheld his face as she had never seen it before, lit up with a weird radiance, half angel, half devil! She scanned the features as if he were a stranger in whom she tried to seek some likeness to a man she had once known, perhaps almost loved.

But before she could speak he had dropped her hands, and turned away.

She watched him go without daring to call him back.

As the door closed, Georgina owned to herself that her resolve never to speak of John Reginald again had caused her the most painful effort of her life.

"Where have you gone?" she cried, seeking the enfranchised spirit of her child in the shadows of departing day, "my little lamb, not yet to the cold damps of the grave, yet out into vast incomprehensible eternity." She moved as she uttered her pitiful wail, away from the warm glow of a bright log fire, and crossed to the window. The sky was leaden, the bare trees waved their gaunt arms aloft to the wild grey clouds above. It was winter without, and winter in her heart.

For months Georgina had not listened to a sermon, and suddenly the grim deserted scene took voice and movement. The uncovered boughs, the floating mists on high, the sodden grass, and empty earth flower beds all preached to her of a Deity, and like messengers clothed with a prophet's

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mantle, asserted the magnificence, the awfulness, and the goodness of the Omnipotent!

Dumb with the mute astonishment of thrilling realisation, Georgina hearkened to this lesson issuing from creation.

Ravenscroft Park might be modernised within, but the monarch trees without, the far-reaching landscape defied her. Never in sunniest summer days had it worn a nobler aspect than now, as night swept down, and the woman, feeling her own insignificance, gazed wonderingly at that splendid mirror upon which God reflected his greatness.

The unseen powers around had given her for a few brief seconds spiritual eyesight.

She fancied that the earth shook, and the pillars of the world trembled under her, that the countenance of Heaven turned from grey to appalling blackness, the day of vengeance was at hand, hastened by hardness of heart, unbelief, impenitence! A dreadful vision of the final separation between the good and the bad rose threateningly. Her Inferno was to be always with Sefton, in a city of wickedness and wretchedness, built up by the jealousies, bickerings, railings, and disputings of past centuries. She struggled to free herself from this horrible dream besetting her in an hour of wakefulness, and her efforts were as the stormy strivings of disturbed elements. The tempest within Georgina seemed to mingle earth and sky in one wild scene of fierce confusion.

With a cry she banished the fearful picture conjured by her brain. What if she—the designing adventuress, the unloved wife—the frivolous, careless mother, who had sacrificed her offspring for a whim, could cast down the fabric of her old unworthy life, and rear a new creation on the ruins of the past.

Wrought on by remorse she sank beneath an accumulation of self reproach, and burying her head on the window-sill, gasped forth a halting prayer, torn, tossed, crushed, seared by a swift revival of apparently dead principle and conscience.

Her earnest desire to know more of God astounded Georgina, for already a strange unaccountable tranquility calmed her racking nerves. She looked upwards and spoke with sure confidence. "Heaven," she said pressing her hands to her heart, "has begun already; its powers are in action."

The worthlessness of everything but faith swayed her mind, till it seemed to soar to the land into which John Reginald had been gathered.

She held him in her arms again, and talked with his glorious companions. All things around them were pure and lovely—exquisitely innocent, as the child who had never tasted sin.

For the first time since his death, the tears poured in torrents down Lady Ravenscroft's drawn cheeks, shedding their healing waters on her parched, dry heart.

"We have found Him together, baby," she whispered to her angel child; "*the* One who can heal the broken-hearted, and set at liberty them that are bruised."

So she knelt still by the window, with her face buried in her hands, while the fire burnt low, and the dark mists of night shed their chill breath upon the panes.

Only in that intense quiet a mocking, distant laugh came wafted on imagination's wings, whispering that the bruise was difficult to heal, and could not be cured in a day, perhaps never in this world.

And the laugh was always Sefton's.

When eventually a maid, taper in hand, entered Lady Ravenscroft's room to light the blazing gas-burners in their decorative globes, she started back in trepidation at the sight of her mistress.

What an object of misery crouched by the window curtains, sick in body, sad in soul, bowed down with woe, stricken by care!

"My lady," she said softly, trying to raise her.

Georgina lifted her head, and, lo! the face that was marred by weeping was also wreathed in smiles.

"I am cold," she murmured; "stir up the fire, light all the candles and the gas, draw the blinds."

Then for the first time Georgina remembered that conventionality should have prevented her raising the window's veil, since John Reginald's white image lay upstairs—*not* John Reginald, only the casket that once held his soul.

"Where is Sir Sefton?" asked Lady Ravenscroft.

The maid looked down; her eyes were moist.

"Upstairs, my lady," she replied.

"In the nursery?"

"Yes; he has been sitting there for the last hour."

"You can go," said Georgina, sinking into a chair.

She listened to the retreating footsteps.

"What does it mean?" she asked herself. "Sefton would not look at the child while he lived, and now when I cannot bear to face those ashen features, he watches as if guarding by the dead?" It was uncanny, she thought, her husband's attraction for that room. Oh, if she could only read his mind—decipher his inner self.

But Lady Ravenscroft did not know what she was wishing, or she might have thanked God for her blindness and incapacity.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 9.

THE guinea goes this week for London to A. Richards, 66, Dalston Lane, N.E., and for the provinces to A. Clayton, 226, Wheeler Street, Aston, nr. Birmingham.

The sentence was "Octavia sprang forward with a little cry."

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 8

THE following three competitors—Mrs. Alley, 56, Baronscourt Road, West Kensington, N.W.; Mrs. J. W. Blakston, 11 Brinkburn Street, Sunderland; Mrs. E. Glave, 8, Windsor Terrace, Uplands, Swansea—have forwarded the best solutions to the eighth Jumbled Story, and the first three prizes have therefore been equally divided between them; that is to say, each of the above-named will receive a cheque for £2 6s. 8d. The remaining three prizes of £1 each are awarded to the following: A. B. Hind, 44, Lloyd Street, Manchester; Mrs. Dudley, 17, Springfield Terrace, Kidderminster; C. W. Garbutt, 3, Ovington Street, Middlesbrough-on-Tees.

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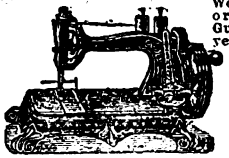

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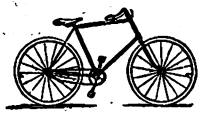

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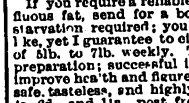

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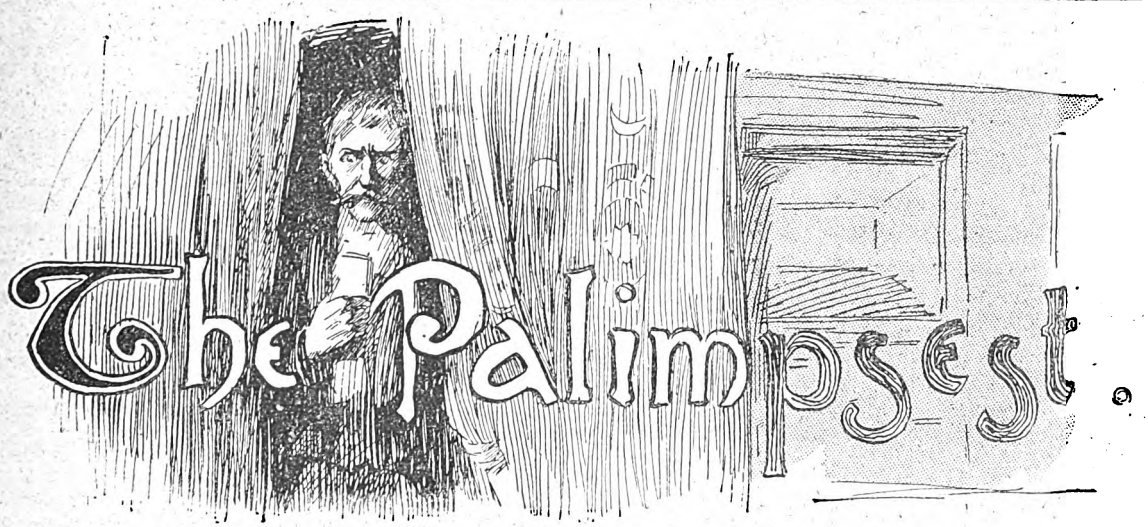
EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 403.] For the Week ending September 19th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.



I LITTLE expected when the Minister of Fine Arts commissioned me to secure for the French Government a palimpsest, that I was to witness—indeed, to play a small part in—a very moving tragedy. A palimpsest, as you know, is a manuscript of which the original text has been covered and new text super-imposed—generally the work of monks of the tenth century, who needed more parchments on which to inscribe their ecclesiastical writings. The re-agents of modern chemistry have made it possible to restore the original text, and some of the most precious gems of Greek and Latin literature have thus been redeemed from the desecrations of over-zealous clerics.

This particular parchment had been discovered to be a palimpsest in the last century; but it had been lost, before it could be deciphered, in the sacking of the Abbey of Faverney, in 1793, and had only recently been heard of again in the library of an eccentric Russian, Prince Volkine, who was suspected of being a Nihilist, and had died mysteriously a year before. The library of this Prince Volkine—curious name, Volkine, I thought; evidently of Slavic origin: *Vilko, vilk, vulk, volk,* Volkine the same root; meaning a wolf—was to be sold by his widow, and as other collectors and libraries would be after it, I lost no time in setting out for the Château de Doremont, where the princess resided.

That very evening I took the Basle express. In the compartment with me were a lady and gentleman to whom I paid no particular attention. As the train started, he drew out a bundle of papers and began to read them, and the lady, leaning her head comfortably against his shoulder, closed her eyes with a contented smile and settled herself for a nap. She was a dainty little woman, with fair hair, great black eyes, and a pale complexion. She was not pretty, however, a bulging forehead, thin lips, and a short nose, made her almost ugly. But her face beamed with the beauty that illumines the faces of all women who love and know themselves beloved.

Soothed by the movement of the train, I, too, soon dropped off to sleep. Suddenly I awoke with a start. Before me, kneeling in the middle of the compartment, was the man, motionless as if petrified with fear. His haggard eyes stared with dilated pupils straight before him; his parted lips moved in a vain effort to make a sound; and his right arm, stretched rigidly towards the open window, pointed out upon the moonlit plain. An almost unintelligible murmur now came from his lips. "The snow!" he stammered; "the snow! How cold it is, how cold!"

The young woman had sprung up in alarm. "Lucien, Lucien," she cried, "it is I—I who am here with you," and she tried to raise his inert body.

Suddenly the intensity of his gaze relaxed, his lips closed, and he burst into a peal of shrill laughter.

"Farewell, old wolf!" he cried, in a tone of concentrated hate; "the wolves will spare the wolf," and he fell back unconscious.

Now a strange change took place in the man. From beneath his lids two tears stole down his cheeks—he was weeping. And for some moments he wept, silently and motionless. The woman had taken him in her arms, now kissing his hands, now wiping his tears away with her handkerchief. Little by little his contracted limbs relaxed, he sighed deeply, and his eyes opened.

"What has happened?" he asked, in evident astonishment.

But the train had slackened up and stopped, the guard opened the door and cried "Jussy," and as this was my station, I bowed, and hastily stepped down upon the platform. As I left the train, I heard the great clock of some neighbouring church strike eleven.

I was driven over to the Château de Doremont the next morning, and found that the Princess Volkine was

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in Paris, but was expected to return any moment. When I explained my mission, the rotund little gentleman who received me stated that he was the father of the Vicomte Lucien de Hurecourt, who was to marry the princess on the morrow, and he was now escorting her home from Paris. His own name was Grand-Jacquot, he said, but his son had revived the ancient style of the family, Grand-Jacquot de Hurecourt, and was a very aristocratic young gentleman. I must defer my affair until after their return, and it would afford them all much pleasure if I would honour the wedding, a very quiet affair, with my presence. There was nothing for it but to accept the worthy man's hospitable offer.

After some refreshment, M. Grand-Jacquot led me to the library. It was a large and sombre room, with books

The lady . . . closed her eyes with a contented smile.

of all kinds and manuscripts of all ages filling the shelves to the ceiling. In the middle of the room was a square table, and on it were a folio volume in red morocco—the catalogue, doubtless—two silver candlesticks, with half-burned wax candles in them, a bronze inkstand, pens, and an eraser. But what first attracted my attention was the great fireplace, with a great stone chimney. Carved upon its otherwise plain surface was a striking device—a wolf's head, sable, with eyes, gules, on a silver field. This black head, staring sharply out from the white base, glared ferociously and fantasically, like a wolf of the Ukraine. It was crowned with the coronet of a prince, and on a scroll beneath was the legend, written in capital letters: *Volke ne volk volku.*

"The wolf is not a wolf to the wolf," said I, translating it literally.

"Exactly," said M. Grand-Jacquot; "it is derived from a family legend," and he repeated it to me, though I was already familiar with it from a Byzantine manuscript—John Stilitzes, I think. In the time of the Dukes Rurik and Oleg, it ran, among the Malo—Russian worshippers of the god Teroun, the golden-bearded Jupiter of the Slavs—lived a Prince Volkine, a mighty hunter and redoubtable brigand, who amused himself with training wolves. He had formed a pack of them with which he ravaged the lands of his neighbours. He had made pets of three wolf-cubs, bringing them up like domestic dogs; the beasts even ate at his table and slept in his chamber. In a certain battle, the bandit was wounded and fell from his horse. His enemies were about to dispatch him, when the wolves, like a faithful body-guard, flew to his aid and put the strangers to flight.

"I would amend my translation of the legend," said I, when he had finished. "The idea, more concisely put, is: 'The wolf spares the wolf.'"

"A lying legend!" sneered a mocking voice behind me, and turning, I saw that a man and woman, in travelling dress, had entered the room while we were talking. I could not repress a slight movement of surprise, for in them I recognised my travelling companions of the preceeding night.

"Marfa, Lucien!" cried M. Grand-Jacquot; "ah, you naughty children, how late you are! I expected you all last night, and have been quite uneasy about you." Then presenting them to me: "The Vicomte de Hurecourt, my son, and the Princess Volkine, who is soon to be my daughter, M. Stéphane Chéraval."

"To what are we indebted for the honour of your visit?" inquired the Vicomte curtly.

"M. Chéraval is a *savant* whom the Minister of Fine Arts has sent for a palimpsest," replied M. Grand-Jacquot; "doubtless the one that Prince Volkine used to treat with acids and scratch with an eraser so incessantly."

His words startled me, but not so much but that I could notice the Vicomte's sudden nervousness and the trembling voice in which he replied.

"The palimpsest has disappeared," he said.

"Disappeared?" I cried.

"Yes, a week ago. I have searched everywhere for it without success. It must have been stolen."

"Stolen—who can have taken it?"

"There is but one person—Anton Mikhail."

The Princess had not yet spoken, seeming disconcerted by my presence. But now, turning to Lucien, she said, in an indignant tone: "No, no; you malign him. Anton Mikhail is a saint, he would rather die than commit a sin. But come, we must go and receive Judge Bardene, whom Lucien invited this morning to be one of the witnesses of our marriage. That is why we are so late, for Lucien got tickets for Lure instead of only Jussy." And she led the Vicomte away, the old gentleman following them. Left alone, I hastened to the table, and, with a trembling hand, seized the catalogue. The folio opened as of its own accord at "Manuscripts." It was an admirable catalogue, each entry being carefully made with full particulars. The first read as follows:

No. 1. Psalter, without commentary, of the tenth century. Twelve pages. Incomplete and mutilated, comprising only the 114th, 119th, 129th, 137th, and 145th psalms; the psalms of the office of the dead in the Latin ritual. Mentioned by the Benedictine dom Loysilleau. Procured from the pillage of the Abbey of Faverney.

In a trembling hand—doubtless that of the Prince Volkine—was added this note: "*Palimpsest. Very precious. The Milesian of Lucius of Patras.*"

Unconsciously I had picked up the eraser that lay on the table and now I saw that particles of parchment adhered to the sharp steel, that it had evidently been lately used. As I was studying this, a shadow fell upon

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the table, and, lifting my eyes, I saw at the window a strange being, whom I knew at once for Anton Mikhail of whom the Princess Volkine had spoken. Dressed in a long robe of soiled white cotton, he bore in his arms several planks of pine wood. From his belt depended a bag, in which were nails and a hammer. Then he had considered me well, he entered the library, crossed the room, and set down his burden by the wall. Then, without a word to me, he began to adjust his planks, and nail them together, droning to himself meanwhile a monotonous chant that I remembered to have heard before in the Ukraine.

"Little father——" I began in the same tongue.

No answer.

"Anton Mikhail, what are you doing?"

"You can see," said he, without desisting from his work; "I am building an altar."

"An altar! What for?"

"The little mother, the Princess, is to be married. You should know that, since you are invited to the wedding."

"And you think, Anton Mikhail," said I, smiling, "that the Princess will kneel before your altar?"

"Listen," he said, leaving his work, and coming to stand before me; "the daughter of Anna Petrovna, the freed serf, the wife chosen by the noble wolf Volkine, is, in spite of her sin, neither a pagan or a lost soul. She will kneel before the God—my God, and here." And turning to his work, he resumed his monotonous chant.

"Man of God," I said, "do you know of what you are accused? They say you have stolen."

Anton Mikhail turned, and pointing towards heaven with one finger, said: "Listen once more. God is the public witness of the most secret crimes; at His chosen hour He will denounce. He will speak if I am guilty."

At this moment a servant entered, and announcing that they waited dinner for me, led the way to the drawing-room. Here I was introduced to Judge Bardene, and the Princess Volkine taking his arm, M. Grand-Jacquot, the Vicomte, and I followed to the dining-room.

"Father," said the Princess to M. Grand-Jacquot, "will you aid me to do the honours of my house? M. Chéraval at your right, Lucien at your left." The judge placed his hand upon the chair at her right, and seeing her seat herself was about to follow her example.

"No, no, my dear judge, not at my right—here," she said, indicating the chair at her left. "Valentin," said she, to the servant, "tell him we are awaiting him." Then, noticing the judge's disconcerted air, she added: "You will excuse me when I tell you that in my house the place of honour is always reserved for God—that is, in the person of one of His Messiahs."

While she was speaking, M. Bardene was casting very singular glances about from under his spectacles; and it was Lucien whom he presently addressed.

"So, M. de Hurecourt," he asked, "you do not believe in expiatory Messiahs, perhaps not even in expiations?"

"I hate charlatans, under whatever robe they appear," replied Lucien drily, and the conversation turned to other topics.

At the conclusion of the dinner, we went out upon the terrace, where coffee was served. It was a balmy August evening, and Judge Bardene discoursed charmingly of his early life, when he had been the friend of Mme. Récamier and Mme. Louise Collet. But his words were lost on us. I was thinking of the missing

"Anton Mikhail, what are you doing?"

palimpsest, Grand-Jacquot, of anything but Bardene's talk, and the Princess watched Lucien with loving eyes, as he sat back and let his gaze wander over the moonlit scene before us.

Presently he rose, and, motioning the Princess to join him, began to stroll up and down the terrace.

The loving couple had passed and repassed us several times, when suddenly Lucien started back. The gaunt figure of the priest had appeared from behind a bush and stood confronting them.

Lucien clenched his fist tightly, and strode up to the fanatic.

"For my sake, Lucien," she cried, "do not strike him. And you, Anton Mikhail—leave us. I cannot see you now." She had stepped up to the "man of God," and seizing his hand, would have kissed it.

"You shall hear me!" he said hoarsely; "I am your prophet, and your expiator. You shall hear me! Listen, Marfa—I have watched, and I have fasted. I have prayed and prayed. Then the dead appeared to me; his spirit has descended upon me, and his soul has united itself to my soul. It said to me: 'Go to my well-beloved, and tell her that, if she wishes, I will forgive her.' Do you wish it, my daughter?"

"I do not wish to be separated from Lucien," she said, in a low voice, pressing herself against the Vicomte's arm.

Anton Mikhail burst into a scornful laugh; then he cried, with growing excitement:

"He is so just, and so good, the noble wolf Volkine! Do you remember, Marfa?—your father was a serf, a kholop, a brute with a human face. Volkine was pleased to free him, he was his redeemer. And you—

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he took you from out the dust, and lifted you as high as himself. To your father he gave the liberty that makes a man, to you he gave the knowledge that should make a saint. He has made you the equal of queens—he married you. But you, Princess Volkine, you?—oh, you!

"And so, poor woman," he went on, "to-morrow you wish to consummate your sin, to bind your life to that man—a blasphemer, an atheist! You wish to lose your soul for ever, and abandon it to torture! You shall not do it, Princess—I forbid you! But do not tremble so, and understand me well"—his voice became low and supplicating—"ah, my child, if you hearken to me, to-morrow you will repent your sins and purify yourself for ever. To-morrow will your pardon come; to-morrow will you gain Paradise!"

"To-morrow we shall square accounts, you thief," cried Lucien, trembling with rage; "come, Marfa, this farce has lasted long enough."

Anton Mikhail turned slowly towards him, and looked him straight in the eye.

"You, too, to-morrow—you will come to pardon; yes, to-morrow. The dead wishes it—the dead commands it!"

"You dare threaten me!" cried Lucien, and he sprang at the priest with clenched fist.

But he did not strike Anton Mikhail. Just then the great clock of Doremont began to strike the eleventh hour. Lucien turned pale as a ghost and trembled in every limb.

"The snow!" he muttered; "the snow! How cold it is, how cold!"

He was silent for a moment, his mouth open, his eyes staring as if in horror.

"Farewell, old wolf!" he cried suddenly, in fiercest scorn; "the wolves will spare the wolf!" And he laughed—laughed horribly.

"Help, help!" cried Marfa, half fainting, and we sprang towards Lucien. But already, as on the preceding night, a reaction had set in, and he was weeping silently as he lay inert upon the terrace. Then he sighed deeply and the crisis passed. He looked about him, recognised us, and asked in a tone of profound surprise: "Why, what is the matter, gentlemen; what is the meaning of these frightened faces?"

"Come, children," said M. Grand-Jacquot, whose face had become livid, "you must retire now, you have much to go through to-morrow," and he hurried them into the château.

Anton Mikhail had long before disappeared.

"That was a very strange scene," commented Bardene, when we were alone; "by-the-way, you are a Russian scholar—could you make out what it was all about?"

"Oh, yes," I replied; "they talked a common Russian," and I repeated to him what they had said.

"Strange, very strange," he murmured.

"No," said I; "there is nothing remarkable about it. The Princess as a serf belonged to the sect of which Anton Mikhail is a priest—the Filipovtz; fanatics, who hope by their own sufferings to redeem mankind; voluntary expiators of the crimes of the world, Disciples of the Bleeding Lamb, who kill themselves that others may be immortal. That explains it all—the reproaches of the 'man of God,' who saw her slipping from the faith, and the perplexities of the Princess, struggling between her love and her conscience."

Bardene chatted about it a few moments longer, and presently he retired. At last I was free to make a search for the palimpsest.

All was silent as I entered the library. Lighting one of the candles, I proceeded to look about me. At the extremity of the hall stood Anton Mikhail's little altar decked with flowers. Raising my eyes, I shuddered as I beheld the great Volkine wolf, its sparkling eyes gleaming down upon me. I was about to begin my search among the manuscripts, when a sudden noise startled me. It was as if a key had been inserted in the door giving upon the terrace. I stood quite still, and held my breath. Yes, the door began slowly to open. I snuffed my candle, and fled to the darkest corner of the room.

"You dare threaten me!" cried Lucien.

A hand now appeared, and slowly drew aside the *portière*, disclosing the pale face of Lucien de Hurecourt. His eyes did not change their direction once—they stared at me. I saw that I was discovered, and managed to muster up courage to come forward.

"Sir," I said hesitatingly, "it is true you find me here after midnight in an apparently compromising position; but——"

I did not complete my sentence. He did not hear me, he did not see me. He walked slowly forward with an automatic step—he was walking in his sleep. In his hand he held an object which he pressed to his breast. It was a manuscript—my palimpsest! Arrived at the table, Lucien laid down his manuscript, opened it, and gazed at it for some moments. Then he lit a candle, sat down, took up the steel eraser from the inkstand, and began to scratch the parchment.

I had now regained my self-possession, and stepping lightly forward, I looked over his shoulder, and examined the manuscript. It was indeed the palimpsest, the Carolingian, the psalter of the offices for the dead. "*De profundis clamavi ad te*," the first line of the open page read—"from the depths have I cried unto thee." It was scraped through in places, and was sadly mutilated, but here and there I could read words, phrases, sentences, in Greek text of the best epoch. But, alas! a great blank space had been erased upon more than half of the page, and at this Lucien was scratching industriously. Drawing out

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paper and pencil, I transcribed what was legible, translating as I wrote:

.....Lucius.....
.....Oh, Lucius.....
.....you, Lucius in.....
.....to secure yourself an adulterous love and to steal a vast heritage.....
.....By the religion of the gods, in the name of the human conscience, in the name of public piety, punish an abominable crime.....
.....the soul of the dead has for a moment been freed from hell...
.....have pity, have pity; by the stars of heaven, by the divinities of death, by the elements of nature, by the silence of night, give me back my life for but an instant.....vengeance, the sole consolation of the dead.....

(Here occurred the blank space; further down other phrases followed:)

..... and the body rises, it speaks; it weeps, alas!.....
.....you shall confess, you shall tell all, you shall tell to all the secret of the dead.....the sin that has robbed me of my bleeding couch.....

Here came the bottom of the page. The continuation of this strange scene of necromancy should follow. I tried to turn the page gently, but could not. Lucien was leaning heavily on it, and still scraped away.

Now he stopped, and sighing deeply, arose and started slowly towards the door. Now was my chance if I ever hoped to get the precious manuscript.

I put forth my hand to draw it gently from him, but I had no sooner touched it than he screamed, as if in mortal fear, and struck me a terrific blow on the chest.

It sent me sprawling on the floor, and when I got on my feet again, Lucien had disappeared through the door.

The next morning I was rather late in getting down. I had taken my coffee in my room, and found the wedding-party already assembled. Judge Bardene and a young doctor were to act as Lucien's witnesses, and two lawyers were to perform the same kindly office for the Princess. But as one of the latter had sent word that it was absolutely impossible for him to be present, I was asked to take his place, and willingly consented.

Lucien seemed to know nothing of the preceding night's performance in the library, and seemed the happiest of men.

"Come," said M. Grand-Jacquot, after a few moments, "we must repair to the mayor's office to have the civil marriage performed. M. Chéraval, as the Princess's senior witness, will you offer her your arm?"

"Excuse me," said Lucien, stopping me, politely enough, as I offered my arm, "the Princess will take my arm;" and as she seemed to hesitate: "Marfa, I beg of you, take my arm."

She obeyed, pleased, and blushed charmingly.

"Children, children!" cried the scandalised parent, "I am astonished——"

"I wish it," said Lucien shortly, looking his father in the eye, and the party proceeded to the great door. Suddenly Lucien turned and led the Princess towards the library.

"Come, none of this pleasantry, my son," said M. Grand-Jacquot; "the mayor has been waiting an hour."

Again the son turned upon him and said imperiously:

"I wish it."

In the library a strange spectacle awaited us. The walls were adorned with green branches, and the little

Struck me a fearful blow on the chest.

altar, erected by Anton Mikhail, was decked with flowers. On the altar, amid roses, lilies, heliotrope, and pansies, was a wooden chalice, a clumsy production of Byzantine art. The "man of God," still in his robe of soiled cotton, stood upon the lower step of the altar, awaiting our approach. Lucien led the bride towards the altar, while we filed in behind them.

"How kind you are, Lucien," said Marfa, in a moved tone; "I am very grateful to you. But, truly, we must put off the religous ceremony until later. Let us go first to the mayor's."

"I wish it," said Lucien de Hurecourt for the third time.

"Darling, I beg of you——" began the Princess, joining her hands in supplication.

"Obey, Marfa!" cried the stern voice of Anton Mikhail; "the dead commands. For you the hour of pardon has come."

He had expressed himself in French, rough and incorrect, but intelligible to all. A livid pallor overspread the Princess's features, and she bowed her head without a word.

"Ah, judge," said Lucien, turning with a mirthless laugh to Bardene, "how coarse and superstitious are these Slavs. I know them well—I have lived in Kherson, where I was consul of France. It was a melancholy post, that city of Potemkin, with its steppes—its eternal steppes on all sides. But let us sit down—I have much to say," and pushing forward a chair for Bardene, they sat down while we grouped ourselves about them. Princess Volkine, her head bowed, seemed to hear nothing, to see nothing, to be stolidly resigned—but to what? As to the "man of God," he stood motionless as a statue, his blazing eyes fixed upon Lucien.

"Proceed, sir," said the judge; "I am listening."

"Yes, Kherson is a sad place," resumed Lucien, "with no distractions—little society, no balls, no concerts; the only solaces are to be found in cigars, cards, and brandy. Outside the city all is desolation—boundless levels of barren plain, inhabited only by wolves—packs of fierce, gaunt wolves. It was neither

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duty nor the attractions of the city that kept me there, it was an affair of gallantry. Thirty versts north of the city rose the towers of the Castle of Kara-Issar, where for a few months each year lived the Prince Volkine.

"A strange person was this Prince Volkine, with his bald head, his black eyes under their shaggy brows, his Kalmuck nose, and his long, white beard; grand in his manners and imbued with an inordinate pride of race. He had two passions; he strove madly for universal knowledge, and to that end studied all the sciences and spent his nights over musty parchment and mouldy manuscripts; and he conspired—yes, this Prince Volkine, whose forefathers had not deemed a Romanoff worthy to unloose their shoes, had become a democrat, a conspirator, had even married the daughter of a serf. Out of respect for his ancient name, and, perhaps, for his age, the government did not interfere with him, but it watched him; and he abused its indulgences, unhappy man.

"I was very assiduous in my calls at Kara-Issar, not to listen to the old man's maunderings, but to see his wife, the Princess Marfa. We loved each other, she and I, and she——"

A heartrending cry of grief and indignation burst from the Princess's lips, and she sank on her knees before the altar.

"Let her suffer!" said Anton Mikhail imperiously, as I started to aid her.

"Lucien, Lucien, my child," cried M. Grand-Jacquot, "you are ill. You must go up to your room——"

"Silence, M. Grand-Jacquot!" said Judge Bardeno sternly; "as an officer of the law, I command you not to interrupt this statement. Proceed, sir," he said to the Vicomte.

Then began before us a terrible scene. Lucien, impelled by an irresistible impulse, had risen, and now like an actor he played—he lived his part.

"It was very monotonous when I returned to Kherson," Lucien went on; "I was reprimanded for my absence by the minister, little work had accumulated, and there was nothing to do—oh, Marfa, Marfa, if she were with me! Meanwhile, let me work. To-morrow evening there will be a ball given by the new governor—someone knocks at my door. 'Come in.' Ah, a soldier, with a note—two lines hastily traced:

"The police will attempt the arrest of your friend, Prince Volkine, at his Château to-night. Save him. You are commanded to do so.

"'Who brought this?' The man was gone, there was no signature. 'Save him'—I shall not go. May a thousand devils take him! 'You are commanded'—I commanded! By whom? A pack of scoundrels—and then, is he not Marfa's husband?

"'Prepare the drosky, Tegor, and put in the two best horses. No, you need not come—I shall drive myself. What do you say? Yes, there is plenty of snow. And—what? Oh, wolves, I am not afraid of wolves. Good, give me the reins—I shall not be back until the morning.'

"How long and sinister the road is! Last year, when Marfa was at Kara-Issar, I used to drive over twice a week, and it seemed delightful. Dear Marfa, why did he send her to Switzerland? Can he suspect? To-night the road seems horrible. Ah, this Volkine.

"At last the castle. The court is deserted, no noise in the house. The door is half open—Volkine expects some one. Eleven o'clock; we can get back to Kherson before daybreak, but we must be quick. I spring up the stairs—I know the way so well—I push open the door, and find the old man working—always at the same manuscript. 'Lucien,' he cries, 'what brings you at such an hour?' I give him the note he reads it, then looks at me. 'Hasten, prince; I will conceal you at the consulate. To-morrow you can depart on a French vessel for France—you are saved.' No word of thanks; he slips on his wraps, takes the manuscript in his hand, and we start. I lash the horses, we fly over the snow—we two, alone, side by side, in the night.

"See! What are those two red points of flame, down there in the moonlight, that seem to gleam and change their position? The man is mad to put himself in my power thus. And I love Marfa, she belongs to me. If she should become a widow—but it is absurd, the police are on our track, they would find the body——

"The two red points of flame have come nearer—there are four of them, six, ten—and black forms begin to appear against the snow. They are wolves! they have scented us. Our horses plunge forward.

"'You are armed?' asks Prince Volkine. 'Yes, I have my revolver.' Why does Marfa's husband remind me of it? He is looking at me—this old man drives me mad. 'What are you thinking of, Lucien?' he asks suddenly, with a strange laugh: 'I will wager I could say. You are telling yourself that if your companion should die you could marry his widow. You are wrong, my poor friend; you will never marry Marfa!' I suppress an angry and threatening gesture—he knows all! How has he been able to read my thoughts? Now I remember something Marfa once told me, that Prince Volkine pretends to exercise a mysterious power over me. Yes, that is it. He knows all, he will separate me from Marfa—kill her perhaps.

"The wolves surround us. They gallop beside the drosky. They are ahead of the horses and snap at their muzzles. We are lost! if we could throw something to them they would stop—it would be deliverance. A wolf leaps at the off horse and seizes him by the nostrils. I rise in my seat and draw my revolver. 'Shoot!' cries Volkine. But I do not shoot, and, turning to him, I say: 'Since you are of the race of wolves, why are you afraid?' He drops the reins, and stands up facing me.

"We threaten each other, face to face; we defy each other; we challenge each other with our eyes, without a word; his eyes seem to burn into my soul. Enough of this torture! I raise my pistol and fire upon him. He cries out, he sways, he falls against me. With his two hands he seizes me—one upon my forehead, the other gripping my throat. Still those eyes—those terrible eyes! He leans towards me, whispers in my ear, his hot breath upon my cheek: 'You shall never marry Marfa. On your wedding day you will tell the whole story to the officers of the law.'

"With a desperate effort I push him from me, I throw him into the snow. Then, laughing in my turn, I lean back and cry after him: 'Farewell, old wolf. The wolves will spare the wolf!' the motto of his family.

"Already I am far away. Through all the night I hear his desperate cries, half drowned in the snarling of the wolves. At last it is day. The city—the streets are still deserted. I reach my house, and in my room fall asleep in a chair. My servant awakens me. 'You have forgotten something, sir, in the waggon,' and he hands me a manuscript, the one the Prince carried. But the wolves alone know my secret. Ah, Marfa, you are mine henceforth, mine for ever!"

The crisis had passed, and after it came the tears,

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unconsciousness, and surprise of the two evenings before.

At this moment Marfa arose. The pallor of agony was on her face; but her eyes gleamed with joy, shone with happiness. Slowly she approached Lucien and knelt before him.

"Was it for love of me," she asked, "that you dared to kill? And for love of me you will die?"

"I loved you," murmured Lucien; "and you—do you love me still?"

For answer she seized his hand and covered it with passionate kisses—this hand that had done murder for her.

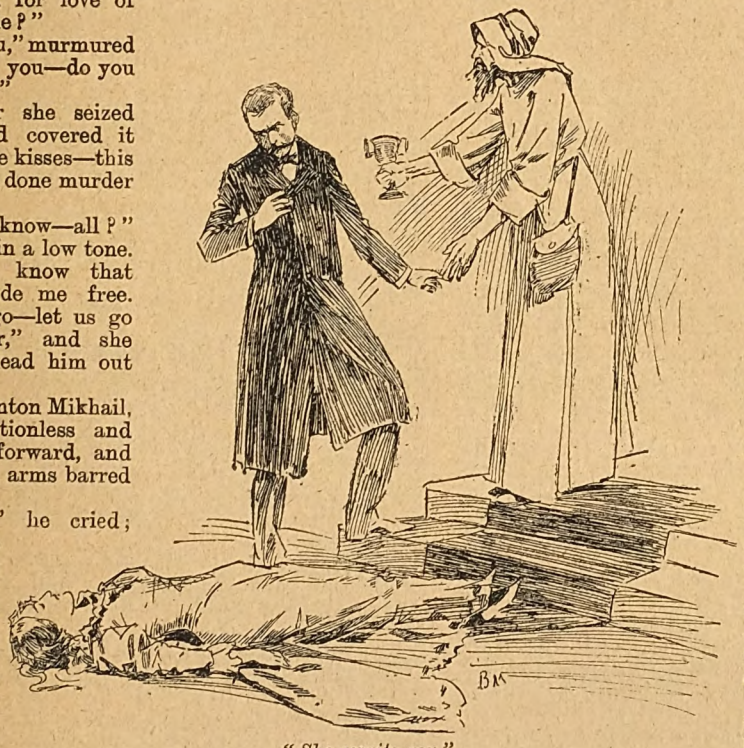
"Do they know—all?" asked Lucien in a low tone.

"All; they know that you have made me free. Now, let us go—let us go away together," and she rose as if to lead him out into the park.

Suddenly Anton Mikhail, till then motionless and mute, strode forward, and with extended arms barred their way.

"Cowards!" he cried; "you shall not go! God has led you to pardon; you must bow to it!"

Marfa drew back into the room, her lover following her.



"She awaits you."

"Marfa," pursued the fanatic, "the hour of expiation has sounded, and you know well how God exacts expiation. He Himself taught us, in Himself wishing for death. Death—propitiatory death—will wash away all guilt, cleanse of all sin; it is the baptism of life, it is the Great Pardon. But the law of the Bleeding Lamb is inexorable.

"Voluntary murder is only atoned by self-immolation, the blood of others can only be washed away in our own." He was silent, at once ferocious and suppliant. Marfa said not a word, but softly took Lucien's hand in hers, and together they drew near the altar.

"My daughter—my dear daughter," said the priest, taking his place at the altar, "here, in this chalice, is Paradise for both of you."

"Paradise, father—the Paradise of which you have told me so often, the Paradise of eternal love?"

For all response, Anton Mikhail took the wooden chalice and held it towards the couple.

Lucien opened his arms; the young woman threw herself into them, and lip to lip, clasped in each other's arms, they stood thus, in silence for a moment.

"Father," said Marfa, at last, "in the eternity to which you would send us will my beloved never be separated from me?"

"No, dear child. God is called Justice, but he is also called Love. Trust in Him. Your marriage in death will be for all time."

Tearing herself from the loves of earth, Marfa stretched forth her hand for the chalice that held eternal love.

"Give it me quickly, father," she cried; "I shall leave a share for you, Lucien," and she drank the deadly draught. She gave the chalice back into the priest's hand, swayed for a moment and fell on her face upon the floor.

"Saved!" cried Mikhail, and he offered the poison to Lucien, saying: "She awaits you."

Lucien hesitated for a moment; then, closing his eyes, he drained the cup, and in his turn fell dead beside the woman he had loved.

James Rockell.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 10.

Curiously enough, the first correct card to hand this week comes from Cardiff. All the competitors, London and provincial, whose attempts arrived before that sent by Mr. J. Burke, 3 Burgh Street, Riverside, Cardiff, gave the word "house" (p. 290, c. 1, line 21), of which two-fifths of the letters were turned; or "man" (p. 316, c. 1, line 38), of which the "m" alone was turned. The correct word is "stood" (p. 290, c. 2, line 67). The "inner radius" guinea goes to Mr. A. J. Stevens, P.O., H.M.S. *Repulse*, Chatham.

POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 12.

If A=17, E=19, I=20, O=25, and U=3, what word on this page is of the greatest numerical value. Give the word and its total value in plain characters on the back of a post-card, together with your name and address. A guinea goes to the reader who first points this out, and another to the reader living more than a hundred miles from London. *Post-cards only, please*—other forms of communication disqualified.

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THE WHITE ELEPHANT.

"SHE's a-goin' fast," murmured the Widow Mudge as she bent over John Holcomb's wife and noted the laboured breathing and ashen look of the sick woman.

"Ye don't mean it, do ye, Betsy?" said Mrs. Pringle, who was assisting the widow in the care of the invalid. "She's been a-goin' so many years I don't much believe her time's come now."

"I tell ye, Cinthy," retorted the widow with a grim satisfaction, "I tell ye that airs death." And she added hastily: "I think mebbe we'd orter call John."

"Well, I should think we had orter," replied Mrs. Pringle. "A man wants to know when his own wife's a-passin' away."

So she hurried through the low-ceilinged, whitewashed kitchen, in which lingered the subtle aroma of boiled beef and cabbage, and through the woodshed to the back porch, where John Holcomb sat engaged in mending a rake and talking to another man sitting in a light spring waggon drawn up before the door.

"John," said Mrs. Pringle, touching him on the shoulder, "I do believe Martha's hour has come. The widder thinks so, too. Ye'd better come in and pray, hadn't ye?"

John rose, and, drawing a face befitting the occasion, said to the man in the waggon: "Joel, I wisht ye'd hold on a minute; if Martha's really so bad as they say, I'd better send to town by ye fer to get her coffin. I shan't have no chance to go myself, an' you kin git it jest as well as me."

"All right," replied Joel Purdy; "I'll set here till ye come back an' tell me how she is."

John Holcomb, who was a thin man with a sandy beard and meek grey eyes, disappeared within the woodshed, followed by Mrs. Pringle's fluttering cap strings. He was absent only a moment or two, when he returned with pale, solemn-visage and perturbed air.

"Yes, she's a-goin' sure," he half whispered, "I'll resk gittin' it. Martha's five foot two, an' thinner'n a poker, so ye won't have no trouble findin' one ready made. They come a mite cheaper, I fancy. I wisht ye'd call at Parmlee's, too, an' ask him to come out, so's I can arrange bout the buryin'. Ye might's well tell folks we'll probably have the funeral day after to-morrow."

Having received his melancholy commissions, Joel drove away, while John returned to engage in prayer at the bedside of his dying spouse.

Mrs. Martha Holcomb had been dying for years: time and again had she announced that she could not survive the day. Over and over had she taken to her bed for the last time. Whenever her children or grandchildren departed after paying her a visit, she called them to her and, after bidding them a solemn and final farewell, adjured them to meet her "beyond Jordan, where the wicked cease from troubling." It was one of Mrs. Holcomb's fond delusions that the wicked had set snares for her feet all her life; that they were determined to make her stumble and fall into the pit. She yearned to be set free from these abominations, and really tried her best to die. But the wiry little woman had strong vitality, and as, after all, there was really nothing the matter with her, save slight attacks of what her neighbour, Mrs. Pringle, called "magrums," she had held out to a reasonable age.

But this last attack, whatever its nature, had assumed quite a serious turn, and even her husband, who had been known to speak rather slightingly of "Ma's conniption fits," was now thoroughly alarmed and convinced that he was about to lose his life partner. Accordingly, with the thrift begotten of his daily experience, he determined to secure a bargain in coffins and have it on hand when the fatal moment should arrive.

Mrs. Holcomb lay in a stupor all day, never rousing until sunset, just at the moment that Joel Purdy drove into the yard with his long, ghastly freight. John Holcomb was standing in the porch as Joel reined up his horses.

Together the two men lifted out the coffin and bore it tenderly into the kitchen, where they deposited it on a couple of chairs, and, drawing back, regarded it with the gaze of connoisseurs.

"It looks fust-rate," was John's comment; "good strong one, hain't it, Joel?"

"'Twas the best Ben Cook had in stock," replied Joel, his head on one side, as he eyed his purchase critically, "an' bein' ready made, he'll let you have it dirt cheap, he said."

"Well, I'm obleeged to you, Joel," said John, as he followed his neighbour to the kitchen door, "an' mebbe you'll ask your wife to come over this evenin' an' help lay Martha out. Mrs. Pringle an' the widder air clean beat out a-nussin' of her."

"Why, yes, John, certainly I will. I know Mrs. Purdy'd jest soon come as not." And vouchsafing this encouraging statement, Joel turned his horses and drove homeward.

As John stepped back into the kitchen, the stillness of the house suddenly smote him. The widow Mudge, wearied out, had gone home for a nap. Mrs. Pringle was in the pantry cutting up the cold ham for supper. John felt calm and peaceful, and resigned to the trial he was about to undergo.

Suddenly he heard a voice, sharp, irritable, querulous:

"John!"

The sparse hairs on John's bald head stood up. A trembling seized his limbs. His face grew pale. He gasped.

"John!" called the voice again.

At this, Mrs. Pringle emerged from the pantry, a slice of ham dangling from the fork in one uplifted hand, the knife in the other. Her eyes were fairly popping from her head.

"Why, John," she panted, "that's Mrs. Holcomb's voice. She's a-callin' ye. She——"

"I know it," cried John, in a terrible tone, "she's a-callin' me. She hain't dyin' after all, ye see, an' jest look at that there coffin settin' right there. Will ye, for the love of Heaven, hide it somewheres afore she gits up an' sees it?" And, clutching his hair in impotent despair, he went into his wife's room.

Mrs. Pringle was a woman of action. She was as strong as a man, and alert as a cat. Realising John Holcomb's awful predicament, she rose at once to the situation. Dropping knife, fork and ham, with one supreme effort, she pounced upon the coffin, lifted it and vanished.

When, ten minutes later, she reappeared, flushed and guilty, she saw an apparition wrapped in a patchwork

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bed-quilt before the kitchen fire. It was the sick woman, who an hour before was believed to be *in extremis*. There she sat, comfortably ensconced in an easy-chair, toasting her feet at the oven, and smiling feebly as she sipped a cup of tea handed her by the trembling hands of John.

"Why, Mrs. Holcomb," said John's fellow conspirator, "how careless of ye. Ye've been dreadful ill. Ye hadn't orter got up so sudden, had ye?"

"I couldn't stand that air bed another minute," declared the invalid. "It was as hard as a marble tombstun."

John gave such a start that the spoon beat a little tattoo on the saucer, as he passed a fresh cup of tea to his spouse. Mrs. Pringle looked demurely down, and smoothed out the creases in her gingham apron.

"I really thought the hour of my departure had come," went on Mrs. Holcomb, smacking her lips over her tea.

"So did some other folk," thought Mrs. Pringle, stealing a sly glance at John. The unfortunate man was truly a pitiable object. His brow was covered with perspiration, and he shook as if seized with an ague.

"But my strength is renewed," continued Martha, "and though yet very feeble, I feel that a time, times and half-times, are still mine. But I need some nourishment dretfully. Mrs. Pringle, I do believe I could relish one of them slices of ham."

Mrs. Pringle smiled as she went back to the pantry. "I'll bet anything," she said to herself, as she fell to slicing a loaf of bread, "that she heerd me cutting that ham and that's what fetched her out of that bed. She does love good vittles, though she don't know nothin' 'bout preparin' on 'em. But that air coffin! If it don't beat anything. What in the name of the old cat will he do with it? I fancy he's got a white elephant on his hands."

There was a movement behind her. She turned quickly to meet John's pallid face, glassy eyes and parched lips.

Lifting his voice so that his wife could hear him in the kitchen, he said: "Jest reach me a jug, will ye, Mrs. Pringle? I'm a-goin' down to the cellar fer ter git some cider fer my poor, dear, sufferin' wife." Then in a low, hurried whisper: "What have you done with it?"

"It?" asked Mrs. Pringle, with a puzzled air. Though she perfectly understood his question, she enjoyed his alarm and confusion.

"Yes, that air jug'll do fust-rate," said John in strident tones to gain time. Then lower: "Yes—it—it—that air blamed—old—coffin?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Pringle, "oh, you mean that. It's safe."

"Where? Where?" persisted John.

"In the loft over the hog-pen," whispered his tormenter as she handed down the jug.

* * * * *

Mrs. Holcomb continued to improve rapidly, and in a week or so was able to attend to her household duties. John, however, was on the verge of nervous prostration. At any moment some officious and meddlesome person might tell his wife of his premature bargain. He knew the temper of his consort, and that if she were to discover he had been so ready to assist her departure from this world, he would know no peace from her waspish tongue. He could depend upon the village cabinet-maker, who had supplied the coffin; upon Joel Purdy and Mrs. Pringle, for these he had sworn to secrecy; but at least a dozen other people had seen Joel driving along with his gruesome burden, and had received the information that it was intended for John Holcomb's wife. The sword was suspended over his head. At any moment it might fall.

He grew nervous and fidgety, starting like a guilty thing whenever his wife addressed him. He paid stolen visits to the loft, and regarded his bargain with looks as black as its sable cover. At times he was tempted to destroy it; and reckless visions of the glorious bonfire it would make darted through his brain. But John Holcomb was a penurious man. He could not bear to waste anything—even a coffin. There was ever the possibility that his wife might——

John always turned away from these meditations in a state of mingled hope and fear.

One morning Joel drove up to the door and called to John to ask if he had heard the news:

"What news?"

"Old Si Hawkins can't live till night, they say. He's jest a-gaspin' like a fish," returned Joel.

John was seized with an inspiration. "Joel," he hoarsely whispered, "ef you're a-goin' 'long by there, I'll jest jine ye."

"Well, git in—git in," said Joel cheerfully, "I'll be glad of your company."

"Joel," said John, when they had jogged along a few minutes, "do ye know why I'm a-goin' over to Si Hawkins'?"

"Why, I suppose fer to neighbour with his folks in the hour of sorrow."

"Well, of course," said John, "that is my principal reason fer a-goin'; but, Joel, I think mebbe I can drive a trade an' git thet air coffin off my hands. I tell you, Joel, thet thing'll drive me clean crazy if I don't git rid on it. Now, if Si was willin' ter swap a calf——"

"How can he when he's a-dyin'?" demanded Joel.

"Well, I mean his folks, of course. I'd take a calf or barn-yard tools—Joel, I'd take almost anything fer that coffin," concluded poor John.

"Yes," said Joel musingly, "I understand how ye feel 'bout it, John. If I was in your shoes, an' had a wife with Mrs. Holcomb's temper, I shouldn't want no coffins about. But s'pose Si's folks say they'll take it, how are ye a-goin' to manage to git the thing away without Mrs. Holcomb a-seein' of it?"

"I dunno," said John despondently, "I hain't thought so fer as thet."

"Ye might git 'em to cart it away at night after she's gone to bed," suggested Joel.

"Thet's so," cried John eagerly, "you're a fust-rate one to plan, Joel. I do hope that Si's folks will agree to take it. You see, Joel," argumentatively, "they've got to have one. Thet stands to reason. Well, they might jest as well take mine as git one from town. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Joel, "seems as if it would be a foolish waste of time and labour to haul up a coffin from town, when there's one handy in the neighbourhood. I'll tell ye what I'll do, John, to help ye out. If they take your coffin, I'll come over to-night an' git it and take it down there, after you and Mrs. Holcomb are fast asleep," and he nudged John playfully.

"Joel," said John, grasping his hand, "you're a friend in need. Help me to git thet air coffin off my premises an' anything I can do for you, jest call on me."

By this time they had reached the Hawkins' farmhouse,

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and John, descending from the waggon, tiptoed softly up the front steps and knocked—a gentle, deprecating knock, befitting the solemnity of the moment. He was admitted by one of the daughters of the house, and invited to be seated.

"How's your pa?" he asked nervously.

"He's very low. Can't last till night, the doctor says."

"Can I see your ma?" was the next timid question.

"Yes," said Matilda Hawkins, manifesting no special surprise at the request; and going to the adjoining bedroom, spoke to her mother, who presently appeared.

She was a gaunt woman with large features and firm mouth. She shook hands with her neighbour and sat down.

"I jest heerd this mornin' how bad off Si was," said John, "an' I hurried over to see ef there's anything I can do."

"No, thank you," returned Mrs. Hawkins, "there hain't nothin' nobody can do. He's jest alive an' that's all. How's Mrs. Holcomb?"

"She's pretty well," said John nervously.

"Well, it was amazin' how she got over thet last attack of hern," observed Mrs. Hawkins. "I never was so beat over nothin'."

"Nor I," said John earnestly.

"I should be jest as much surprised to see Si Hawkins come a-walkin' out of that air bedroom," said the lady. "You'd given her up, hadn't ye?"

"Yes," said John, "I had even made all calculations for the buryin', got the coffin an' all."

"Why, so I heerd," said Mrs. Hawkins. "Astonishin'!"

"I didn't know," stammered John, "but what if you hadn't spoke fer one—thet bein' as how you'd have to have one—I might sell you mine, or swap it—or—or—somethin'," he finished helplessly.

"Buy what?" inquired Mrs. Hawkins.

"Why—my—thet is—Mrs. Holcomb's coffin."

"Do ye want to sell it?"

"Do I?" shouted John. Then, lowering his voice, he added: "Excuse me, Mrs. Hawkins, fer hollerin' so loud, but if you could know how I've suffered from thet air coffin, you'd feel fer me. Do take it! If Mrs. Holcomb was ever to find it, I dunno as she'd live with me a day—no—nor an hour."

"How big is it?" asked the prudent widow-elect.

"It's a good size," replied John, trembling with joy at the encouraging tone of her voice, "Martha's five foot two, an' it's plenty long fer her."

"Thet would do fer Si," said Mrs. Hawkins thoughtfully. "He was always a small man, and, lawd! he's shrunk up to nothin' now. I s'pose you'll sell cheap?"

"Yes, you can have it cheap. I'll knock off ten shillings, or if you'd ruther, you can swap somethin' fer it."

"Well," said Mrs. Hawkins, who was keener at a bargain than even John himself, "I'll swap ye a plough fer it."

"Don't need no plough," hesitated John.

"Well," said his neighbour, "from all I can hear, you need one as much as you do a coffin. Thet's all I'll do. The plough's out there in front of the barn. You can look at it, and ef you want to swap fer thet, I'll take the coffin an' agree to keep my mouth shet."

John expostulated, but in vain. He had met his match. He went out and examined the plough. It was a crazy old affair, and would need considerable patching before it would be of any use, but he decided to accept the proposition. "Mrs. Hawkins'd skin the hide off ye," he confided to Joel, "but I've got to do it. I don't see noo other way out of the mess."

So the bargain was struck. Joel was to deliver the coffin at ten o'clock that night, while John was to come after the plough at his convenience.

* * * * *

"John," said Mrs. Holcomb, with a sharp poke, "wake up. There's someone about. I believe they're down at the hencoop."

John started up and listened. He distinctly heard the door of the hogpen open. Joel was about it.

"Bosh," he hastily remarked, "there hain't no noise. You're always a-hearin' of somethin'. Lie down, Martha, an' go to sleep, or you'll be havin' one of your worst spells."

"Never mind," replied his consort, as she put on her dress, "there's something wrong out there, an' I mean to see what it is."

John was driven to extremity. Through the soft summer night he could hear Joel dragging something heavy down the stairs from the loft. He heard the horses stamp, and Joel softly say: "Whoa!" once or twice. What should he do? If his wife insisted on going out, she would discover his awful secret. In some way he must distract her attention until Joel should get safely away with the coffin.

He hesitated one instant, then with a yell which would have terrified a band of Apaches, he seized the water jug from the washstand, and deliberately flung himself over the large rocking-chair at the foot of the bed.

The yell, the crash of breaking china, the deluge of water, and the fear that her husband had gone suddenly insane, was too much for Mrs. Holcomb. She fainted upon the bed, while John, drenched, cut, bleeding, but triumphant, rose from the *débris* as Joel drove quietly past the bedroom window. He was saved!

* * * * *

It was the evening after the funeral services of Silas Hawkins. John Holcomb and his wife sat at their supper-table. The lady was reviewing the event of the day.

"It was as pleasant a funeral as I ever see," she observed. "The minister's remarks was very satisfying."

"Yes, that's so," assented her husband.

"The singin' was good, and the flowers was nice. I thought Mrs. Hawkins had orter had a new bunnit, but she's near, so near, I s'pose she wouldn't spend the money."

"I never see no closer woman," agreed John, with a sigh, as he thought of the rickety old plough.

"But what struck me," said Mrs. Holcomb, reaching for the cold corned beef, "was the coffin."

John shivered.

"It was a fine one," went on his wife. "I was surprised ter see so good a coffin. I wonder where she got it. Did Ben Cook git thet up, John?"

"I don't know—I s'pose—how do I know?" fell in jerks from John's blue lips.

"Well," said his wife composedly, "I never see a coffin I was so taken with. When the hour of my departure comes, John—an' it's liable, you know, to come at any minute—I'd like to have you git a coffin for me as near like thet as you can, for I never see no nicer pattern of a coffin."

Poor John could not speak.

E. S. Tupper.

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JUMBLE STORY No. 12.

TED CAPEC.

See Page 384.

He had gone into a shop to buy her some roses, and borrowed. It was only a small sum, for the paint. His bride of less than a year made him the chance of life; a week, even longer perhaps—but lips he pressed so tenderly heeded not his passionate hæmorrhage and actual disease."

"How she would have rejoiced over my first child thrown out of harm's way; the fragile rescuer should come now."

With hair half unbound she stood, a dark, proud most perfect Hero that ever watched for Leander.

He was not allowed to go to his wife yet; for Parker does not do things by halves.

So Foster did what he had sworn he would never he kissed the death damp from her brow.

The Artist put the girl into position again and left his wife's bedside. At the end came the return and an almost too ethereal beauty in her eyes.

"I shall be here again later, but I am afraid there would not have lent him anything. But it saw enough. He realised everything.

There were many men besides Jack Foster stays away. When I no longer need or welcome God, it is too hard; I cannot bear it."

* * * * *

"In this world," muttered Foster to himself the varnishing ticket; and the irony of it that it thought she was by his side. Then he saw a run- at each visit was more importunate that his patient relaxing—most important if organic mischief were but still a child; while half-way across the year; maybe there were many better pictures than Evelyn.

"Accepted!" he cried; then his agony was sharp after all," he murmured.

He opened the envelope carelessly and drew back unopened, and then Foster went to a friend after all, you see," she whispered, and the smile on her husband's anxious look.

"Sometimes Fate's little jokes are not so unkind the girl went on:

Before he could move the tragedy was over—the goddess, watching, with an unfathomable look of her face deepened into absolute radiant content; and her old buoyancy return, and the far away surgeon rubbed his glasses and continued:

"Sweetheart, you are not so well to-day," he said and until a shrill cry made him look round he half crushed a letter that he held unopened in his hand right? I am afraid I turned my head."

The picture was finished and sent in before she were taken all might be well, and he watched for while he waited a maid brought in a letter. He for the first time noticed how fragile she had grown, he stared at it:

The days passed slowly and Jack Foster scarcely watched the colour come back to Evelyn's cheeks, directly in its way a tiny child—dirty and unkempt, and at first Jack Foster did not realise that the fate of our picture," she said afterwards, in reply to see a doctor."

An hour later the doctors had completed their hand.

"I am so glad, darling. I did bring you luck of consciousness, and she smiled faintly at him as Foster could never quite transfer to canvas.

"Nothing to be done." Jack Foster sat motion- senseless on the ground.

"This feverishness is only anxiety to know the man was poor—probably if he had been rich he should go to a dryer climate. "London was too cold, and if he were to forbid my posing! What doctor. Go on painting, I am quite rested. Is my name and lead to endless commissions and bring kisses.

"It has been taken, little one." His voice was to be prevented. Delay now might result in examination and given their verdict: "No possible road, with arms outstretched to save it, was his, but no one had a more beautiful woman to House, but Dr. Clayton came again and again, and much depended on money now. The letter came tenderly, a few days before his picture was finished, do; he wrote to Evelyn's father and told him how as he stopped suddenly in his work. "You must opened it mechanically, and read without under- standing it, but the contents grew clear to him as keenly anxious to have their pictures taken that look died out of her eyes. Now if only his picture find they have not space to hang it."

"Your picture, Jack?" she breathed.

"Then if it's accepted that means it is sold as husky, but well under control.

"Yes, darling, if they take it it means Davos gaily.

"Not, yet Jack," she pleaded. "It is only a little Platz for you and commissions innumerable for me; that is all."

The man crossed over and kissed her softly, and send for his picture "as the Committee regret to her she comes." In the bitterness of his soul he consented to see a doctor. And when he shook his head and talked gravely of Davos Platz she laughed longing in her glorious eyes, that try as he would and unjust. When success means everything she well. Oh, Jack, if they only take it."

The days passed with no news from Burlington away horse dashing madly down the street, and less.

"Sir James Parker saw it one day and offered you ever so much money, isn't it?"

"When you have sent it in, dear, then I will se- a the posts eagerly.

Foster took the news as one stunned. The day after the funeral, "things are horribly unequal should we do then? This picture is to make your out not the ticket but a request that he would them safely settled at Davos Platz, and Jack me a hundred guineas for it if it is hung."

"To lose her on the point of winning all. Oh, is nothing to be done."

MR. C. Y. BANT

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By George Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER XX.

A Terrible Complication.

"A lady, sir," said Rancer—"strange lady. Just come in a cab. Been in some accident."

"Why does she come to me? Send her to Mr. Gainsford. I'm not a surgeon."

"Said she had come from Lord Braetoun, sir. Would see you."

"Good Heavens, madam! You here?" cried Murray, as he saw the door move, and Lucy Lee stood before him, ghastly pale, her bonnet crushed and torn, and a long scratch across her face, which had bled slightly and been badly wiped.

"Yes. Come at once. He's dying. Pray, pray make haste!"

"Braetoun dying!"

The words went through Murray like a galvanic shock, and everything else was forgotten.

"What is it? You have been in an accident?"

"Yes, but come, pray come."

He did not hesitate. His thoughts were mingled, and for the moment he could think of nothing but obeying the summons.

The cab she had come in was waiting, and he followed her.

"Quick!" he said to the driver; "Chester Square."

"No, no; Brompton Square," cried Lucy wildly.

"But is he not at home?"

"Yes, I took him home, and there's a doctor with him; but he is so horribly hurt I felt that I must fetch you."

"You took him home," murmured Murray confusedly, and then to himself, as the light fully broke upon him. "Then she does not know!"

He was silent for a few moments, during which Lucy tried to speak to him, but broke down and covered her face with her hands, to burst into a hysterical fit of sobbing.

At last, though, she sat up and gazed piteously in his face.

"You saved him before; you will again?" she said.

"I will do all I can; but try and tell me what has happened."

He looked at her strangely, for her dishevelled aspect and the injury to her forehead suggested an encounter. He had read of such things. Was it possible that in a quarrel he had struck her, and in a mad fit of passion she had retaliated with some weapon?

"We were going—down to the races," she faltered, with a great effort—"Rod was driving four-in-hand—there was a waggon in the way—I hardly know—the next moment there was a horrible crash, and he was down among the horses' feet, and they were kicking him."

She shuddered and held her hands to her breast, as if to stay the tumultuous throbbing of her heart. Then, making an effort, she went on:

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"I just saw that, and then I seemed to go to sleep, and when I opened my eyes again I was lying in a room with poor Auntie, whose arm was broken, and dear Rod was in the next room with people trying to bring him to.

"But it was a long time before he opened his eyes, and then he didn't even know me. The doctor said one of the horses had kicked him in the head, and they wanted to take him to the hospital, but I—we brought him home. Pray, pray tell the cabman to drive faster."

Murray mechanically gave the message, and then reseated himself, with the new trouble making his head swim. Braetoun at this woman's house, perhaps seriously injured, and Olive in ignorance of her husband's state.

The cab drew up at the number in Brompton Square that Lucy gave; and as they entered the house she left Murray in the hall, ran up the stairs to the drawing-room, and entered, to find the surgeon who had been called in kneeling by a mattress on the floor.

"Oh, Rod, Rod," she moaned, and she was about to fling herself down beside him, when the surgeon sternly interposed.

"Hush!" he said. "Silence! Not a word, or I will not be answerable for the consequences."

"But I am his——"

Lucy stopped with her lips apart.

"Yes, so I conclude, madam; but I am doing everything possible for your husband. Come with me into another room. I must speak to you."

He sternly backed her on to the landing, and said quickly as he closed the door: "I must have perfect silence in the house—a trained nurse must be in attendance."

"Oh, please, please let me!" she pleaded wildly.

"Hush, madam. Calmness and decision are necessary. You are yourself suffering from shock, and totally unfit. I wanted to tell you, too, that the case is so grave that I wish for some able medical man to be called for consultation, and—— I beg your pardon, sir; this is private, if you please."

"No, no," whispered Lucy excitedly. "This is Doctor Murray. I have been to fetch him."

"Yes, and I am an old friend of Lord Braetoun."

"Indeed! I beg pardon. I am glad to meet you. I knew your name well. Will you kindly step in?"

Murray followed him into the drawing-room, and Lucy crouched down upon the floor with her throbbing head resting in her hands, and the consultation went on, a low murmur reaching her ears from time to time. While beyond the door Allan Murray found that Braetoun's position was grave enough; severe concussion of the brain and a rib broken, with possible laceration of a lung.

The consultation and examination were long, and the surgeon said at last:

"If he were some sturdy young fellow, full of life, I should

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have hope, but he seems to have been in very bad health, fragile in the extreme. You have perhaps attended him?"

"Many times," said Murray gravely, and he gave a brief history of the last attack.

The surgeon tightened his lips, shrugged his shoulders, and said quietly:

"Well, sir, we must do all that we can. Will you suggest anything you would wish?"

"I can suggest nothing," said Murray, as he stood looking down at the pale face and bandaged head before him, and he shuddered slightly as he thought of what must be done.

"His friends ought to be communicated with at once. Will you undertake the painful task of speaking to Lady Braetoun?"

"Of speaking to Lady Braetoun?" said Murray with a start, and then he paused. "I cannot—I dare not," he muttered, and the surgeon looked wonderingly at him.

"Shall I go?" said the surgeon. "I see it would be very painful to you as the lady's friend."

"Painful, indeed," said Murray at last. "Lady Braetoun is an old friend, sir, and a lady whom I deeply reverence. The shock of this horrible mishap will nearly kill her. Can you help me under the circumstances to keep the whole truth from her, and spare her an additional agony?"

"Would it be right, sir?" said the surgeon sternly. "You are a man of eminence in the profession; should we be justified, in the face of such severe injuries, in keeping back the truth?"

"Not of his accident," said Murray bitterly. "I must be more plain. At any cost I must get my poor friend home. Lady Braetoun must not know under what circumstances the accident occurred."

"The overturning of a brake—want of skill in driving. But you said home. Impossible. If this is not their home, they must make arrangements to stay. Surely, sir, a little further consideration will show you the danger of the step."

"Yes, I see it without further consideration," said Murray gravely; "he must not be moved, but the lady whom we have seen is not Lady Braetoun, sir."

"Ah—h—h!" said the surgeon softly, and he tightened his lips. "Yes, I see, I see. Poor lady! The old, old story. It would save her—but no, the symptoms are too grave; I dare not."

"Yes," said Murray, with a weary sigh, "you are right. The symptoms are too grave; we dare not."

He turned mutely to his colleague, who interpreted rightly his silent question.

"Yes," he said, "we cannot help ourselves. Lord Braetoun's relatives must be told at once."

Murray bowed his head, stepped back to the injured man, bent over him for a short space, and then rose to quit the room.

"I will send in his old nurse as soon as possible," he said firmly. "You will stay?"

"Oh, yes, he must not be left."

As Murray reached the landing Lucy started to his side.

"May I go in now?"

"No; it is impossible."

"Oh, don't say that," she cried in a passionate whisper. "I can't bear it. Pray, pray let me go. I'll nurse him; do anything. Don't, pray don't keep me away; it is too cruel."

"Heaven knows, my poor girl, that I do not want to be cruel to you, but I am forced to say that you must not go."

"Then he is worse? I was right. He is dying!"

"No; he is not dying. He is in a very dangerous condition, but there is always hope. Now for his sake be patient, and leave it to those who will do their best to save his life."

"Ah! You are going! No, no, don't, pray don't go. You must stay with him. He has often told me that no one but you could save him when he was ill."

"I am going to send in a nurse, and——"

"Yes. I know: to get a carriage to take him away. He shall not go. It would kill him. I would die first. I know: it's because he is here with me."

"I am not going to fetch a carriage to take him away," said Murray sternly, "for it would kill him to be moved."

"Ah!" ejaculated the girl.

"But I must let his friends know of his condition. I am obliged to tell you that."

"His friends?" she cried, looking at him wildly. "Yes," she added, with a curious smile, "you are going to tell his wife. Well, I am sorry for her, but why tell her? She wouldn't come near him now."

Murray made no reply to that, but said hastily:

"As soon as the nurse comes——"

"No, no; he shall have no nurse but me."

"He must have a properly trained nurse if his life is to be saved."

"Oh!" groaned Lucy, and her pallid face grew convulsed.

"If you have any proper feeling you will help the lady I send in to do her duty."

"Yes, yes, Doctor," she said, clasping her hands and looking up at him appealingly; "I will—I will do everything; I'll be her servant. I'll do everything you wish, and be so patient and humble. Yes, indeed, I will. Go quickly, please. Don't mind what I said, only pray don't be cruel to me, because—because—yes, that's right. Go now. I'll wait, and get anything the other doctor wants."

He hurried out, feeling that his task was becoming doubly hard, so hard that for the moment there was little room to think of self.

CHAPTER XXI.

Playing to Lose.

Murray went straight to the nurses' home, was fortunate in his search, dispatched the attendant, and ten minutes later he was at Eaton Place, and was shown into Emsworth's library.

"Ah, Doctor, glad to see you, but, eh? What is it? Something wrong?"

Murray told him briefly.

"I could almost read it in your face," said Emsworth. "The fool! The idiot! No, poor devil! An accident. Might have happened to any of us. But how horrible! Olive! It will nearly break her heart. We mustn't tell her."

Murray looked at him fixedly.

"Eh? You think we must?"

"He is in a grave condition."

"You don't mean that? Tut—tut—tut! Dangerous? My poor, poor girl! I suppose we must tell her before they bring him home."

"They cannot bring him home, not for weeks to come—if we can save his life."

"Worse and worse. Where do you say he is—at some house where they took him? How was it they sent for you? He was sensible then?"

Murray drew a deep breath and then completed his communication, and Emsworth started from his seat, and, forgetting his pains, began to walk up and down the room, to the window and back.

"Out with her then! A scoundrel! A judgment on him, and at her house. The miserable Jezebel. This is worse than all. He must be brought away before she knows."

"It is impossible, or I would have had it done at once."

"You would, yes, I know you would, for her sake," groaned Emsworth. "But we can't tell her then. She must think he has gone off on some mad expedition, and know nothing till he is worse or better. I couldn't look her in the face and tell her he has been such a scoundrel to her."

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"It is in the evening papers by now," said Murray, "and she is sure to know."

"Yes, she is sure to know," groaned Emsworth from the window. "Ah! Look here, man, look here!" he shouted.

As Murray reached the open window a boy was crying out papers across the way, a bundle under his arm, and one hand holding a contents bill, with, in big letters:

"Fatal Carriage Accident at Brompton. Death of Lord Braetoun."

"And you told me he was only badly hurt," said Emsworth reproachfully. "Am I such an old woman that you must break the news gently?"

"I told you the simple truth. I have just come from sending a nurse to his side. He is very, very bad, and there is nothing more to be done yet. We may save his life. I can say no more."

That "may" sent a peculiar chill through Isaac Emsworth, and he stood gazing hard at his visitor.

"What shall you do?" said Murray, whose deep voice sounded strangely impressive.

"Ha! I must go and tell her at once," said Emsworth bitterly. "Good God! What news for a father to take to the girl who is everything to him! How can I tell her? It is horrible! I never knew I was such a coward till now. Lying there, at that woman's house! Fool! Idiot! I must have been mad ever to encourage the match! I can't help it—his doing—I wouldn't be such a brute, but I can't help saying it; wouldn't it be better for her if the news that scoundrel is yelling were true, quite true?"

Murray's heart gave one great throb, and he turned pale as death.

The two men stood gazing at each other as if trying to read the thoughts that half maddened them, and at last Murray spoke as if Emsworth's question had not reached his ears.

"I am going back to Braetoun."

"No!" cried Emsworth angrily; "not yet, I feel a broken, helpless old coward, and I—I dare not face her to tell her where he lies. Can we not—keep it back about what place it is; or at all risks he must be taken home before she knows that truth."

"It is impossible, Mr. Emsworth. He cannot be moved."

"Heaven help me then! I never needed its help more. Go for me, Murray—go and break it to her—as gently as you can—you know her well; she has such trust and faith in you."

Murray shrank from him with a look of horror.

"I? I go and tell her?" he cried. "Impossible!"

Then more calmly, as he fought hard to master his emotion:

"No, you cannot mean it. If this terrible news is to be broken to Lady Braetoun, and it must be before she hears in this brutal way exaggerated and shouted through the streets. The task must come from you."

"Yes, it must come from me," groaned Emsworth, who was trembling like a leaf.

"Go at once, sir," said Murray, more calmly now. "Break it as gently as you can. Tell her in a way to make her hopeful. I'll go back to the house and see if I cannot get this woman away."

"Ah, yes; of course," cried Emsworth, snatching at the thread of hope. "Why should she know whose house it is? With care we may keep the news from her till he can be moved. And look here, Murray, money will do a great deal. Use it as freely as you like. Spare no expense. Spend thousands if it is necessary, only keep this horrible position from her ears. Come, let's go at once."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN OWL OF ILL TIDINGS.

OLIVE, Lady Braetoun, was in her room putting the finishing touches, with the help of her maid, to a simple afternoon costume, and the carriage was waiting at the door. Her face was pale and troubled, and a faint line was dawning upon her broad white forehead, for she had been thinking a good deal during the past few days that she would try and wean her husband somewhat from the intense and feverish love he was developing, as it seemed to her, for the race-course. For the truth was beginning to dawn upon her that his monetary troubles were on the increase, and instead of his freeing himself, as he had assured himself he would, by a few lucky *coups*, matters were getting worse, and he was constantly absent from home.

She had not seen him for five days, for he had told her that he was compelled to go down to Newmarket and also to spend two days in Surrey at his little training stable, where his mare, Belladonna, had developed some strange disease.

So Braetoun went down to the Surrey farmstead and to Newmarket, but he did not send any message home. It was Highdown Races that day, and having unwillingly become acquainted, since her marriage, with racing fixtures, Olive concluded that Braetoun would be down there and return home at night.

The line grew a little deeper in her brow as she covered her fair young face with her veil, the act seeming to draw a cloud over its sunshine, and she trembled a little, wondering how he would be when he came home—happy and bright, and eager to take her in his arms, or dull, heavy, and bitter from losses, and complaining about the agonising pains in his head.

The veil had just been secured, and Olive was thinking that she would first go and call on the Dowager Lady Braetoun, when an upstairs bell rang for Melson.

"The bell, my lady."

"Yes; it is only to say that the carriage is waiting. Go and say that we know."

"Yes, my lady."

The next minute the maid was back in the room.

"If you please, my lady, Lady Braetoun is here, in the drawing-room."

"Oh," said Olive. "I'll go down."

But there was no look of delight in her eyes, for somehow the ties of affection between her and her former chaperon had not tightened since the wedding.

Olive moved to the door, but before she could reach it there was a sharp click, it flew open, and Braetoun's mother staggered in, looking wildly excited.

"Are you all treating it like this!" she cried. "Where is he? Where is he?"

Olive turned ghastly pale, and caught her visitor by the arm.

"What is it—what is wrong?"

"Then they haven't brought him here?"

"Brought—him—— Oh!" cried Olive wildly; "then something has happened to him! Quick, Lady Braetoun," she cried, seizing her now by the shoulders in her excitement. "Pray, pray, speak! Roderick—Roderick!"

Lady Braetoun was in an intense state of excitement, and bursting into a fit of hysterical sobbing, she wailed out:

"He's killed—he's killed, and the paper said they had brought him home."

Olive reeled and fell as if suddenly struck down, and Lady Braetoun, whose hands clutched the evening paper containing the terrible news, let it fall to sink on her knees, and began to tear off her daughter-in-law's veil and bonnet.

"Oh, my lady, my lady!" sobbed the maid, wringing her hands; "it's killed her—it's killed her!"

Lady Braetoun, who was the more collected of the two, pointed to the water on the stand, for she could not speak, and for the next few minutes that, eau-de-Cologne, and salts were tried in turn, but without avail.

The maid then took the initiative, tore at the bell, and on her own responsibility sent off one of the servants to Wimpole Street with a message to Murray.

"Widowed—doubly widowed!" groaned Lady Braetoun, as she sobbed hysterically over Olive; and then, as she took

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first one and then the other cold hand to raise it to her lips, she let them fall, and knelt there gazing straight before her.

"Oh, my lady! my lady!" cried Melson; "don't you be taken like this, too."

Lady Braetoun started and turned to the maid.

"That paper—quick!" she cried; and the maid handed it to her from where it lay crumpled on the floor.

"What did they mean by 'took him home'?" she cried vacantly, as she opened the sheet and turned it towards the girl. "I can't read it—I can't read it," she moans. "Quick! Tell me."

The girl mastered her sobs, and began to read the brief account, but Lady Braetoun interrupted:

"No, no, not that; the end—the end."

The girl uttered a loud sob, hastily dashed the tears from her eyes with her apron, and then read aloud the concluding paragraph of the report.

"Yes, yes," sobbed Lady Braetoun wildly. "I see it all now, that wretched woman was with him, and they took him there."

She began gesticulating with her hands, and rocked herself to and fro, sobbing hysterically.

"Oh, Roderick, my darling, and I did try so hard to win you back from your wicked ways," she cried. "I did think that now you would have repented, and left her altogether for your wife's sake. But I might have known why you were so much from home, neglecting her as you have. Cut off in your early manhood—at a time like this! A judgment upon you for your sin!"

"Oh, hush, hush, my lady!" whispered the maid excitedly.

"No, no; the truth must come out now," wailed Lady Braetoun, who was half delirious with grief; "everyone must know of his wicked, shameless life. I tried to hide it for her sake. I tried all a mother could, but only to be mocked, ill-treated, and reviled, and now it has come home, snatched away like that in his sins, to shame us both."

"My lady, my lady!" cried the maid in a hoarse whisper, as she took the unhappy woman by the shoulders, literally shook her, and ended by clapping a hand on her lips. "Hush, don't, pray, my lady. Can't you see she's coming to, and listening to every word?"

Lady Braetoun turned and looked in Olive's direction, to find that she had recovered her senses, and had raised herself upon her left elbow, while her right hand was holding her wet, dishevelled hair back from her brow, as she stared with dilated eyes at the speaker—her parted lips and ghastly face proclaiming that she grasped the full truth of all that was being said.

"Olive, my darling," cried Lady Braetoun wildly; "don't, don't look at me like that. It wasn't my fault, indeed."

"Roderick! Dead! Tell me, then, where is he now?"

Lady Braetoun uttered a passionate cry, and sank down on the carpet, burying her face in her hands, and then burst out into a series of hysterical shrieks.

Olive crawled to her, and as she bent over she drew the unhappy woman's hands from her face, as if unrelentingly determined to know all.

"Lady Braetoun, speak to me," she said in a strange, husky voice.

"No, no, no!" sobbed the hysterical woman.

"Speak! tell me! I will know the worst!"

"I did try—so hard, and—and he did leave her—but—but he went back."

"Who is this woman?" said Olive sternly.

"I can't—I daren't tell you, my dear. It is too horrible at a time like this, for he is dead—he is dead!"

"Dead?" said Olive where she knelt now, with her hands pressed to her temples. "Dead? No—no—no, it can't be true!"

"No, no; you can't come in!" cried the maid, who had suddenly rushed to the door. "My lady is taken ill."

"Stand back, girl!" cried Emsworth angrily. "Olive, my darling!"

"Father!" she cried wildly, as she stretched out her hands to him. "Take me, oh, take me! Dead—dead!"

She sank in his arms as he lifted her from where she knelt, and her head dropped back in perfect insensibility once again.

"Too late!" groaned Emsworth, turning to Lady Braetoun, who crouched dishevelled on the floor. "Does she know the worst?"

Lady Braetoun gazed at him with a pitiful, half-imbecile look on her countenance, as her lips feebly moved, but no words came, and Emsworth involuntarily turned to the trembling maid with so fiercely-questioning a look in his eyes that she whispered quickly:

"Yes, sir; I did try to stop her, but my lady told her all."

(To be continued.)

A Faithless Sentry.

SAID the President of the military court of Trofim Stoyan:

"You have been found guilty of the crime of aiding the escape of prisoner number two hundred and seventy-nine from the mine of Gorkaya-Balka. Before sentence is passed the court desires to hear from you your version of the circumstances of the prisoner's escape, and the motives which induced you to be false to the trust imposed on you. We understand that you dispute the correctness of some of the witnesses' statements. We warn you to speak the strict truth. Stand at attention."

As the President spoke, a slim young fellow, standing between two glittering bayonets, drew himself up to the attention, glanced at the spectators, and faced the court.

"Go on," said the President.

"Your excellency," began the soldier, "I don't want mercy, and I don't expect it; but you have asked me to tell the truth and I tell it. It was on a Saturday night, snowing hard and bitterly cold. Sergeant Petroff marched me up to the entrance of Gorkaya-Balka mine, and I relieved the sentry on duty there. I was to remain until midnight, and I received the usual orders to stop anyone who tried to enter or leave the gallery and to shoot them if they persisted. I was shivering with cold and kept tramping about in front of the entrance to keep warm. After the barrack clock had struck ten I noticed someone crouching in the shadow of the old tool house—a woman, I thought. It seemed darker there

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than out in the open. The snow was driving in my face.

"I felt queer and timid that night. Turning sharply round at the end of my beat farthest from the tool house I saw approaching me the figure of a woman in black. I got opposite the entry into the gallery and stood silent. I don't know why I felt scared. There was no one else about or nearer than the overseer's house. She came swiftly over the snow, and her face was covered with a veil. I couldn't speak; it was as if my tongue was frozen. She put her hands on my shoulders, and looked up into my face."

"What was she like?" demanded the President.

"Your excellency, I cannot describe her. I only saw her eyes then, and they were on fire, and went right through me. She told me much that I cannot recall, for I was looking, not listening. But at last I understood her to be talking of her brother in the mine. She said she had come all the way from Russia to see him, and that he was dying. She said that if I would let her into the mine for a few minutes she would always pray for me, and devote her whole life to making me happy. Her great black eyes bewitched me, and I believed her. I said nothing, but pointed to the mine, and in a moment she had fled into the dark opening to the gallery. I never thought of what I was doing. I was dazed, and stood stock still, and the snow kept falling all the time, and the night was growing darker. I had my eyes fixed on the entrance, and saw the figure emerge and run towards me.

"'Soldier,' she said, 'you have made me happy for life; make yourself happy and fly with us. Let my brother pass. I will lead you and him to a place where we will be happy together. Be good to me, soldier, and I will give you all you ask from me. I will be yours. I will live for you, and die for you.'

"Don't smile, excellency. I was intoxicated with her words. I believed her. Her arms were round my neck, and her face was lovely as the Madonna's. I seized my rifle and flung it with all my strength out into the snow. She put a file into my hands, and I followed her into the gallery. There the darkness was thicker still, but we groped our way to where a man stood chained to a thick wooden stanchion. I knew what I had to do. The man said nothing, but the woman kissed me; kissed me, excellency. So I worked like a madman. He was soon free.

"We reached the entrance as the barrack clock was striking eleven. There was a whole hour yet before the guard would be changed. We ran through the little wood and crossed the frozen river, and away beyond a wide open space, where the snow was very deep, we entered the pine woods. The woman knew where she was leading us, for we came to a hut where we found clothes and food. I buried my uniform in the snow. All that night we moved rapidly through the woods, hardly speaking to one another at first. But the man and woman went on in front, walking arm in arm, and often they kissed one another, laughing and crying in turns. When I was close to them they sometimes spoke French. As soon as it was light I never let my eyes leave her face. Her eyes were large and dark, but her hair was like gold and hung down her back wet on her black cloak."

"Stand at attention, sir!" said the President sharply.

The prisoner stood erect and again resumed his story.

"The morning was clear and frosty. The man had fallen several times during the night. His strength was gone.

"I saw he was pale as death, and blood oozed from his mouth. The woman grew frantic with fear that he would be caught. The man, however, could go no farther. He lay down on the snow, just as we were leaving the woods and coming out on the steppe. I thought he would have died. I took him in my arms and carried him verst after verst until my strength was gone and I felt fever coming over me. But the woman never noticed me, and once or twice when I turned to look at her from under my burden I saw that her eyes were fixed on the face of the man I carried. I could hold out no longer. I fell on the snow and fainted. How long I lay there I cannot say. Whether or not I dreamt I am unable to tell the court. I don't think it could have been a dream. I thought I saw a troika come noiselessly over the snow, and heard the breathing of horses."

"Do you mean to tell the court this was a dream? Can you give no further particulars about the troika or its driver?" interrupted the President.

"No, your excellency; the horses were black, I thought, and I know their eyes shone brightly; the sledge also seemed to be black. It came silently, it went away with gently ringing bells, the silver bells. When I came to my senses it was snowing hard. The wet flakes awoke me, I think. I gazed around me on all sides, I was alone. I thought of my dream. There were no hoof-marks, no traces of sledge runners, nothing but the level, trackless snow. Perhaps the snow had filled up the track, perhaps—perhaps there was some other reason. Your excellency, I felt myself forsaken. I could not understand it. I was mad, and cried aloud. Suddenly I noticed pinned to my coat a scrap of paper with pencil writing on it. It was taken from me when I gave myself up, but I'll never forget the words: 'We cannot take you with us further. Save yourself as best you can. My husband and I will always pray for you.' Oh, excellency, I saw it all then, and sat down in the snow and wept and cursed. I loved that woman. Yes, I was a fool."

"And a traitor," interpolated the President, scowling.

"And a traitor, if your excellency says so; but I did not think of that then. I thought only of my love, of how I had been betrayed, of my hurt pride. Your excellency knows the rest."

"The sentence of the court is that Private Trofim Stoyan take the place of the escaped prisoner in the mine at Gorkaya-Balka. He will remain there during the pleasure of his Imperial Majesty."

That evening the young soldier was chained to the stanchion.

ARNOLD WEEVIL.

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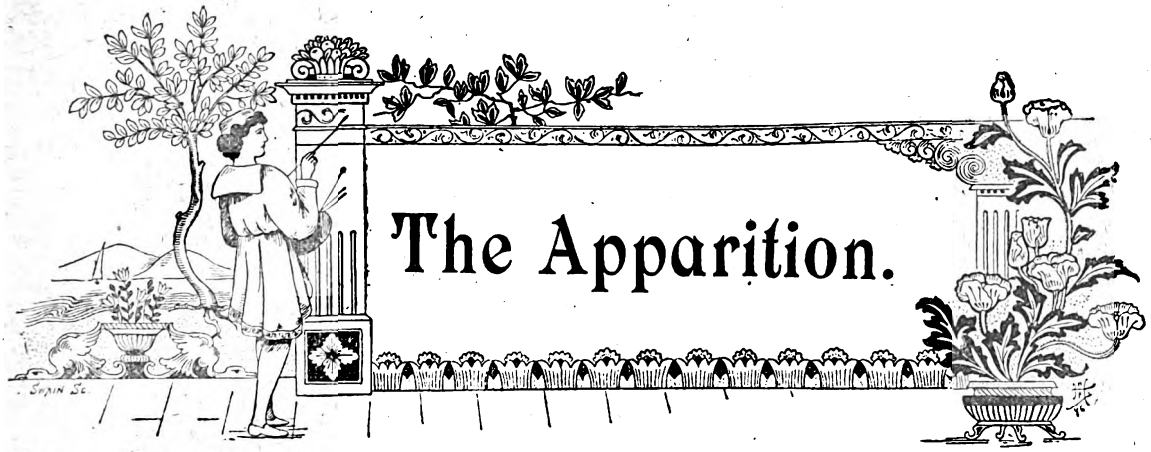

The Apparition.

The peasant stood face to face with the doctor in the background, near the bed of the dying. The old woman, calm, resigned, regarded the two men and listened to their talk. She was about to die, but the thought was not revolting. She was ninety-two and her days were over.

Through the open door and window streamed the July sun, spreading its warm rays over the brown, earthen floor, furrowed and beaten down by the wooden shoes of four generations of rustics. The odours of the fields drifted in, borne on the scorching breeze; the smell of grasses, wheat, and leaves burned by the noonday heat. The clicking sound the grasshoppers made was clear and distinct.

Raising his voice, the doctor said:

"Honoré, you cannot leave your mother all alone in this state. She may pass away at any moment."

The peasant grumbled.

"Must get in my wheat. Been too long in the fields already. The weather's just right. What do you say, mother?"

The old, dying woman, still possessing the avarice of a Normandy peasant, nodded "Yes," urging her son to get in his wheat and leave her to die alone.

But the doctor became angry and stamped his foot. "You are nothing but a brute, and I'll not allow you to do it, do you hear? If you have to get in your wheat to-day, go and find Mother Rapet, *parbleu!* and let her watch your mother. I wish it, do you hear? If you don't I'll let you die like a dog when it comes your turn to die—when your turn comes to be ill—do you hear that?"

The peasant, a tall, spare man, tortured by indecision, by fear of the doctor, and the fierce love of saving, hesitated, calculated, and blurted out:

"How much will La Rapet ask to watch?"

"Do you suppose I know?" exclaimed the doctor. "That depends on how long you want her for. Arrange that yourself with her, *morbleu!* but I want her to be here in an hour, understand," and he went out.

When the peasant was alone he turned towards his mother and said in a resigned voice:

"I'm going to get La Rapet, because that man wants her. Don't budge till I get back."

And he left the room.

La Rapet, an old woman, watched the dead and the dying of the Commune and its environs. Then, when she had wrapped her clients in the clothes they were never to leave, she took up her irons to press the garments of the living.

Wrinkled as a last year's apple, evil-minded, jealous, avaricious in the extreme, bent double, as if she had become broken by continually bending over the ironing-board, one might say that she had a sort of love for witnessing the agony of the dying.

She could only talk of people she had seen expire, of the variety of ways they had passed out of life, repeating her stories over and over again, with the minuteness of detail of a hunter recounting his adventures.

When Honoré Bontemps found her she was preparing blueing for the collarettes of the village women.

"Well, good-evening," he said. "How are things going, Mother Rapet?"

"Just the same, just the same," turning her head. "How is it up your way?"

"All right with me, but the mother's bad."

"What's the matter with her?"

"She's going to close her eyes."

The old woman took her hands out of the water, the blue, transparent drops dripping from her fingers into the tub.

"She's down as low as that?" with a sudden sympathy.

"The doctor says she won't live beyond sunrise. What'll you charge to watch her to the end? You know I'm not rich. Never could afford a servant—that's what broke mother down. She worked like ten: never stopped till she was ninety-two—you see how it is."

La Rapet replied gravely:

"There are two prices; two francs a day, three francs a night for the rich. Franc a day, two a night for the other. The other is for you."

The peasant reflected. He knew his mother to be hardy, vigorous, tenacious of life. She might last eight days in spite of the doctor.

He said resolutely:

"No, I'd rather make a price—a price to the end. I'll take the chances one way or another. The doctor say she will soon go. If so, all the better for you and the worse for me. If she holds on to-morrow or longer, I'm ahead—you're out."

The nurse, surprised, looked at the man. She had never made such a bargain before. She hesitated, thinking of the risk she might run.

"I can't say anything until I have seen the old one," she said.

"Come and see her."

She dried her hands and followed him.

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As they neared the house, Honoré said to himself: "Ah, if it is over already!" And the desire he felt manifested itself in his voice. But the old woman was not dead. She lay on her back on her pallet, her arms extended on the purple coverlet, hands frightfully thin, wrinkled, resembling crabs, contracted by rheumatism and years of grinding toil.

La Rapet approached the bed and studied the dying woman. She felt the pulse, listened to the breathing, tapped the chest, questioned her to hear her speak, then, after a final look, went out, followed by Honoré. Her opinion was formed, the old woman would not pass the night.

"Well, then?" he asked anxiously.

The nurse answered.

"Well, she'll last two days, perhaps three. You give me six francs altogether."

"Six francs—six francs!" he cried. "Have you lost your senses? Don't I tell you she will only last five or six hours?"

And they disputed a long time together. As the nurse was going away, and as his wheat would not be gathered in, he at last consented.

"Very well, that's settled; six francs, all included, until the corpse is carried away."

He strode away towards his wheat, lying in the field beneath the broiling sun that withered the stalks.

The nurse entered the house.

She had brought her work, because by the dying and the dead she worked without relaxation. Suddenly she asked:

"Have they administered the sacrament, Mother Bontemps?" The peasant shook her head, and La Rapet, who was devotional, rose hastily.

"*Seigneur Dieu!* Is that possible? I'll go and get the Curé," and she ran off towards the priest's house at such a speed that the *gamins* thought some misfortune had happened.

The priest soon came in his surplice, preceded by a choir-boy ringing a bell to announce the passing of God's sacrament. The men working in the fields doffed their great hats, waiting silently until the white vestments had disappeared behind a farm; the women gathering herbs rose to make the sign of the cross. The choir-boy, in his red skirts, walked rapidly; the priest, his head leaning on one side and mumbling prayers, followed; behind them came La Rapet, bent double as if to kneel as she walked, her hands joined as in church.

Honoré, afar off, saw them pass. He called out:

"Where is our Curé going?"

"He is carrying the good God to thy mother, *pardi!*" replied the choir-boy.

"That's good," said the peasant, returning to his work.

Mother Bontemps was confessed, received absolution, and the priest went away, leaving the two women alone.

La Rapet looked at the dying woman curiously, asking herself how long she would last.

The day was declining; a fresher air entering the chamber in puffs caused the picture of a saint on the wall to dance grotesquely. The little window-curtain, yellowed and covered with fly-specks, seemed to be struggling to fly away like the soul of the old woman.

She lay there silent, her eyes expressing indifference to death so near. Her breathing sounded harsh in the silence.

As night fell Honoré came in and approached the bed. He saw that she was still living.

"How goes it?" he asked, as he used to do when she was indisposed.

Then he sent away La Rapet after the injunction.

"To-morrow at five, without fail."

She replied:

"To-morrow—five o'clock."

She arrived at daybreak, when Honoré was eating his soup, which he had prepared himself.

"Well, has the mother passed away?" she asked.

He replied, with a cunning look in his eyes:

"She is much better," and he went out chuckling.

La Rapet was disquieted as she approached the bed, angry to find the old woman in the same position. She understood that she might last two, four, even eight days, and she was furious at the man who had played her the trick, and the woman who would not die.

She set to work, nevertheless, her eyes fixed on the wrinkled face of Mère Bontemps.

Honoré came in to lunch. He seemed happy, even jeering. Then he went out. He was harvesting his wheat under very favourable conditions.

La Rapet was getting exasperated. Every minute that passed seemed to her to be robbing her of money. She had a desire, an insane desire, to take that old hag, that old witch, by the throat and stop, with a little squeeze, the feeble breath that was stealing her time and money.

Then she thought of the danger, and other ideas came in her head as she approached the bed.

"Did you ever see the devil?" she asked.

"No," murmured Mère Bontemps feebly.

Then the nurse began to tell stories to terrorise the poor, dying creature.

A few moments before one died the devil appeared, she said. He carried a broom in his hand, an iron pot on his head, and screamed horribly. When one saw him it was all over, life would go out in a little while.

Mère Bontemps, moved with terror, tried to turn her head to look into the shadowy corners of the room, as if she expected an apparition. Suddenly La Rapet disappeared at the bottom of the bed. In the closet she found a sheet and wrapped herself in it. On her head she placed an iron pot, whose three feet curving outward resembled horns. She took up a broom in her right hand, and with her left she lifted a tin wash-boiler, letting it fall upon the floor with a resounding crash. Then stepping up in a chair she drew aside the curtain at the foot of the bed, and appeared gesticulating and screaming shrilly under the iron pot that covered her face, menacing with her broom the old peasant woman.

Overcome with an insane look, the dying woman tried to raise herself to flee. She struggled partly out of the bed-clothes, then fell back with a deep sigh.

It was over.

And La Rapet tranquilly put everything back in the closet, and with experienced hands closed the eyes of the dead. She laid a saucer of holy water on the bed, and sprinkled the room, then kneeling down, began to repeat the prayers for the dead, that she knew by heart, having learned them as a matter of business.

When Honoré entered in the evening he found her still praying, and he calculated that she had made twenty sous out of him, because she had watched three days and a night, which made only five francs instead of six which he owed her.

Le Vier.

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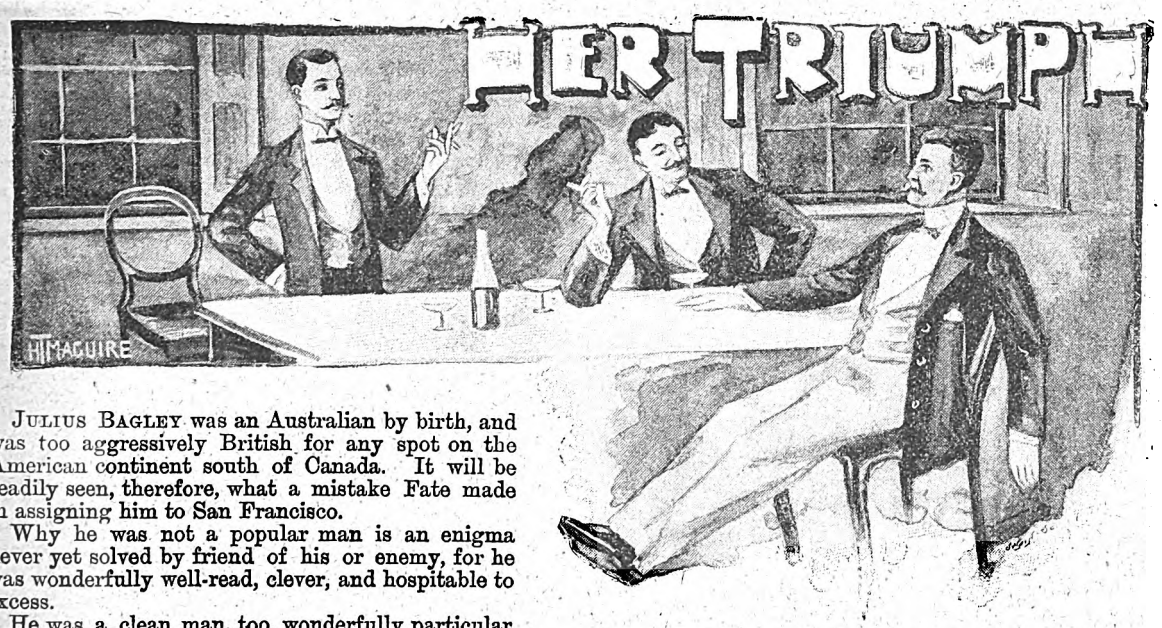
HER TRIUMPH



Julius Bagley was an Australian by birth, and was too aggressively British for any spot on the American continent south of Canada. It will be readily seen, therefore, what a mistake Fate made in assigning him to San Francisco.

Why he was not a popular man is an enigma never yet solved by friend of his or enemy, for he was wonderfully well-read, clever, and hospitable to excess.

He was a clean man, too, wonderfully particular about his appearance—clean morally, we are grudgingly obliged to admit, as well as clean physically.

When it is announced that he was a trifle below five feet in height, it is unnecessary to add that in order to make the most of his inches he ever stood as upright as a bantam chicken, and habitually wore a top hat in preference to anything lower.

In happy moments he cited history to prove that intellect lodged from choice in understood men. Napoleon was a favourite with him.

He belonged to the proper club in the town, and played cards admirably; but possessed such a vicious knowledge of what was correct play that never an acquaintance of his breathes who would be Bagley's partner of his own volition. He was unpleasant when he lost, to be sure; but he was so particularly disagreeable when he won, that those whom Fate provided to be his partners invariably succumbed to a reprehensible desire of losing the game for him.

Another vice of his was that he never became genially intoxicated. Drink he did, and sometimes hard; but its effects was to render him more Britons-never-will-be-slaves-y, and more anxious to improve upon his height than ever. Moreover, an extra glass was apt to bring to abnormally good memory some dead-and-buried rule of whist, over which our games mostly broke up in heated and unfriendly discussion.

Nor did he get on well with women. He was so prone to construe every remark of theirs into something personal and derogatory to his dignity, and to answer it sneeringly as such, that he and they had ill times of it together. Poor beggar! he tried to be amiable and fascinating, that I know. I sometimes felt very sorry for him. When he had some particularly bad dig, he would ease his tension by blowing off to us the bad training of American women. They didn't know their place. They had too much to say in outside affairs—stupid say, too. They were allowed to be impudent from their youth up. Their parents were to blame and their husbands, too.

"For goodness' sake, Bag, why don't you marry and show us what ought to be done?" growled young Grosvenor one night.

"I intend to," answered Bagley. "I intend to marry a woman with no dashed notions of independence, if I can find such a one on this free—dashed free—soil of yours. If she can't read or write, so much the better, so many less the chances of her wasting her time and getting into trouble. All a woman wants to know is how to cook well and how to mind her own business and to keep things tidy."

"Fine qualifications for a housekeeper; but say, Bag, would you find such a woman the brightest of companions?"

"Companions—stuff! A man's companions should be men," he announced blatantly, rearing his pompadour. He wore it extra long, so as not to depend entirely upon his boot-heels for additional inches.

"Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat," shouted Grosvenor, puffing himself out.

We were uneasy lest this might provoke a squall, but Julius had a grasp on a subject that interested him, he was loath to let it go for the common occupation of taking offence.

"When a man provides a woman with a home and food and clothes, he has a right to expect perfect obedience from her," he resumed stridently. "But if she is allowed several years' fling, as young girls are, he won't get it from her. Worse than all, a man really never can be sure of what he has married, so schooled are women from infancy in keeping their bad traits from cropping out. The safest thing to do is to pick out some neglected, modest girl, and train her. Teach her your ways, so that there will be no clashing of wills, no family jars. My wife shall have had no experiences before I marry her."

"But you'll keep her bountifully supplied afterwards, eh?" demanded Grosvenor rather impudently.

"What do you mean?" demanded Bagley ferociously of us all, whom he surprised grinning covertly at each other.

We hastened to explain that nobody meant anything in the least, and stuck to the lie till it saved us;

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nevertheless we held privately to the opinion that Bagley was just the man to vent upon a wife and family all those petty brutalities of temper and speech that good manners obliged him to veneer in society.

That summer he spent a month in the mountains at

"The next time you saw off your hair, consult me."

a third-rate hotel, kept by a miserly little Frenchman. We couldn't discover any attractions about the place, but Bagley assured us that the fishing was good. In the autumn he went up there again, and on his return to the city he announced that he was married. He married the innkeeper's daughter, brought her to the City, and went promptly into housekeeping.

If I confess that we were simply wild to see what sort of a woman he had married, I only state the case mildly. Our fever of expectation was aggravated by a fear that she might be such an ignorant dowdy that every pride would keep him from inviting us to the house. But we didn't know him. Matrimony—the first month of it—brought all his good points to the surface, and he one day invited Grosvenor and me up to dinner with such hospitality and enjoyment that very shame prompted us to refuse. But we went.

The house was a cosy little box, prettily furnished (Bagley was thrifty), and Mrs. Bagley fairly captivated us. Not that she was ravingly beautiful, for she was not; but she was very sweet looking, and slim, and shy, and appallingly young—she couldn't have been over seventeen. She hardly spoke a word of English either, but she did the honours of the house so charmingly and showed herself so infatuated with everything Julius said or did or thought, that we went away that night actually pleased with Julius ourselves.

Of course, we called again and again; but bit by bit, as always happens, we began to see behind the scenes a great deal. As the newness of his situation wore off, all traces of Julius's real self showed through and began to make affairs lively.

For one thing, he shamefully took advantage of her ignorance of English to badger her into making mistakes, at which he would roar loudly, and the poor little thing would laugh too, and pretend to be as pleased as pigs herself, in spite of the tell-tale flood of colour that would rise up to her hair roots.

Her name was Desiree, but he said it was too big a mouthful, and called her Sarah "for short." She smilingly begged him to call her Daisy, if he objected to Desiree, but Sarah he stuck to, and Sarah it was except when an extra stress of bad temper provoked him to "Sal."

Now this matter of a name might seem a slight thing, but after a woman gives up her surname, if she can't keep her christian name, what rights has she?

Desiree (for so we got to calling her in defiance of Bagley) was indeed ignorant—she scarcely could do more than sign her own name—but her ignorance had been forced upon her, for she was the most intelligent little lady I ever met. The way she began to pick up information from the papers and the quickness with which she mastered the language was simply marvellous.

We used to play cards up at Bagley's until twelve and one o'clock, and little Desiree would get so sleepy that she would almost tumble out of her chair, but Bagley would not let her go to bed. He must have represented it to her that it would be an insult to her guests, or so we judged from a chance remark of the little woman, and we made up our minds to clear out at ten. We did it once, but on the occasion of our following visit she begged us to stay so pathetically and glanced such imploring glances to her husband that we felt sure he had blown her up for driving us away. So of course we stayed.

After a few months Bagley got tired of showing off his wife and began to train her. The first public exhibition of his method occurred on Independence Day. Grosvenor and I had gone up to Bagley's to take him and Mrs. B. to an officers' dinner at the Presidio.

Desiree came into the room all smiles and blushes. She wore a brand-new dress, and her hair, which was orginally combed straight back from her forehead, was curled, and curled profusely. She looked radiant, pretty, and knew it, and turned her glowing face to Bagley for approbation. He scowled, and replied:

"The next time you saw off your hair, consult me. When you have gone into your room and brushed that fizz off your face I'll take you out with me, not before."

It was her first act of independence, in honour of the day, perchance, and he resolved to nip it at once.

The colour that deserted Desiree's face must have crept into mine, for I felt it sting me.

"Don't you like it, Julius?" asked she, with a catch in her voice, but smiling bravely at us, as if she enjoyed her lord's little eccentricities.

"No! I don't like it! Let me know if you are going to do as I ask or if you are not, because time presses."

"I am afraid eet will look vairy funny combed back, it ess so short. Just to-day, Julius, do let me, please."

She looked at me anxiously, with a nervous dread of his refusal, which made Grosvenor and me want to kick ourselves for seeing.

Bagley hung up his hat, sat down ostentatiously, and opened a paper. The courageous little woman stood nervously in the middle of the floor and tried it again.

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"Will you not let me go out wiz you onless I comb it my hair back, Julius, dear?"

"Either do as I tell you, or don't do it!" answered he angrily, turning upon her fiercely. "But not a toe do you go as you are! Understand that."

A look of outraged dignity displaced the intreaty on her face, and I was filled for a moment with unholy joy, expecting she would rebel, but she did the wisest thing, perhaps, in turning to Grosvenor and me, and saying sweetly:

"Wait for me the moment, please; eet will not take but a little while to make a scaircrow of myself!"

She left the room swiftly to hide the tears that filled her eyes.

Bagley wisely wrapped himself in his paper and never showed his nose above it until Desiree came back looking sweet and demure enough without her pretty curls, but lacking every trace of her former radiance and beauty.

This scene was the first of many others and in all of them Desiree showed the same sweetness and extraordinary submission, but it was easy to see that as time passed she bore with him more and more from principle, and less and less from love.

For a while our visits ceased, and when we resumed them, Mrs. Bagley had a wee bundle in her arms, which she crooned and cooed over with ever increasing delight. Bagley grew more bearable, too, and showed off his son and heir with a pride that almost resembled love.

Then a new set of persecutions began. The little bundle would be put to bed, and its mother would be forced to leave it, and sit by her husband's side and listen to how he was going to bring up his youthful son.

"My boy shall run in the streets as soon as he can stand. I won't have any woman molly-coddling him;" or, "My son is going to be a man. I won't have him fall into the clutches of the Catholic Church, or of the Episcopal Church, either. One psalm-mumbler about the house is enough." And the poor woman would murmer: "Yes, Julius," or "No, Julius," and grow pale and nervous, and smile all the time feebly, to show what a perfect loving understanding existed between her husband and herself.

Once her baby cried, and she started up to go to it, but Bagley made her sit still, and held forth on a new subject.

"Worst management in the world to take a child up the minute it cries! It puts a premium on fuss and disturbance. Let it cry!"

"But, Julius, babie is vairy young yet. Oh, leesten to the poor sweetheart! Julius, it hurts me to hear that babie cry!"

"Just stay where you are. No baby is too young to learn obedience. If you begin to pamper it, you will never leave off. I know what I am about. Sarah, let it cry, I tell you."

So Desiree sat and listened to the wails, and dug her hands into each other, and kept her strained face turned towards the door until the feeble little voice trailed off into a melancholy silence.

If ever a woman was tortured in this nineteenth century of progress and enlightment that woman was little Sarah Bagley, and we, friends of hers, respected her as we did a martyr. Her courage was superb. Hers was no fool's submission. She had temper enough flashing in her dark eyes to give way if she felt it right to do so, but you see she was very young and conscious of a certain inferiority to her husband, and I suppose Bagley was the first man that ever paid her any attentions; so many causes combined prompted her to a plan of subjection and obedience as heroic as anything I have ever seen.

If he had only treated her with actual violence we could have knocked him down and had it out with him, but as matters went we were powerless to interfere.

Bagley was fond of his wife and proud of her, especially of her cleverness—a quality that he formerly underrated in woman—but he was treating her like a dog, actually breaking her in as one would an animal. Heaven knows how she stood it. He went his strongest when any of us were near, just to demonstrate that he lived up to his precepts. Perhaps he felt safer when we were by, for a wife will put up with loads for appearance's sake.

We would have cut the man at the very start had we not felt that we showed ourselves truer friends of Desiree by sticking to him.

He was proud of his methods and he was never tired of holding forth what he would have done in such and such circumstances.

"Hubbard's a fool!" he said, one evening at the club, when we finished telling the last report of Hubbard's high-stepping better half. "A fool; I wouldn't put up with a thing like that for a moment."

"No?" I asked sneeringly. "Tell me what you'd do?"

"Do? I'd smash something. There's nothing like

Mrs. Bagley had a wee bundle in her arms.

hurling a Cologne bottle through a looking-glass for stopping any woman's tongue. I've done it, and I know."

Poor little Desiree! We did not doubt it, not one of us.

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"Come home to dinner with me," he continued affably. "Sarah has been wondering where you have been hiding lately. Come."

I have been keeping away for a fact. The truth is, I was fairly sick of the scenes up at Bagley's, and half angry with Desiree for putting up with them. But hers was not the nature that rebels, and I kept away for nearly three months.

"Come along," urged Bagley.

"But, man," I expostulated, "it's eight o'clock. They'll never keep dinner for you all this time!"

"Won't they? Come and see!" and Bagley laughed an ill-natured laugh, which told me that his wife had been trained in many unsuspected directions.

It was after eight o'clock when we arrived at his house, and Desiree looked as nearly angry as I ever saw.

She looked very pretty, too, and was carefully dressed.

"Most singulaire time to come home for dinner," she remarked promptly. "We were going to the theatre, too; did you forgotten it, tell me?"

"Well, you see, we are not going after all," he answered sourly, for he was particularly taken back at her reception of him, since he had invited me up especially to show me that "dinner time" was simply whenever he chose to dine, not before nor after.

She honoured me with a laughing welcome when she saw me, and then gave an order to the servant to bring in the dinner.

Bagley was in a shocking temper, and carped at the position of every spoon on the table. Failing to draw tears or apologies from his wife, he began in an overbearing way to make fun of her appearance, sneered at her theatre finery, donned for nothing, and objected to roses in her dress. She ignored him with her usual gentle tact, and tried to keep up a spirited banter with me, although her breast heaved, and her colour deepened at his downright insults.

Her calmness merely irritated Julius to a frenzy. When the soup came on it was naturally only lukewarm, and little circles of grease floated on the surface of each plate. The plates were of fine china, and hand-painted by Desiree. She had evidently had them brought on for my benefit.

"Bah!" ejaculated Bagley in a brutal fury. "I have told you again and again that I won't drink swill, and I won't. Now, will you remember it?"

Crash! At the question he had swept the plate off the table to the floor, where it lay in twenty pieces in a pool of greasy soup that soaked rapidly into the rich carpet.

I held my breath. Desiree held hers also, and looked for one wild, dismayed moment into her husband's fiery eyes. Then she recovered herself completely.

"You are right," she says, with at least three r's. "Perfectly right. It ees swill. Bah!" And without the quiver of an eyelash she swept her plate superbly into the middle of the room, and the two greasy pools crept amicably towards each other. Then she rang the bell, and calmly ordered the joint to be brought on.

I must say for Bagley that he knows when he has gone far enough; he took his cue from his wife, ignored the chaotic messes on the carpet, and allowed the meal to proceed to a really pleasant conclusion. But he was simply dumstruck with surprise. The conversation, as might be expected, was formal, and I did most of it—which was also to be expected. Bagley was aware that by going into the crockery business herself his wife spiked his biggest gun. The man was dazed.

Desiree had a blazing colour in her face and looked dangerous, but she invited us into the parlour after dessert with the suavity of a duchess, and never weakened once, not even when the distant tinkling of bits of soup-plate demonstrated that the work of reconstruction was going on in the dining-room. I was really afraid to leave the house, so I swallowed my objections to him as a man and a brother, and stopped to play chess with Bagley.

At ten o'clock, as was his wont, young Julius woke up and howled. After a period of irresolution, his mother arose.

"Sarah," began Bagley, with an ominous polish of tone, "sit down. Let him yell himself to sleep. It's good for him."

This last argument destroyed the balance.

"Stuff!" said Desiree with a fine appropriation of her husband's favourite ejaculation. "If it ees good for him to yale, it ees bettair for him to be attended on." And she decidedly left the room.

It was but five minutes' work for me to checkmate after this, and after the achievement I made a frantic and successful attempt to get out of the house. I was no longer afraid for the madame. In her young eyes was the strong dawn of a resolve to defy Church and State and get a finger in her own pie at last. And she did.

I told the tale all over San Francisco. You can't imagine how pleased Bagley's friends were. We rallied around little Sarah to a man, and, taking advantage of a month's absence of Bagley (he was sent on business by his firm), we took her and an aunt of Julius' to many amusements, and cheered her up, and did some training on our own accounts. In two days' time the frizz reappeared, double the quantity of it, too.

That was several months ago. She snubbs Bagley now as often as he needs it, and never turns a hair. She isn't half as sweet as she used to be, but who could expect it?

She has found her tongue at last, has got a grip on the language, and rattles away with twice the volubility of an English woman, and with a finer stock of idioms.

Bagley is just nowhere when he begins to argue with her, for she has a nimble wit, which invariably turns the laugh on him, even when she is in the wrong and knows it.

When she gets tired now she goes to bed. On cold nights she thinks nothing of enjoying the warmth of the parlour as long as possible by putting up her hair in curl papers under the very eye of the Queen's subject. Once or twice she has overturned our hands at whist, and yawningly sent us home. She is really a little spitfire, but who can blame her? If she hadn't been curbed to the kicking point, she'd be trotting along as good as gold to this very moment.

We uphold her hands, as it were, and egg her on, and the fun is immense. But the trouble is, this sort of thing is so apt to end in divorce.

JULIA SCHLOMM.

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The Echo of an Old Romance.

There is not, in Ireland, a more romantic, wilder, or uncivilised spot than the one on which stands Durrie Castle, with its background of venerable mountain pine, that on three sides forms a green curtain between itself and the outer world. Tall, dark and grim, its ivy-garlanded towers look down upon a silent sheet of water and beyond to a rough bogland broken by precipitous or sloping glens graced by hazel, holly, and every description of copsewood. Now and then appear patches of fallow pasturage on which shy white cottages have sprung up, as do daisies in tall meadow grass; while over and above all rises the cloud-kissed peak of Mount Erigal, like the finger of God pointing to eternity.

We had all gone up there for the grouse-shooting, at the urgent invitation of Sir John and Lady Allison, who, having rented the castle from its (then) present owner, had torn themselves away from the frivolities of a season at Cheltenham, to study more primitive life among the Celts.

The house was like all buildings of ancient date, more or less sombre and inhospitable, the rooms being panelled in oak, the beds heavy four-posters, and the walls covered with oil-paintings, from some of which the frames were rotting away. A general air of *stuffiness* pervaded the place, and Lady Allison, herself a sunbeam, protested that, notwithstanding the introduction of every modern convenience, even the kitchen remained a veritable mausoleum.

A party of young people, however, fresh from city life, can soon change a wilderness to a rose garden; so, what with the butterfly costumes, fluttering ribbons, and gilt fans of the ladies, added to the undress uniforms and dashing manners of a rollicking quartet from the "Queen's Own," we had soon "turned the temples of Egypt into Belgravia," and startled the sleepy echoes by peals of hearty laughter.

It was on the fifth day of our visit to Durrie Castle—that—after the ladies had retired—we men, having put on our smoking jackets, gathered about the open grate in the hall; for the evenings were cool, and a nightcap of sherry is never so spicy as when warmed by pink shadows from a blazing fire of pine logs.

Sir John Allison had, I remember, been unusually jolly, rattling off tiger experiences in the Indian jungles till we younger fellows became uproarious in applause, when suddenly and unaccountably a silence fell upon us—for myself I can best liken it to that oppression in the air which precedes a thunderstorm.

At last Derlick, a youthful Lothario, brought to bay by conventionalities, broke the spell by asking:

"I say, Sir John; Durrie Castle dates from the Reformation; are there no romances interwoven with its history? It seems to me," he added, glancing at an oil painting suspended over the fireplace, "as if that young woman must have broken some hearts in her day."

All eyes turned to the portrait, which was that of a beautiful girl, dressed in a white satin gown of the Elizabethan period. No words can describe the glory of her dark eyes, which, like moons of fire, challenged admiration from beneath partly closed lids. The mouth tender, yet full of lurking coquetry, was made more winsome by a dimple in the rounded chin beneath it.

"By George!" I exclaimed, rising to examine the picture more critically. "One might almost conceive it possible, by extending the hand, to assist her down from that frame, and see her come tripping among us. I can fancy her tapping Allison on the shoulder with her fan."

Our host shivered. The light from the wax candles on the table threw trembling shadows on his face, and I observed that it paled, as he moved uneasily in his chair.

"My dear fellows," burst from his lips, with spasmodic utterance, "there is a story connected with that picture which has driven every would-be tenant from Durrie Castle for the last two centuries. Notwithstanding the fact that each successive owner has, in turn, remodelled the house, torn down, refurnished, changed and beautified——" he paused and, looking eagerly in our faces, whispered parenthetically: "The ladies must know nothing of this; they would fly the country like a flock of birds. It has only recently come to my ears, through the garrulous tongue of old Halloran, the under-gardener."

Colonel Drumgoole and de Long had been leaning forward, their eyes glued to Allison's face. Both dabbled in hypnotism, electro-biology, spiritualism and the like. De Long picked up Sir John's unfinished sentence.

"Notwithstanding all this remodelling, Durrie has a ghost?" He spoke with serious interest.

"A very uncanny one," returned our host. "It seems that in the days of Elizabeth, this young girl, a Miss Dorothy Cavendish, then serving as waiting-maid to the Queen, attracted the eye of Essex, the sovereign's favourite. You may guess the sequel. Dismissed from Court, and pursued by the vengeance of the angry lady, Miss Cavendish fled to Ireland, to hide herself with Papist friends in Durrie Castle. Jealousy was spurred on by bigotry, and the Queen sent Walter Stuart, a spy in the guise of a peacemaker, who asked, and obtained, an interview with Dorothy, in a turret chamber of the north wing. The one in which you sleep, Drumgoole." Drumgoole started, and I saw his fingers, long and white as a woman's, interlace themselves till the veins which made blue tracery in them stood out like cord.

"The exact nature of what passed during that inter-

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view, I do not know, but threats must have been followed by a struggle, during which Stuart's hands, clutching at the girl's throat, left blue marks on the fair skin. Then, so I was told, she broke from him, and springing through the window ran along on a narrow ledge that encircles the tower, holding on with both hands to the ivy. What she suffered at that terrible moment who can tell? The slender stems of the vine breaking and giving way beneath her despairing fingers while balancing himself, in hot pursuit was a bloodhound, ready to hurl her to more certain death in the darkness below. Derlick! *you* are a fatalist. Tell us if what follows was the vengeance of God or pre-ordained? With one foot on the narrow ledge and a hand outstretched to seize the fluttering skirts of his victim, Stuart was paralysed to inaction by a wail of agony, that, starting among the pine trees like the soughing of wind, spread over the entire valley. Tipping the crest of Erigal, the moon came up, piercing its way through a rugged mass of grey clouds, and flinging icy shadows on the castle walls. Horror, perhaps in anticipation of his own deed, perhaps at that awful and mysterious wail of the Banshee, froze the blood in his veins. Casting one terrified glance at the abyss beneath him, his fingers relaxed their hold, and, grasping wildly at the ivy in his descent, he fell, like Apollyon, to the bottomless pit."

"The girl?" panted Derlick, with parched lips. Even I, his companion through many a skirmish, and a worshipper of facts, laid down upon the table a wine-glass, whose contents trembled in my unsteady clasp.

"Miss Cavendish escaped. How she climbed back through the window and found her way to her friends one may surmise; but it is said that Stuart's murderous fingers left an indelible stain upon her white throat. You will observe that in the portrait she wears a neck-band of black velvet."

Was it my fancy, or did the fair Dorothy blush under the concentrated gaze of our curious eyes? In the flickering candle light it seemed to me that her red lips parted in a half-uttered sigh.

"Positively," exclaimed de Long, "I can understand the Queen's jealousy Such a woman as that would melt the heart of a Trappist monk."

"Did Elizabeth pursue her rival any further?" This from Derlick, who accompanied his question by a nervous glance over his shoulder. I, too, had thought I heard the fluttering of a fan.

"No, I believe that Dorothy was allowed to reach Scotland unmolested, where, as the wife of Sir Donald Gower, she passed a life of semi-seclusion; but it is said that the ghost of Stuart haunts the north wing of Durrie Castle, and that he will yet wreak the Queen's vengeance on any direct descendant of Lady Gower who may occupy the chamber from which she fled. Come, boys! off to your rooms. I'll wager the ghost will not bother a pack of unbelievers like us. What? Frank not able to finish his nightcap? Has a bugaboo story succeeded where cannon balls failed?" I thought his merriment forced. Drumgcole's lips, like narrow threads of scarlet wool, parted in a feeble smile.

"On the contrary," he retorted, "I am about to prove myself a hero by sleeping in the haunted chamber. Apparently Sir John has forgotten that *my mother's name was Gower.*"

He picked up his candle, and scoffing at Allison's earnest offer of another apartment, nodded a brief good-night, and the party dispersed. It was then eleven o'clock.

* * * * *

Shortly after midnight I was awakened from a first doze by a curious noise in the chamber overhead, occupied by Drumgoole. Half dazed, I sat up in bed, rubbing my eyes and listening with attentive ears. The first idea conveyed to my semi-conscious brain was that the Colonel was chasing *something* back and forth across the floor. Then I heard his window thrown open, as if by an eager, impatient hand. A thrill of unexplained terror sent the blood with electric force against my throbbing temples, as I sprang out of bed, with the vague idea of rushing to Frank's assistance; but, at this instant, a sudden tempest of wind, uprising among the pine-trees, hissed through their branches with weird effect; then, increasing in fierce velocity, swept over the valley like the snarl of a wolf or fox in its death agony, while simultaneously *something* black, and obscuring the moonlight, shot past my window, cleaving the air in its swift, downward course like a scimitar.

Pinned to the spot by a lethargy of horror, it was some moments ere I could summon courage to throw open my bedroom door and run out into the hall. At the head of a staircase leading from the floor below I met Sir John Allison, and the moonlight, shining through a hall window, showed that his face was bloodless as white marble.

"Great Heavens, McArliffe!" breathed he huskily. "What was that cry? Did you hear it?"

I gripped his arm, and, with a quick convulsive movement, drew him back into the shadow of the heavy damask window curtains.

Something was descending the upper stairs, whose banisters were composed of solid oak panelling as high as a man's waist. It was Drumgoole. He was in his night clothes, than which his face had no more colour, and both hands grasped his throat; while from between his lips, drawn, and revealing the lower teeth, came at intervals a wolf-like cry, expressive of mortal agony.

"The Hand! The Hand!" he repeated. "Take it away! The *Hand!*"

Allison sprang forward.

"Frank!" he exclaimed soothingly; "what has happened, old fellow? What has——"

The question froze unfinished on his lips; for, at that instant Colonel Drumgoole, swaying to and fro like a storm-tossed tree, fell at our feet, and bending over him we observed upon his neck the blue mark caused by garroting fingers.

What explanation have I to offer? None that can be accepted by a materialist like myself. For five weeks the Colonel lay between life and death, raving incoherently of horrors that no pen could portray, but which were ascribed by the doctor to a fevered imagination. At intervals, starting up in bed, he renewed the cry of that terrible night, begging protection from "The Hand! The Hand!"

Later, nursed back by Lady Allison with tenderest solicitude to convalescence, he showed an unwillingness to talk, replying to any direct questions by a shudder, and a pathetically uttered "Don't speak of it," that commanded silence.

Once only, just before his departure, did he indirectly, but of his own accord, refer to the occurrence.

I found him one evening standing before the portrait of Dorothy Cavendish with deep interest. Conscious that someone observed him, he turned quickly, hesitated a moment, then murmured more to himself than to me:

"Poor girl! *Poor* girl! Oh! I know what she suffered."

Ida Down.

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The Return.

The ball had commenced at seven o'clock that evening, and now, at nine, it was high tide, the sailors said, as they wiped the perspiration from their foreheads between the quadrilles.

This night they gave themselves up to pleasure—these stout fellows of Tréport—in the hall at the gates of the town. They danced in their fisher's dress; they jumped and stamped their heavy feet upon the floor, their hands open and squarely placed upon their partner's backs. The women were buxom creatures, in rude health, whom the men grasped as they would presently their oars. The violins screeched, the horns sounded, skirts whirled, laughter rose, and the many sounds united in a tumult louder than the bellow of the rising sea.

When Jean Maquenem entered, dressed in the simple uniform of a foot soldier of the line, a grey-haired waiter pointed out a corner masked by a pillar, and disdained, no doubt, as inconvenient. Jean Maquenem placed himself there and looked about him. Five hard years he had passed far away from his native village. He was about twenty-five, with blue eyes, rather deeply set, strongly built and of healthy complexion. His smile was frank, and there was nothing about him to betray the existence of any fierce passions or to indicate their absence. In fact, he was an honest fellow, a little romantic and somewhat timid.

He had sought out a place apart, wishing to be recognised unexpectedly, and rejoiced naïvely in thinking of the embraces he was about to give and receive. As he sat there, memories of his youth crowded thick upon his mind, awakened by the sight of his former companions in toil. With them, during years gone by, he had towed the boats along the channel, passed the nights upon the sea, cast the nets and worked the ship, and been buffeted by the wind and waves and rain. He also had danced with them in this hall, where he found nothing changed but himself.

But more than all else it was Marguerite Couplet whom he would rejoice to see again. As far back as he could remember she had been mixed with his life. Although simply the daughter of an innkeeper and a fisherman, from childhood she had loved to adorn herself, to remain at home, and to play less boisterous games than her comrades who ran about the quay with their boy companions. She grew to be one of the most beautiful girls in the province. No other woman had stirred the heart of Jean Maquenem as she did when she walked abroad, dressed in her short red skirt, showing her slender ankles and pretty feet incased in leather shoes whose wooden soles clicked upon the flagstones; her graceful waist moulded in a tight corsage, her cap with long violet bands tied under her chin, and great gold ornaments of Norman pattern hanging from her ears. And he had pleased her so much more than the others, that for eighteen months he had remained her lover, and when they parted she vowed to await his return.

Soon he saw her descending the stairs for a quadrille. She was taller and browner, but still very beautiful. A red kerchief with blue flowers was about her shoulders, and tied behind her waist, showing a corsage of the same shade of brown as her skirt. Her sleeves were red, and the bands of her cap dark lilac. Yet this riot of colours did not detract from the fresh, sea-tanned beauty of her face, where shone two eyes sparkling with pleasure. When she smiled she showed two rows of teeth as white and even as those of a young wolf.

The soldier noticed all these details with keen pleasure. Yet his joy would have been greater if Marguerite had not been dancing with a big, handsome fellow who treated her familiarly—a fisher, named Pierre Dominique Malatre, whom Maquenem recognised at once by his nose, like an eagle's beak, his broad forehead, and superb breadth of shoulders.

Chance brought this group under the balcony, to the place even where the dreaming lover sat leaning on his elbow against the pillar. His impatience overcame his timidity, and in a voice loud enough for the girl to hear he called twice: "Marguerite! Marguerite!" She turned her eyes, recognised her old-time sweetheart, blushed very red under her complexion like a sunburnt nectarine, and continued the dance without responding. She said only some words to Pierre Dominique, who looked also at Maquenem, nodded his head, and drew his partner into the crowd.

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This welcome was quite natural, but the soldier remained stupidly gazing at them over his empty glass. Instinctively, as dogs feel a look of kindness or of anger, he was sensible of an air of coldness or estrangement, but reassured himself with the thought that the surprise and embarrassment of meeting him before three hundred people had nonplussed the girl. He waited until the end of the quadrille, counting on approaching and speaking to her, but scarcely had the orchestra scattered abroad the last measures of their music, than he saw Pierre Dominique advancing, who gave him an ardent embrace and seated himself by his side, saying:

"Hé! La Grise, how goes it?"

It was the nickname of his boyhood, which he had not heard for years. He felt a singular, indefinable emotion of mingled pleasure and pain. Pierre Dominique continued, looking his comrade straight in the face with his yellow eyes—the colour of sand—such as sailors have sometimes:

"You have arrived in time to be present at my wedding. Two weeks more and you would have missed it."

"So much the better that I am here," said the soldier. "And mine will not be much later. Whom are you going to marry?"

"You sly dog! You know as well as I!"

"On my word of honour, I do not."

"An old sweetheart of yours, la Petite Couplet."

"Marguerite?"

"The Couplets have not two daughters, I suppose. Does that astonish you? Did you think she was going to remain four years alone, sighing for your handsome eyes, like a fish on a table gasping for water? Four years to live on hope! Know you, that it is hard for a woman. *Ma foi!* I presented myself, I pleased her, and here we are."

"And if I have remained faithful to her?" interrupted Maquenem, thunderstruck by this revelation.

"And if Paris was made of butter it would have melted long ago," replied Pierre Dominique with a hearty laugh. He continued to jest with a lightness of spirit and a confidence in himself which crushed his rival, who felt constrained by his uniform in the presence of this stolid fisher, this clear-eyed Hercules, whose breast was moulded in his knitted jacket. He was ashamed of his regulation moustache and short hair when he looked at the curling locks and thick beard, black and shining, of the sailor, who shook, in speaking, two earrings made of circles of gold in which rolled little round blue stones from the Alps. Presently the sailor left him and he mechanically dragged himself over to the table where Marguerite sat drinking with her parents.

He kissed her upon both cheeks, with the kiss of one who walks in a dream, and he could not have told whether her face was cool or burning. Her parents questioned him naturally upon his past life and projects for the future, and Marguerite laughed with such frank gaiety that the poor soldier's thoughts were in a whirl. When he arrived alone at the door of the inn where he had engaged his bed for the night, he thought confusedly, how lucky it was that he had not gone first to the Couplets to surprise his betrothed.

Yet he did not resign himself easily to his lot, but reflected much, and finally took the only course which appeared reasonable. to speak with Marguerite herself.

He dressed himself in his best next morning, but with sinking heart and little hope. He guessed that his costume of *lignard* would not please the young Normande. More ardently, more fiercely than ever, he felt returning his old love for the sea, and to reach Marguerite's home he took the street which led along the harbour and through the fishmarket.

It was the hour of marketing. Many recognised Maquenem, and greeted him with a word in passing, but they had no time to loiter. It was the sea, the great sea, which urged them forward, which called back the empty ships that it might cast into them anew its overplus of monsters. It roared yonder at the end of the pier, shouting to them all to hasten—that its rising tide would stay for none. He traversed the market, and reached, with mechanical steps, Marguerite's door.

The sailors' tavern, kept by Mme. Couplet, was upon a narrow street near the harbour, and at this hour deserted. Everyone was at the market. Marguerite generally left to her mother the task of purchasing, and Maquenem counted on finding her alone.

Marguerite was kneeling before the stove, whose cover she had removed, and was furiously scraping off the rust with an iron hook. She turned as the door opened, and greeted Maquenem with a cordial "*Bonjour*," and asked him what he would have to drink, interrupting herself to apostrophise her stove.

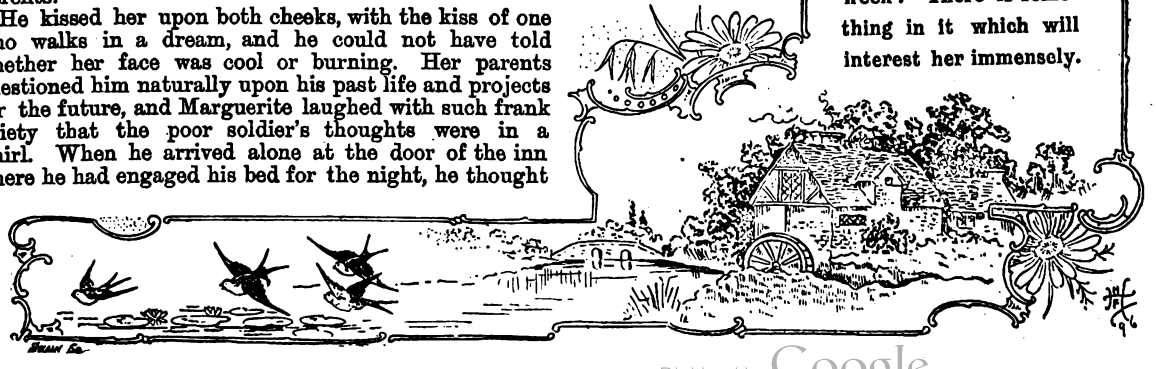
She rose quickly and shook the dust from her skirts, served Maquenem, and calmly, without affectation or coldness, seated herself near the window and began knitting.

The soldier was silent, and instinctively Marguerite ceased to speak. At last, with the superhuman courage of the player who throws his last coin upon a card and turns it quickly, he said:

"Marguerite, why have you deceived me?"

"I have not deceived you," she replied. "You departed to take up a landsman's life. I thought you would do like all the rest. Their *fiancées* await them, and when

Has your wife or your mother or your sister seen *Home Notes* this week? There is something in it which will interest her immensely.



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they return the men do not want them because they have grown old and are no longer their ideals. It is better to quit than be quitted, is it not? Those who await for years the return of their sweethearts do so because they can find no others." And she uttered a burst of false laughter, such as is common to all coquettes, *grandes dames*, *bourgeois*, or women of the people—when they jest at vows they have broken.

"Each to his character," responded the soldier. "I have kept my promise well. Now that I have returned, you should keep yours, or else you are heartless."

"Heartless!" she cried. "That is a little too strong. What if I had amused myself with the messieurs from Paris during the summer, like many others? They have proposed to me oftener than the week has days. And then I would have married you afterwards? Heartless! You would wish that I sit for ever sighing here alone! No, you are not jealous, you! You would make a fine husband!"

"I love you so!" he interrupted, casting in her face this irritating and foolish reason. Then he told her of the hopes he had cherished: how happy would have been their peaceful life; that a fisher's bride is never sure in the morning that the cruel sea will not drag her husband down before night.

"I am sprung from a race of sailors, and my husband will be one," said Marguerite.

Then he supplicated her, saying she was part of his life, reminding her of their old friendship, and how unhappy he would be if she wedded another, and much else straight from his heart.

"I love him passionately," she answered simply.

"Well, adieu!" said the soldier, after another silence. He placed upon the counter the price of his glass, and departed.

During the days which followed he lived outwardly as if nothing had happened. He organised his little house, bought some sailor clothes, and showed his intention to take service once more on one of the fishing boats of the port. He tried again, but unskilfully, to equal his boyhood companions in the terrible toil of the sea. He still loved Marguerite as only the simple know how to love. He loved her so much that he forgave her. But there was in the world one creature whom he did not pardon—Malatre. Maquenem hated him with an hatred like that of Othello for Cassio.

One January morning, the day before his wedding, Pierre Dominique was returning from Dieppe, whence he had gone to buy some ivory ornaments. He followed the path which lay like a narrow ribbon along the edge of the cliff. It was an immense solitude. The night mist had dampened the grass, which slipped and crackled under his feet. But the sailor marched gaily, calculating to himself for the twentieth time the cost of his wedding and his establishment, when a hundred steps from him, by a hillock, he saw a black mass lying across his path, and thought it was without doubt some coastguard overpowered by smugglers.

He advanced and recognised Jean Maquenem, who rose at his approach, saying simply:

"I have watched and hoped for your coming for an hour, Pierre Dominque."

"And why?" demanded Malatre, who stopped short, made defiant by the other's gaze.

"To revenge myself. You have stolen my promised bride. You must not marry her. I forbid you. Swear to me that you will say 'No' at the church to-morrow, or, as I live, you shall not pass."

"Who goes to the chase loses his place," responded Pierre Dominique gaily, believing Maquenem insane, and, from his piteous mien, judging him harmless. "If the girl loves me better than you, you should take in your horns and say adieu!"

"You shall not pass," replied Maquenem.

"Do not anger me," said the other, "or I will break your head." As he was very cool and cared little for a useless battle, he sprang forward and pushed Maquenem violently aside, and started to run in the direction of Tréport, followed by his rival who reviled him and called him, "Coward!"

Malatre ran fast, but rage seemed to double Maquenem's strength. He made prodigious bounds, and fell like a tiger upon the other's back, who, his blood burning with anger, turned and replied to the onset with a blow which would have felled an ox, but which the madman received without faltering.

Face to face, foot to foot, they began a wordless battle, the fierce blows resounding heavily. Maquenem ducked to escape a furious stroke that would have ended him, and seized the other round the body, as he was almost falling from the violence of his futile blow. So powerful was the sailor that he resisted some moments the cruel embrace which cracked his bones. Thrice was he lifted from the ground and thrice fell upon his feet. Maquenem, at the end of his strength, the veins of his forehead swollen to bursting, raised him a fourth time, and they rolled together upon the earth.

By a quick movement of his shoulders, Pierre Dominique recovered himself and forced Jean Maquenem beneath him. The latter did likewise, and each of the two combatants in turn threw over the other, and this strange, struggling, two-headed monster descended slowly the gentle slope of the hillside, like a cask that one starts rolling from a mountain top.

"Wretch!" cried Pierre Dominique suddenly, "we are going into the sea!"

The descent was steep now; the abyss ten steps away; but their course was unchecked.

"In the name of God, let me go! Let me go!" cried the sailor.

Maquenem, with nostrils contracted and cruel eyes, gave a last frantic heave with his shoulders, and together they rolled over the edge and fell upon the rocks far below, against which the rising sea dashed angrily the army of its waves, as impotent in their fury to beat down their walls of stone as is a passionate love to vanquish indifference in the heart of woman or the inexplicable cruelty of Fate.

PAUL BOURGET.

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY No. 9.]

HIS MAIDEN EFFORT.

"I TELL you, Arnold, you are making an ass of yourself."

"I know I am," said the individual addressed, with something like a groan, "but what can I do? If I only had the courage I would clear out of Brighton this very night, but I can't, and that's the end of it. Why would I stay?"

"The girl doesn't want me, Johnson, that's clear."

Johnson blew a big cloud of tobacco smoke.

"It is not clear that the girl does not want you, but it is clear that you showed your hand too soon. The idea of a man proposing to a woman he has known only three days!"

"You need not say any more about it," said Arnold, throwing away his half-smoked cigar and picking up his hat.

"Sit down, old man," said the other; "I do believe that I have an idea. I'm going to do you a good turn. Leave it to me to find out for you what is the exact state of affairs."

"There is no use," said Arnold wearily; "and, besides, you'll make a mess of it. What is your plan?"

"Oh, it is very simple," said Johnson; "and I shall not make a mess of it. I shall supply her with a rival. It will be very easy to see from the way Miss Ralston takes it how you really stand in her eyes. Since women have no scruples about employing artifices, why should we?"

"But what will the other girl say? Will she consent to serve as a tool in this way?" asked Arnold dubiously.

"Oh, I'll make that square. My cousin, Miss Erskine, is coming down to stay with us. She is the dearest girl in the world, and would do anything for me. Just leave it in my hands. You shall see how she will enter into the spirit of the thing. But remember this, the success of the whole business will be in your chucking that infernal reserve of yours to the dogs. You must be as light as air, and go about with her as if quite oblivious to the fact that there is a Miss Ralston in the place."

With many misgivings, Arnold consented to be a party to the deception. He felt as if he were a prospective party to a burglary, or hatching conspiracy against the State.

On the evening of Miss Erskine's arrival, he dressed himself with special care and went up to the house. He was prepared to be very ill at ease with his fellow-conspirator.

But the young girl who was sitting beside Mrs. Johnson, in the drawing-room, showed no signs of conscious participation, though the proposer of the scheme had told him that she had been told all about the situation and had given her promise of assistance.

Among those who came in later was Miss Ralston. Johnson felt that his plot was going to be a success, when he saw Arnold take no more notice of her than to bow stiffly.

He wondered a little at the gift for realistic acting which his friend had suddenly and unexpectedly developed.

To look at him and Miss Erskine, you would have said they were friends of very long standing. His triumph was increased, though it was dashed by just a little remorse, as he saw Miss Ralston watching them with a peculiar look in her eyes.

"She does care for him," he said to himself; "but it serves her right to get this lesson."

Mr. Johnson gave her an opportunity of talking to him, but she made no allusion to the other couple for a long time.

Finally, she asked him how long Arnold and Miss Erskine had known each other. She seemed surprised, though she tried to hide it, when told that they had met for the first time that day.

During the next week the comedy progressed gaily. The hero and substituted heroine walked together, played tennis together, and were generally inseparable.

One evening on the pier, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson saw them passing the place where the lady sat for whose benefit the play was arranged.

"We won't have to keep it up much longer," said Mr. Johnson; "that is gloriously well acted."

But Mrs. Johnson said nothing.

All Arnold's old mopishness has flown away, too. The consciousness of coming success seemed to have settled down on him. He was no longer impatient, and instead of being the worst, had developed into the best company in the world.

Johnson one day told his wife that he believed Providence had cut him out for a diplomatist.

Every sign given by the person deceived he watched with the keen eye of a doctor observing the details and development of a pet case.

Early next week he had to go up to town. At the end of three days he came back. He was quite curious to know how the plot had progressed during his absence. Arnold was the first person he saw as he descended from the train.

He knew that there was something wrong from the expression of his face.

"Well how have things been going while I was away?" said he, with a fine professional interest.

"Splendidly," said Arnold; "you shall be the first to congratulate me, old man. It was all settled this afternoon."

"I do," said Johnson, wringing his hand with a vigour that made the other wince; "and I hope she won't be angry with me for planning the deception we played on her. Miss Ralston is a fine girl, old fellow, but a hard one to manage."

"Miss Ralston!" said Arnold; "why, my dear boy, your cousin, Miss Erskine, promised to marry me to-day."

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MAGDE MORRIS.

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

As Flame Amidst Straw.

Georgina, during the first few weeks of mourning, faced life in a new spirit. She was trying to use her influence to win Sefton to a better and happier frame of mind. Why not now, she asked herself, though so late? Her husband was only a weak man, and she a woman of strength and character. She could not analyse his strange emotions, ever varying day by day. Sometimes he would not speak at all; occasionally he conversed in a half-veiled, sarcastic mood, but always he seemed to be thinking. She would watch him for perhaps an hour at a time, sitting before the fire, his body sunk low in an arm-chair, his brow wrinkled, his lips moving. When she addressed him he would start as if he had been hit, and turn his eyes reproachfully upon her without replying. Now all this was distinctly trying to Lady Ravenscroft's temper, but the enthusiasm of reform was upon her, and she exercised it by petulant fits and starts.

In her efforts to improve her own stunted nature, which she considered had never had fair play, as far as religion was concerned, she discovered that her husband's feelings and impulses were contagious. His morbid conjectures and bitter jeers caught her like flame amidst straw, kindling all that was bad in Georgina to a mighty blaze.

At first she tried preaching at Sefton. But arguments and reproofs on his hardness of heart and general demoralisation only appeared to increase his fits of sulky silence or outbursts of almost childish rage.

"Can't you leave me alone? I'm sick of being nagged at," he would exclaim, dashing from the room.

Then, in despair, Lady Ravenscroft turned to the shelves of the old library, and read sermons upon influence.

She learnt pages by heart, and repeated them in the night watches, when despair laid its icy fingers on her pillow, and brought forth drops of agony upon her brow.

"It is not mere words that turn men," she murmured. "It is the heart mounting uncalled into the expression of the features. It is the eye illuminated by reason—the look beaming with goodness. It is the tone of the voice, that instrument of the soul, which changes quality with such amazing facility, and gives out in the soft, the tender, the tremulous, the firm, every shade of emotion and character."

But even as she spoke, Georgina knew full well that she could never inspire confidence or attract goodwill in the man her treachery had made her husband. While endeavouring to exert a good influence, she could only convey by words what her looks and affectations or exaggeration of manner perpetually resisted. It was a hopeless uphill struggle, and one which the woman would never have attempted save for the image of a dead child beckoning her on from the summit of the steep and stony incline.

It was like swimming in an ocean without a shore, seeking the light of the sun in a midnight hour.

So the days crept by, and Lady Ravenscroft and Sefton were as far apart as ever.

It was one Sunday evening that Georgina finally realised the hopelessness of her good intentions, and the fiery nature of that absent-minded husband she sought to guide to higher things.

She had been to church for the third time that day, and the peace of God's house appealed to her, though she joined mechanically in the service. Her thoughts were with John Reginald in the graveyard without.

When she returned she found Sefton had not waited supper, glad of the excuse to avoid her society.

She ate her solitary meal in silence, and rejoined him in the drawing-room. He was standing with his elbows on the mantelpiece, and one foot upon the brightly-polished fender.

As Georgina approached he turned and spoke.

"Why do you desecrate the church," he asked, "by your presence? You know you are a bad woman, yet you stand before God and the congregation, shameless and defiant, in my pew! You kneel on the very cushion where my father knelt before you—under the frowning monument of our ancestors! Do you ever think, when you look at it, of the sorrow and pain you brought on my mother—the curse you laid upon our family? When you talk to me of Heaven, have you forgotten that your kisses helped my father step by step down to perdition? I always knew you as a traitress, but at least I hoped you were not a hypocrite."

Georgina started back and gasped as Sefton delivered these hideous truths. She opened her lips to speak, but her throat was parched and dry.

"Why do you do it?" he hissed again, coming a step nearer. "Is it that you think me fool enough to be taken in by this assumed virtue, this acted sanctity?"

Georgina's speech came at last. She stretched out her hands in an effort of self-defence.

"I have discovered," she answered, "that holiness is happiness, I am groping after light. I have realised at last the awful truth which the whole world appears to disregard, the possibility of every individual departing with the dawn of to-morrow—yes, with the dawn of to-morrow—who will answer for a day? who will vouch for an hour? Think of it coming, perhaps to-night, upon *you*, Sefton, upon me! What could we say now if those skies were rent asunder? Is the day of probation over? *Yes!* Is all ended? *Yes!* Great God! no more time for repentance? *No!* Another year, another month, another day, or hour, before we go hence with our sins upon our heads? *No*, again *no, no*, and for ever!"

Georgina's passionate words broke forth from her inmost soul. She felt she had answered well, but the cold man surveyed her unmoved. Would nothing touch him? nothing banish that horrible smile which had become stationary about his lips?

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"Go on," he said calmly. "I would hear more of your terrific anticipation of futurity. I, too, believe there is a God, who will revenge the wrongs of His people. In that dread judgment I shall call on Him for vengeance!"

As Sefton spoke of retribution, his eyes grew bright as stars—wider, and fiercer; while his shattered mind dwelt upon the torments in store for the wicked.

He saw Georgina pale, and he exulted in her wretchedness, finding mad delight in her gathering despair.

A glad thought struck her in the midst of this storm. They had never mentioned their child since his death. Surely now if she held him up between them it must calm the troubled waters.

"You taunt me with hypocrisy, you make a mock of my religion," she answered; "but surely you will let me worship in peace, when I tell you I am endeavouring to fit my soul to meet John Reginald again?"

The name awoke Sefton's wild passion to merciless vehemence. Poison was in his life blood, he approached Georgina with the resistlessness of fury.

"You think," he muttered, "that such as you will foregather with that innocent, pure spirit, the child whom death robbed us of? because your blood was in his veins, therefore he was not worthy to perpetuate my name. You have the audacity to tell me, in another sphere, that your soul will be allowed to mingle with his. No, Georgina, he has been gathered to the 'inheritance of saints.' What claim can you have to that title?"

Sefton's madness in no way lacked magnetism. He was, without knowing it, breathing his spirit, and transferring his image to Georgina. There was a fund of poison in his character, infused by insanity, which taunted the woman as she listened to his cruel condemnation.

"See, now," he continued, "the worthlessness of your striving! You have missed the light—your sun has set—it went down for ever upon the prostrate body of your lover as he lay out there," pointing to the window, "under the shrubbery trees. He is with the accursed. You had better go to *him*."

A great change gradually came over Georgina as she drank in Sefton's sentences.

Her feeble footsteps, staggering along the narrow way, halted. She turned back almost with a sigh of relief.

She nodded her head mechanically, and turned towards the door.

"Don't go," said Sefton. "I've not done with you yet—I want an answer."

"To what?"

"Well, to all this talk, my pious lady!"

"Good! You shall hear. To-night I returned from church with the full hope that in time I should see the dawn of a brighter day break over our strained and miserable home. In this last hour I have tasted the horror of waiting for a dawn that never comes. Imagine yourself, Sefton, sitting through a long night, watching for the first streak of daybreak in the dark firmament above. Let the hour of morning come and bring with it no light! The outcries of a terror-stricken world would fill the air, growing momentarily more wild and frantic at the loss of the sun. A chill creeps on. I can feel the frosty winds howling across the freezing earth. The heart of the sea is frozen, and all the fellow-planets that have lost their sun become mere balls of ice, swinging silent in the darkness. I am cold now, Sefton, outwardly and inwardly. I care no more to mourn our son. You have placed him beyond my reach; you have torn out my mother's heart and trampled it under foot. All that was human in me you have turned to brute beast. How long does the lioness mourn her cubs? The world is still fair, though the future may be dark. I will taste its pleasures while I can. If I shut myself up here with you I shall go mad. Shock propriety, shall I? Oh, yes, perhaps; but life is so short. I might have been a good woman—it was just touch and go—but you must needs meddle and intervene! Now I have told you straight, take the consequences of your action. Watch the ruin of my soul, and bear it with you to the grave!"

Sir Sefton laughed. The sound came full, free, and unrestrained.

"What a scene of tragedy and comedy!" he exclaimed. "You talk as if sin were new to you, the 'ruin' of the thing you call your soul a novelty."

Georgina's teeth chattered, for the raw east winds of misery swept through her motionless body.

She saw her hopes crumble, knowing at last that her influence was not strong enough to operate on the mind of her husband. The weapons she believed in barely an hour ago seemed to have snapped into a thousand splinters. They were useless, and she stood empty-handed, flung from the heights to bitterest depths again. Reform! There was no such possibility for women like her, or men of Sefton's nature. From head to foot she felt herself a mass of discord, her spirit untuned without a nerve at unity, her sensibilities crushed—her religion dead.

The removal of her child to an invisible existence might have raised Georgina to noble habits of thought and feeling, and turned her attention to the future world from gross and transitory interests. Already the dim shadow of awakening faith had in a few brief moments of inspiration changed to a substantial and glorious reality. But Georgina was destined to tread thorny and uncommon paths—to see the sacred bond of parent and child scoffed at by a mad and reckless husband, made so by her own act—herself alone to blame from beginning to end!

She moved slowly to the door, exhausted by her late passion, yet still smarting under Sefton's cuts.

"What is my whole life but continued insult?" she cried on reaching her own room, and turning the key with a little hissing sound between her lips. "For me there is no sympathy—no love! I have fallen beneath sympathy, and death robbed me of affection. Nature has implanted the thirst—the passion for love in my soul ever since John Reginald lay cold and stiff, murdered by my carelessness—my vanity! Where are my resolves—the vague ideas of a better lot dawning for Sefton—and for me? Hope spread her unused pinions in vain. Hope is one of the faculties—the feelings—that died for ever in my heart to-night. It must be war to the end now, the infinite chasm between us growing wider."

Georgina spoke breathlessly. Her thoughts and words came ever swiftly like a rushing torrent, and, strangely enough, it never entered her head that Sefton's mind was deranged.

"I have money," she continued, "to go my own way; but then he would be glad—thankful to be rid of me! And a wife living apart from her husband—well, there is a peculiar ignominy about that; you hold yourself up as a public illustration of failure!"

Georgina flung forward her arms and beat the air. Her character had not changed since the morning she shattered her looking-glass wilfully after Sir Reginald's death.

She was the same impulsive, passionate, vindictive creature, dwarfed and stunted by the withering influence of misfortune. The dead do not know their want of life, and so this woman, whose moral sentiments were palsied by the interweaving of all that might have been good in her with a system of scheming, pushing, hypocrisy, and self, self—always self—first and foremost, must needs become degraded!

Now hate reigned uppermost in her mind—a hatred of the world, a horror of everything.

Suddenly her eyes grew feverishly bright, and the very terror of the thought that came over her was a pleasure, purely emotional, born of the love of sensation. And the thought grew swelling in her brain, till her senses reeled, chairs and sofas swam before her gaze.

"To do *that!*" she gasped, "to do *that!*"

But as yet she could not speak the thought, for it parched her lips, burnt her throat, and racked the very fibres of her being.

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CHAPTER XXV.

Self Dissection.

Georgina spoke to herself in low disjointed sentences.

"Moral courage, that is all I need. Duty, yes, I like the word, for it *is* my duty to seek the punishment I deserve. In me, the spirit of self-sacrifice, the spirit of martyrdom shall be gloriously displayed. Conscience and the divinity within my soul spurs and goads me on. I feel already the kindling energy, the solemn joy, inspired by pain and peril in the cause of justice. Oh! the blessed laws of England, that will free me from the bondage of the flesh, and give me the power of lowering Sefton's pride to the dust. I will place myself in the way of scorn, and advance to meet a death more suited than any other to bring infamy on the name of Ravenscroft."

Still dazed by excitement, and eager to revenge herself upon Sefton, she again went forth to the contest, entering her husband's presence with a blanched, ghastly face, and hair dishevelled.

"Why have you come back?" he asked, and she noticed he had not moved since she left him, but stood in the same unnatural attitude, with drooping shoulders and protruding chin.

"To tell you," she replied, "that your cruel taunts and desperate unbelief in me have not utterly quenched the light of revelation!

"I have found strength in my sorrow, strength that even conquers the fear of death. I can laugh at you now, Sefton, for some deep power, hitherto latent within, has sprung up, enabling me to look above material Nature. You might as soon try to pluck the sun from his sphere, or storm the skies with earth's artillery, as move me now from my purpose."

"What are you driving at?" he questioned sullenly. "I thought you had done with your fanatical rubbish for one night."

Georgina drew nearer. She lowered her voice, and the words seemed choking her as she continued:

"When I spoke to you just now of 'shocking propriety,' and 'tasting life's pleasures,' I meant to go back to the gay world, have my fling, and throw off the shackles of sorrow. But I see it is impossible. There is a secret weighing down my heart, a voice urging me on to give myself up to justice. Sefton, you remember how strangely sudden was our child's death. Look me in the face, and say why and how *you* thought he died!"

Her husband's eyes were bloodshot and staring as they returned her gaze.

"Why and how?" he muttered, "why and how!"

"Yes. Was it from natural causes?" He bent his head.

"You ask a riddle."

"Then listen, and I will give you the key. You remember how he slept at the ball?"

"Perhaps—he—was—dying—then?" There was a deep streak of red across Sefton's brow as he gasped out this sentence.

Georgina covered her face. "You are right," she confessed, "he was dying by my hand!"

"*Yours?*"

"I drugged him in all innocence, but, nevertheless, I am his murderess. For this crime I intend to die; to-morrow I give the story to the world. A Ravenscroft at the gallows! Think of it, husband, for you *are* my husband. In the sight of God and man we are one flesh, the vow and covenant is between us still. It is part of your being that will meet a felon's death."

He looked her up and down, as if her wild words were but the outcome of some torturing nightmare. Yet she spoke with a certain intelligence and vigour that surprised him.

"How dare you invent such a dastardly lie!" he burst forth, "you are trying to fool me with this mad talk, to satisfy your craving for tumult. If you did drug him I suppose the dose was not poisoned intentionally."

Georgina listened, a numb apathy creeping over her, which, joined to stubborn determination, hardened her set lips and deadened the light in her eyes.

"I am better out of the world—let me swing for it!" she whispered hoarsely.

"Wretched woman!" he cried, starting forward, and laying his hands roughly on her shoulders, shaking her in his desperation.

"If it was your doing, then let the weight of guilt be buried in your own breast, with the dark past that is gone. You stole the name of Ravenscroft when I was too weak to resist. You shall not sink it lower in the mire!"

"I am not your slave—at least my conscience is my own! I repeat—the grave has no horrors for me now, nothing can stand between the soul and God's mercy. This is a way of atonement. I shall not shrink!"

Georgina spoke boastfully. She only saw the picturesque side of the wild notion, her calmer mood and reasoning nature had yet to assert itself.

Gradually her lofty bearing and high flown allusions to conscience awoke in Sefton a supreme sense of the ridiculous.

Remembering himself to be the murderer, his unhinged brain saw suddenly a distorted joke in this tragic situation.

He broke into a weird peal of ribald mirth.

"Good," he cried—"very good! Give yourself up, be a fool to the end. Drink your cup of shame! Drink my health in it, Georgina—a health to the illustrious name of Ravenscroft!"

As she listened to his horrible laughter, and realised he had actually given his sanction to her sacrifice, a feeling of revolting fear leapt like flame into her blood.

The whole scene of court and scaffold passed before Georgina's mental vision. She heard the hisses of a multitude, and saw in fiery letters: "Confession of Lady Ravenscroft" glaring at her from vulgar posters. Her enthusiasm was sinking—sinking. Her moral courage had given way.

Sir Sefton was sharp enough to see it, though she said nothing. He chuckled inwardly.

"The illustrious name," she murmured at last, catching at an opportunity to retrace her steps without loss of dignity. "For the sake of that alone I would forego the privilege of dying, and carry on my burden of life."

"Fine sentiments," he replied, the mocking smile playing about his mouth. "But all women are cowards. You no more dare face the rope——"

"Hush!" with an imperative gesture; "do not goad me to the folly against which you have been pleading."

"Then in the name of our dead child, Georgina, let the subject cease. You have polluted his memory by pretence, affected fervour, theatrical show, and display! Better remain cold than pretend to feel, for in truth nothing is so despicable as noisy, assumed enthusiasm. Not one genuine emotion has risen to the surface in all your brag and bounce. Forced ardour, fictitious zeal, cant and humbug! Moral courage is not one of the virtues of our times, so don't imagine you possess it. But after all, there are compensations. You have been very amusing this evening, and it is the first time I have laughed for many a night."

Georgina could have borne anything better than that last remark, for its very truth made the sting more bitter. She raised her hands as if to ward off a blow, and fled from the room disgusted with herself.

Her emotions were at a standstill. She was too weak to sacrifice herself in atonement, she knew *that* the moment Sefton gave her free permission to be "a fool to the end." But how her life was to continue, and the future work out, she could neither guess at nor surmise.

"I suppose I shall fall back on the inevitable consolation of pursuing pleasure, and confiding in riches, fleeting transitory possessions. Not a very animating prospect, after what I had dreamed might be. Fancy looking for

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sunshine across a sky which has frowned on me for years, whose clouds are charged with tempests! It was childish and absurd. The chilling blast of Sefton's sneers would check the most promising spiritual vegetation. Flowers cannot flourish when choked by thistles or briars, nor bloom in a climate cheerless and dreary."

So she excused her evanescent mood, trying to forget the humiliating situation in which she found herself.

"Sefton would brand me with every epithet of meanness and inconsistency," she said, creeping into bed with aching head and burning temples, "so perhaps I had better live up to my reputation."

This was her last thought before she fell asleep.

The following morning Georgina awoke with a resolve.

"I must go away," she said, "for change of scene with cheerful people. I wonder what the Humpherys are doing? They have a perfect genius for amusing themselves, and study the art of killing time, not always an easy matter to accomplish! They know how to conquer the greatest foe of mankind—idleness. Their highest ambition is to enjoy life and escape being bored. At the present moment I feel the need of energy and movement!"

She shook her pillows, and rang for her breakfast in bed.

Luxury in every form was dear to Georgina's soul, yet her thoughts ran on complainingly.

She counted her grievances, till they were more in number than the hairs of her head, and mingled tears with strong coffee and buttered toast.

"If you mean to enjoy yourself," she declared, "it is no good going about it half heartedly. I am sick of the drizzling rain of sorrow, last night's good drenching downpour has cleared my horizon. I will put my misery behind me, and investigate the science of pleasure!"

She touched the bell again, too lazy to stretch out her hand for the novel that lay on the table.

"My book," she said, pointing to a yellowback, in which the heroine nobly gave herself up to justice, to save a murderer she loved. Georgina remembered the incident with a wan smile. "And a telegraph form," she continued. "Do I want a pencil? What a question! Am I to write with my fingers? Now wait, and take it down when it is ready." She addressed the form to Mrs. Humphery:

"I am sinking from *ennui*, won't you come to doctor my depression, and cheer me up?"

"A nice message for a bereaved mother to be sending through the telegraph!" said Georgina's maid indignantly to the coachman, as he rode off with the missive. "She wants to be cheered, does she?"

The girl turned away with an expressive grunt, for Lady Ravenscroft's overbearing manner made her highly unpopular in her household.

Mrs. Humphery answered the wire in person, descending upon Ravenscroft Park like a whirlwind in chiffons.

She poured forth a list of engagements "cut" (as she termed it) for the pleasure of seeing Georgina again.

"I have oceans of delicious plans if you will really be sensible, rouse yourself, and enter into them. All the tonic you need is a little harmless fun and frivolity (not too diluted with water) to put iron in your blood. Only let me prescribe, follow my treatment, and all your morbidity will dissolve. Drown the memory of the immediate past, and, if you value your reason, take a holiday from your husband. It positively gives me the blues to look at him—poor man. How he must have worshipped that child!"

"He has a naturally gloomy temperament, and is quite in opposition to the scheme of the world—pleasure! But I really believe he enjoys moping."

As Lady Ravenscroft and the irrepressible Mrs. Humphery wove schemes for the future, Sefton chafed at the presence of his wife's friend.

"It is abominable," he muttered, in the privacy of his study, "Georgina has not even the decency to mourn her son."

(To be concluded.)

SEE PAGE 363.

NEW CONDITIONS.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 12.

In order to lessen the amount of work undertaken by competitors in pasting up the separate lines of the story in these competitions, each line is now numbered, and all that readers need do is to write clearly on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order they believe to be correct. The title and author's name are jumbled up, and should be correctly given.

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the reader whose solution first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Six Prizes—one of £5 and four of £1 each—are
5 *September 14th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reaches this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose key is most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 9.

No competitor succeeded in correctly putting together Jumbled Story No. 9. The nearest competitor was Mr. H. P. Wright, 72, Evelina Road, Nunhead, S.E., to whom £5 has been forwarded. Each of the following competitors has received £1: Miss C. Buggins, St. John's Cottage, Chestnut Grove, New Malden, Surrey; Mr. F. L. Hill, 28, Lyham Road, Brixton, S.W.; Mr. E. Page, Wraysbury, near Staines; Mr. Bernard Ford, 96, King Edward Road, South Hackney; Mr. J. Ross Smyth, 11, Burrell Street, Crieff, N.B.

IN SHORT STORIES

dated October 3rd will appear the opening chapters of a new serial story by Mr. GEO. C. WALLIS, entitled

"The Last King of Atlantis,"

dealing with the strange lives lived by those who once inhabited this lost continent.

POSTAL RATES.

SHORT STORIES will be sent direct from these offices, post free, to any country within the Postal Union, at the following rates, prepaid:

One Year	6s. 6d.
Half Year	3s. 3d.
Three Months	1s. 8d.

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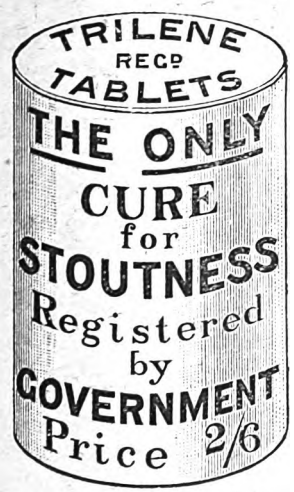
ALL FAT PEOPLE

Can be **CURED** by taking

TRILENE TABLETS Regd.



For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

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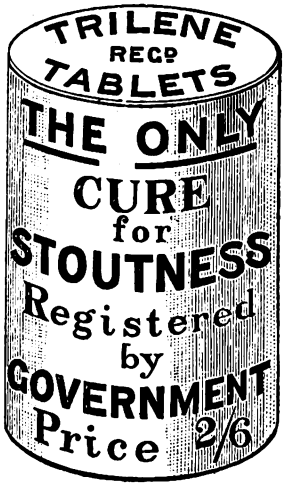

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87, Alexandra Road, Norwich.
"GENTLEMEN,—I have had some boxes of your Tablets for my wife, and she has derived great benefit from them.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Illustrated Family Novelist, November 30th, 1895, says: "A great many women who are plump by nature worry about their stoutness. However, there are some perfectly safe remedies for embonpoint, among them being the Trilene Tablets, which are not only safe, but absolutely beneficial to the general health, and speedily produce the desired effect."

"1, Letterstone Road, Fulham, S.W.
"SIRS,—I found myself decreased and better for your treatment, and can get about more freely.
"Yours sincerely, F. E. GODDEN."

"6, Brighton Terrace, Hull.
"MRS. JOHNSON has much pleasure in saying she has derived great benefit from your Tablets."

"3, Castle Road, Deal.
"MRS. J. PEARSON is glad to say she is much thinner."

Convalescent Home, New Brighton, Cheshire.
MISS S. J. PRITCHARD says: "They have done me good. I am 21lb. lighter already."

"Bretton West, near Wakefield.
"MISS L. LANGFIELD has taken a box of Tablets, and is already 7lb. lighter."

"Claremont House, Shrewsbury.
"DEAR SIRS,—I have nearly finished your Tablets, and cannot speak too highly of them. They do me good in many ways, being a valuable tonic and bracer up of the nervous system, and, being of a gouty tendency, they have also done me good in that way. I am very much thinner.
"Yours truly (MRS.) K. M. ANNAND."

25, Windsor Terrace, Penarth, Cardiff.
MISS M. FLAVELL says: "I have lost 2 stone, and am much better in health."

Extract from *Bury and Suffolk Times*, June 15th, 1894: "Miss Atherton sings and dances as piquantly as ever, and is a marvel of agility, considering how much flesh she has put on of late. Her friends should induce her to take a course of Trilene Tablets, about which I hear wonderful things. One portly acquaintance of my own by merely a few weeks' use of these little Tablets, has reduced his bulk perceptibly. I am assured the Tablets are harmless and tasteless, and that the Trilene Company in Finsbury Pavement, London, are doing an enormous and ever-increasing trade."

486, Market Street, Whitworth, near Rochdale.
MISS GRINDROD writes: "Have had one 2s. 6d. box of Trilene Tablets, and am 5lb. lighter."

2, Chariot Street, Hull.
MR. JUBB, Chemist, says: "My customers speak highly of your Tablets."

Windsor Hotel, Merthyr Vale, South Wales.
MR. J. THOMAS writes: "When I started the Tablets I weighed 17½ stone, and have got down to 14st. 9lb."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.
MR. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17 stone, was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15 stone."

Aspern, 29, King's Hall Road, Beckenham.
MISS S. WOODHOUSE writes: "I have much pleasure in stating that your Tablets are really a safe cure for stoutness; they have cured me, and I am a perfect figure now."

MRS. GIBBON, of Radford Cottage, Bitterne, says: "I have derived great benefit from your Tablets, especially abdominal."

131, Victoria Street, London, S.W.
MRS. ARTHUR WEGUELIN (the "Society" celebrity) writes: "By simply taking the Trilene regularly, and without change of diet, I have lost 1st. 4lb. in four weeks."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 70, FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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VALUABLE MONEY PRIZES OFFERED EVERY WEEK.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 404. FOR WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 26TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

GRAND PIONEER REDUCTION SALE

By Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son, the well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement. Super-eminent.—The Queen's Royal Household Prudential, Eclipse, and Alarm Carpets and Hearthrugs, etc. (Reg.). Amazingly interesting, instructive, and detailed Grand Reduction Catalogue post free, if, when writing, you mention this paper.

REMARKS.—A lady customer writes complaining that we send out too large a Carpet for the money. Be this so or not, we send out no Carpet measuring less than 6ft. by 9ft.—even for 2s. 11d. TEST THEM. THEY WILL SURPRISE YOU.

OUR NEW VENTURE! Yes, Two Different Pattern Hearthrugs or Carpets for the Price of One! (Copyright).

This is a wonderful step in economy.

PRODIGIOUS SALE OF THE

"PRUDENTIAL" Reversible CARPETS

(Registered.)

Reversible, with a different pattern on both sides, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 10 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine on one side the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian, with on the reverse the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

	Each.		Each.
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. " " "	5/11	12ft. by 12ft. " " "	12/9
8ft. by 9ft. " " "	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft. " " "	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft. " " "	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " "	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. " " "	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft. " " "	11/6	12ft. by 21ft. " " "	22/6

When ordering please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

"Neal Lodge, Upper Norwood, S.E., January 18th., 1896.

"The Dowr. Lady Abercromby is pleased with the 'Prudential' Carpet she ordered."

Blairquhan, Maybole, N.B., August 3rd.

Lady Hunter Blair writes: "Will Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son send her another 'Prudential' Carpet, same as before, crimson and gold, dimensions, 9ft. by 10½ft. Cheque inclosed."

A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Reg)., to match above Carpets, sent for 1s. 6d. extra, size 2 yards long, and 1 yard wide.

SPECIAL OFFER.—3 Hearthrugs for 4s. 3d.; or 6 for 8s.; or 12 for 15s. 6d.

EXTRAORDINARY REDUCTIONS.

100,000 "ALARM" CARPETS

(Registered). GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.

Sale Price 2/11 EACH.

This Gigantic Offer is a Special Contract, made with readers of *Short Stories* only. We will forward direct from the looms to any address on receipt of amount, A GENUINE WOVEN, SEAMLESS, REVERSIBLE CARPET, the largest ever sold at the Price.

Suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Bordered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any Middle Profits. Remember these are Woven, not printed, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool. Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double above prices. A Rug sent with Carpet, 10d. extra.

SPECIAL OFFER. 2 Carpets and 2 Rugs ..... 7s. 3d.

Value unequalled in the Annals of Advertising. As a favour, kindly Examine and Compare these Carpets.

"SHORT STORIES" CARPET COUPON, 26/9/96.

On receipt of this Coupon and P.O.O. or Stamps for amount, we guarantee to send goods as above to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. Cash returned in full if not satisfied.

(Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

All orders dispatched same day in rotation as they arrive by post. Cheques nd P.O.'s payable to

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A Nine-gallon Cask of Alcoholic Beer from a Brewery will cost you 10/6, but Eight Gallons of Beer made from

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Can be obtained for 6d., plus a pound or two of Sugar and a little Yeast.

THE FINEST BEVERAGE IN THE WORLD.

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If unable to obtain it in your neighbourhood, send 9 stamps for sample bottle; or samples of both Wine Essence and Extract of Herbs, post free for 15 stamps.

PALATABLE SUBSTITUTE FOR COD LIVER OIL.

DEVONSHIRE CREAM.

(REALLY GENUINE.)

In Patent Air-tight Tins, ½lb., 1s. 4d.; 1lb., 2s. 4d.; 2lb., 4s. 4d., including Tin and Postage.

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"SHORT STORIES" best suit the mood of this eager, restless age, so

THE JOHN NOBLE HALF-GUINEA COSTUMES,

Ready-made and to measure, may be briefly and simply set down as

"ABSOLUTELY the BEST VALUE in the WORLD."

MODEL 583 is one of the latest up-to-date designs made in that ideal fabric, The John Noble Cheviot Serge. It has a smart well-cut Bodice, with the back shaped to the figure and the front pleated at the waist.

10/6. There is a pretty Yoke Collar, and the whole is very daintily trimmed. The Skirt is a full, wide, tailor-made design. Price, for complete Costume, only 10/6; safely packed and sent carriage paid for 9d. extra.

SKIRT ONLY, as sketched, 5/6; carriage 6d. extra.

SIZES IN STOCK fit figures 34in., 36in., and 38in. round bust, under arms; skirts being 38in., 40in. and 42in. long in front. Larger or special sizes made to measure, 1/6 extra.

COLOURS. — Black, Brown, Navy, Myrtle, Bronze-Green, Ruby, Cinnamon, Electric Blue, Fawn, Grey, and Petunia.

John Noble's Knockabout Frocks,

With long full sleeves, saddle top, and pocket.

Sizes	21	24	27	30	33	36	39	42 45in.
Prices	1/6	2/-	2/6	3/-	3/6	4/-	4/6	5/- 5/6

Sent Carriage Paid 4½d. extra.

"AN IDEAL SCHOOL OR HOLIDAY GARMENT FOR GIRLS."

AN UP-TO-DATE FASHION VOLUME, containing numerous choice designs of Ladies' and Children's Costumes, sent, together with Patterns, post free on application. PLEASE MENTION "SHORT STORIES."

JOHN NOBLE LTD., Brook St. Mills, **MANCHESTER.**

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BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,

SUCH AS

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Weak Stomach, Impaired Digestion,

Disordered Liver & Female Ailments.

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In Boxes, 9½d., 1s. 1½d., and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

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ARE YOU LOOKING for the cheapest and best firm to supply you with Wood for **FRETWORK & WOOD-CARVING?**

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Its speedy and painless cure by the latest and most improved method of treatment for this disease. Send for Illustrated Leaflet, entering fully into the subject. It is the only reliable and effective means of curing this disease without operation. Sent sealed post free for taree stamps, by

E. FORBES, 57 and 58, Chancery Lane, London, W.C.

CORPULENCY CURED By a simple inexpensive self-treatment, effecting a rapid and permanent reduction without change in diet. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. G. A. BOYD, 14, York Buildings, Charing Cross, London.

S.S. S.S.

PEARSON'S

£100

COUPON.

No. 39

Sept. 26, 1896.

S.S. S.S.

HAIR DESTROYED.

A doctor's widow knows of a simple, inexpensive remedy that permanently destroys the roots, and will forward particulars free to all those afflicted sending stamped envelope. Address Mrs. B. D. WOOD, 4, DUKE STREET, VILLIERS STREET, LONDON, W.

BLUSHING

Permanently cured. A Pamphlet giving sound practical advice and particulars of a successful treatment for a rapid, simple, and inexpensive home cure, forwarded free to all upon receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—Prof. B. L. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

Dr. Mackenzie's ARSENICAL TOILET SOAP.

The greatest beautifier in the World. Produces a lovely skin and complexion, and cures spots, pimples, redness, and freckles. The finest and purest soap made. For Eczema and all irritations it is the most emollient and soothing. Absolutely harmless. But beware of the many worthless imitations. Have Dr. Mackenzie's or none. At all Chemists and Stores, 6d. and 1s. a tablet.

Madame Adelina Patti writes from Craig-y-Nos Castle: "I find Dr. Mackenzie's Arsenical Toilet Soap most excellent."

GLOSS JUST LIKE CHINA.

Every man likes his shirt, collar, and cuffs to look exactly like china. It is very easy, too, to get the effect. You have only to rub some of Redford's China Gloss on the linen before ironing, not mix it with the starch, and then you have a beautiful polished surface. A shilling box, containing enough to last for a month or two, sent free by post on receipt of thirteenpence by Redford & Son, G. Dept., 30, Oxford Street, Liverpool.

SULPHOLINE LOTION,

For clearing the skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

SHILLING BOTTLES.

NEW HARRISON Swift Gold Medal **KNITTER.**

KNITS Stockings ribbed or plain, Gloves and Clothing in Wool, Silk, or Cotton. Instructions Free. Lists free per post. 25 Triumphant Awards, including 7 Gold Medals, for the "Harrison" and "Sun" Machines.

Harrison Knitting Machine Co., Ltd. Works: 48, Upper Brook St., Manchester.

HAIR DESTROYED. On receipt of stamped addressed envelope a lady will send to those afflicted with Superfluous Hairs, free particulars of a simple remedy which *permanently* removed a large growth from her sister's face without injuring the skin. Address, in confidence, Miss E. R. DALE, 26, Belvedere Road, Lambeth, London.

RED NOSES

Permanently cured in a few days by a simple, inexpensive self-treatment. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. A. M. CURTIS, York Chambers, Adelphi, London, W.C.

TOO STOUT

If you require a reliable remedy for the relief of superfluous fat, send for a box of my "H.D." Pills. No starvation required; you may eat and drink what you like, yet I guarantee to either sex a permanent reduction of 5lb. to 7lb. weekly. They are a harmless vegetable preparation; successful in the most stubborn cases, and improve health and figure. Their action is rapid, certain, safe, tasteless, and highly recommended. Prices, 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d., and 11s., post free, plain wrapper. PROFESSOR F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

No. 404.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending September 26th, 1896.

SLEEP NO MORE!

"And then it started like a guilty thing,
Upon a fearful summons."
HAMLET.

BASEST of all men is he who betrays a trust.

Nothing could be urged in the defence of Edgar Mostyn: not youth, or lack of experience, not hastiness, not temptation from others—as far as one might judge not passion. No man standing between good and evil ever had better reasons than he for following the right path, and experience would not suffer him to go wrong by mistake. Yet he sinned—and the sin was at once great and contemptible.

When Basil Redstock had been married about a year, business made it necessary that he should leave his wife and home for several months. There were some mines to be looked after in a wild district where he could not take Eva. A maiden aunt, old, deaf, stupid, came to the house to stay, and several of Eva's companions were expected. But there ought to be a man about, as a protection against burglars. Basil's best friend was Edgar Mostyn, a bachelor, and man-of-the-world, yet one whose reserved speech and upright conduct had always repelled the breath of scandal.

"He is a man," said Basil—and Mostyn knew that he had said it—"to whom I would without hesitation intrust every penny I had in the world—my own good name—everything."

So Mostyn came to live in the house of his friend on his friend's request that he should guard and protect his wife.

At first Eva was never without the company of girl friends. Presently they ceased to come; perhaps it was accidental, perhaps she was less urgent in her invitations. During the last month, she and the old aunt and Edgar Mostyn were alone much of the time. The aunt would grow sleepy in the evenings; besides, she was deaf.

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When Basil Redstock returned, Mostyn, who was a man of perfect self-control, welcomed him with cordial smiles and hearty speech. But the weak woman, sick with terror, scarcely knew what she said and did.

Basil was not suspicious by nature—yet he was not a fool.

On the evening of the third day after the husband's return, as Mostyn sat alone in his bachelor quarters, a note was brought to him. It had been left at the door by a woman. In the trembling, illegible scrawl, he, with difficulty, recognised the handwriting of Eva Redstock. The note read as follows:

"What have I done! I cannot tell how it has happened but he knows all. He said he would kill me if I did not confess, and I was almost crazy. He means to shoot you, I know, for he took his revolver and went away. I wish he had killed me—I wish I were dead."

Mostyn stared blankly at the paper for some moments after he had finished reading its message. Here was a catastrophe in a form he had not foreseen; for such weakness was quite out of the pale of his understanding. At last he tore the note to fragments, and tossed it into the fire.

"Well," he said, with a savage scowl, "it is a scrape—a bad one. So he means to shoot, eh?"

Presently Mostyn arose and opened a drawer in his desk. He took out a revolver—not a toy article, but one of the sort that can be made to shoot straight, and to kill—and began to turn it over in his hands. A touch on a half-concealed spring, and the chambers rolled out.

From the same drawer he brought a piece of cloth, a small bottle of oil, and some cartridges.

It took a little time to clean, oil, and load the weapon. While he was thus engaged, Mostyn thought the situation over after this wise:

"He does not know how to shoot, and if I meet him in the street and he draws, I can safely risk his first fire. I know that revolver of his; before he is ready for a second, I can—h'm, it would be a bad business, if I should

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—the whole thing is going to come out anyway, if he tries the shooting business. Ruin me, of course; but I don't care to give up my life just because a woman is a fool. What a fool she was! If she had only denied it, that would have been something—but to confess all!—Yet how if he should come on me from behind? Well, that is not like Basil Redstock. He is a chivalrous fellow, and I imagine will not shoot without warning."

When the pistol was loaded and in perfect order, Mostyn slipped it into a leather sheath and left it upon the desk. Then he sat down by the fire and thought—not of the immediate danger—for he was ready now to meet that—but of the man and the woman who had that day lived a tragedy on his account. Such thoughts were surely not pleasant; yet he remained an hour beyond the time when he usually retired, staring into the flames.

The living apartments of Mr. Edgar Mostyn were two rooms in the second storey of a large residence building. The parlour was in front and looked out over the street. The neighbourhood was quiet, although not far distant from a populous thoroughfare. When he was ready to go to bed, Mostyn, as was his custom, threw wide open one of the front windows. He stood for a moment gazing into the street, which was brightly lighted by the moon and empty of people. Then he closed the blinds, and went into the inner room.

There was in the lower hall of the house a large clock which struck the hours. Shortly after Mostyn stepped into bed, midnight sounded. He lay very still for a time and thought of Eva. Then he turned over into another part of the bed and thought about Basil. And presently he heard the clock strike one.

Then he became restless and tossed about. It was a bad scrape, and it worried him. Even if he saved his life he must expect to part with his reputation, for the affair would make a horrible uproar. What a fool that woman was—what an unspeakable fool!

Two o'clock.

The bed had become disagreeably warm, and he raised himself on his elbow, that the cool air might come under the clothes. The attitude made him think of the way actors die on the stage. Would a man who was shot take this position? He wondered how it would be with himself, if that first bullet from Basil Redstock's weapon should take effect. Pooh! It was a toy affair, incapable of hitting a mark ten feet away. There was very little chance; of course there was a chance, merely a chance. He dropped back in bed.

Then began to see pictures of what might happen. He is walking down the street—Basil comes up from behind—calls out to him—shoots—he falls into the gutter. He is coming out of the front-door of the house—someone calls to him—it is Basil Redstock—a shot—he falls forward on his face on the steps. He is at his desk in the office—a noise of someone speaking—he looks up—it is Basil Redstock—a report—a flash of light—smoke—he drops out of the chair in a heap on the floor—blood on the carpet.

Now the pictures began to follow one another more rapidly. He was whirled along through the various places where business or pleasure might take him in the course of the day; always it was the same—a sudden cry—Basil Redstock—a shot—Mostyn falls—blood. As they came faster, the details grew dimmer, until at last the whole seemed an indistinct haze, in the midst of which he could only see Basil Redstock, with arm upraised and he himself falling—falling——

He was nearing sleep. One moment more and he would have been free from the torment of consciousness, but in that instant he heard a cry from the street, loud and clear, the voice of Basil Redstock.

"*Mostyn! Coward! Come out and be shot!*"

He sprang up in bed—stunned into terror. After the last word was spoken, there was stillness, stillness in the house and in the street—stillness so complete that it roared in his ears.

There was no chance to think it a dream, for on hearing his name called Mostyn had instantly shaken off his drowsiness, and was thoroughly awake to what followed. There could be no question either about the origin of the cry; Basil Redstock—crazed, perhaps—stood in the street—in the middle of the street—before the house, and was calling to him to come out. Evidently he was armed, and the instant Mostyn should appear would begin to shoot.

Mostyn climbed slowly and noiselessly out of bed, and groped his way into the front room. He had no distinct plan of action, but when, by the moonlight that struggled through the chinks of the blinds, he saw the revolver lying on the desk, he took it out of its sheath and went towards the window that overlooked the street.

Here he could see plainly, yet not be seen.

There was no one in the street. It was empty and silent, as when Mostyn had looked down upon it a few hours before.

Where was Redstock? Had he gone away, or was he hiding in the dark shadows? Mostyn strained his eyes but could see no sign of him.

Suddenly he remembered that the cry must have been heard by others in the house—and, for that matter, in all the neighbourhood about—for it had rung out loud and shrill in the quiet night. He listened, expecting to hear the sound of people moving about. But silence continued. Minutes passed—two or three, five, ten—but no sign of Basil Redstock in the street—no sound in the house.

So he turned and put away the revolver on the desk and went back to bed. Now he began to think it all over anew.

The weakness and folly of Eva Redstock had been a surprise, but, in the name of heaven, what possessed Basil? Was he insane—or drunk—or had he actually thought that Mostyn would respond to such a challenge and "come out and be shot"? Really, it was quite incomprehensible. But it was none the less a disgrace.

And four sounded from the clock.

"Four in the morning! and not a wink of sleep yet. Three must have struck when I was only half conscious. In an hour more it will be daylight. I must get to sleep or I shall be a wreck to-morrow—a wreck—a wreck."

"*Mostyn! Coward! Come out and be shot!*"

The words struck into the man, half dozing in his warm bed, with a sudden and icy chill. They sounded very loud, as if Redstock were within a few feet of the house—on the pavement or the steps. There was no longer question but the cry must have been heard, at least by those who occupied rooms in the front part of the dwelling, and Mostyn waited breathlessly for something to happen. But the stillness which followed the cry remained unbroken.

At last he sprang from the bed, shivering like a man with the ague, and peered again through the blinds of the front windows. There was no one to be seen. The moonlight had given away to the first streaks of dawn; and, as he stood looking out, the clock below struck the hour of five.

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To attempt sleep now was idle, and he slowly began to dress. The cry was not heard again.

When Mostyn was ready to leave the room, he put the sheathed revolver into his pocket. He stood for a moment in the front doorway and looked searchingly across and along the street, before he ventured out upon the steps. On his way down town, he slackened his pace at every corner and glanced about, right and left and behind, in the stealthy manner of a man who is afraid of his own fears. Several times he imagined that he saw Redstock coming, and he stepped into a doorway and waited with his hand on his hip-pocket, until the suspected person cam e near enough to show that he was not the man.

"I did not know that I was such a coward," he said; "I am not a coward. A night without sleep has made me nervous. Besides, if I am not always on my guard, I may be taken unawares."

He went to his office, and, lighting a fire, began to turn over the work which he had planned for the day. The place was deserted and still. A sudden, rapid step approaching his door brought him to his feet with his hand behind him. It was only the newsboy, who, as he tossed the paper through the half-open door, caught a glimpse of the white face and staring eyes of Mostyn, and thought that the man must be struggling with the latter end of a debauch.

"This will not do," said Mostyn, mechanically taking up the paper; "I must control myself better or people will begin to suspect——"

He unfolded the sheet and began to read, his eyes running hastily across the row of headlines. Suddenly he cried out with a word that was between an oath and a prayer, and then grew so still that one might have thoughthim changed to stone.

Basil Redstock was dead. He had shot himself—accidentally, the paper said—through the heart.

The article filled the better part of a column, for Mr. Redstock was a well-known man, and his death was a strange, sad tragedy, over which the reporter fondly lingered. He had gone to his office, so it was stated, on the evening previous with the design of making up some arrears of correspondence. In tossing the papers in his desk about, he had come upon a revolver, which he had picked up and started to load. Through some carelessness on his part, the weapon was fired while pointed at his breast, and the shot had proved fatal. The report was heard by several persons in the building, and, forcing the door, they found a tableau which told the entire story as plainly as though each act had been witnessed and recorded. On the desk were letters laid out to be answered and recorded. Drawers were open and papers scattered about, showing that he had been in search of some document when he happened upon the weapon. In the centre of the desk was a box of cartridges and the pistol, ramrod, and cleaner, and near the feet of the dead man lay the weapon, four chambers empty, one loaded, and one filled with a shell.

This discovery was made at eleven o'clock in the evening.

When he reached the end of the narrative, Mostyn laid down the paper and stared at the wall. He was dazed for the moment, and could not make an effort to accommodate the facts that he had just read with what he had known before. At last it became clear to him, for one thing, that Redstock was dead, and he heaved a long sigh of relief.

That danger was passed.

Was it an accident? he asked himself; or was it not more likely a suicide, with this arrangement of things about the desk cunningly designed for the purpose of throwing off suspicion? Well, what did it matter? Mostyn's secret was safe.

"Safe," he muttered: "safe—but hold;—the people at the house—they heard him cry out to me from the street—they must have heard it—why, that can't be—let me see—eleven o'clock?—but it was three o'clock when he called to me—dead at eleven—I know it was three—yes, and later it was five—the second time—impossible—there is some mistake—the paper is wrong—no, I am wrong—but I certainly heard it—three o'clock—eleven o'clock—why, that is five hours—yes, five hours."

Repeating it over and over did not make it any clearer. In the end, the only conclusion which Mostyn reached was that something was wrong—and this meant nothing at all.

As he was ostensibly one of the nearest friends of the dead man, it was natural that he should make inquiries about the accident. A small amount of investigation satisfied him, beyond all doubt, that Basil Redstock had shot himself intentionally, and also that he was dead by eleven o'clock in the evening.

"But that was before I went to bed," thought Mostyn.

That evening he expected to hear his friends at home refer to the strange noises of the night before; but no one spoke of them. Then Mostyn himself told about a drunken man who was crying out in front of the house—about three o'clock in the morning; and surprise was manifested by his listeners. None of them had heard a sound.

Having had no sleep in thirty-six hours, Edgar Mostyn was inclined to retire early. He went to his room at nine o'clock, and as a preliminary of undressing, took the revolver out of his pocket, and put it away in the desk. The act brought back to his mind the singular half-dreams of the previous night when he had repeatedly seen himself shot and felt himself falling. After he got into bed, in the dark and stillness, the weird and awful panorama began once more to whirl past his tightly closed eyes. In vain he tried to drive it away. There was always the same scene—Basil Redstock aiming the weapon, firing, and Mostyn falling.

At last, in spite of it all, he was becoming drowsy, and almost ready to sleep.

"*Mostyn! Coward! Come out and be shot!*"

There it was again!—loud and clear, almost a shriek. It came from the middle of the street, and was the voice—yes, plainly the voice—of Basil Redstock. Why, he was dead! But this was his voice. What did it mean? A dream? A hoax! Or madness?

Before Mostyn knew what he did, he stood by the window looking into the street. There was no one to be seen. He shivered, and turned back towards the bedroom.

Then he heard a noise of talking in the hall just outside his door. Plainly this time the cry had roused the house; and he hurriedly slipped on a dressing-gown, to be ready, should anyone enter the room.

No one came. Presently he opened the door, and looked out. Two men stood at the front end of the hall in the large bay-window which overhung the street. They were fellow lodgers of Mostyn, and they were conversing with apparent unconcern.

"Did you hear it?" asked Mostyn.

"Hear what?" said one of the men

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"The—the crazy man yelling in the street."

"Not a sound."

"How long have you been standing here?"

"Ten—fifteen minutes."

Mostyn noticed that one of the windows was open. How was it possible that the cry should have penetrated to his bedroom, to rouse him—half-asleep—and yet be unnoticed by these men standing by the open window.

As he turned this question over in his mind, gazing in dumb wonder at the man who had last spoken, the words came again to his startled ears, this time in a wild and terrible yell.

"*Mostyn! Coward! Come out and be shot!*"

It was such a cry as might have belched from the jaws of some fierce animal that had acquired the power of speech. It seemed to echo and re-echo through all the house, making the windows rattle and the doors shake, and Mostyn listened for an answering uproar. He looked to see the men at the window turn upon him with horror in their faces, and demand to know what it meant.

But after the sound of the last word died away, the house remained still. The men at the window did not move.

One of them said: "The street is unusually quiet to-night."

"Yes," answered the other; and Mostyn staggered back into his room.

Then the muscles of his body relaxed, and he tumbled into an awkward heap on the floor. It was not a faint; it was the utter exhaustion that comes over a man when, for the first time, he beholds the impossible existing.

An hour passed, and the voice in the street—or in his brain—had been silent. He dragged himself to the bed and fell heavily upon it. Sick and weary with doubt, debate and questioning, he closed his eyes and once more sought for sleep.

"*Mostyn! Coward! Come out and be shot!*"

Ah! There it sounded again. Well, let it sound. He would sleep—sleep in spite of it.

"*Mostyn! Coward! Come out and be shot!*"

Louder this time, so terribly loud that Mostyn leapt and fell back, trembling like a frightened child.

And now the awful longing for sleep began to grow upon the brain, as hunger gnaws upon the body.

In the grey of early dawn he gave up the struggle, arose and dressed, and went out of the house to walk in the streets.

He began to drink—whisky, brandy, and, at last, absinthe. It was all like so much water. Thoroughly frightened, towards the close of the long day he called to see his physician.

"What shall I do?" he asked; "I cannot sleep."

The doctor looked at his haggard face and bloodshot eyes, felt his pulse, and listened to his heart. "Overwork and worry," he said; "you must be careful."

The physician was to Mostyn an intimate friend, so he told a large part of the story: how he heard the voice of a dead man calling to him from the street. Dr. Morey listened, with deep interest.

"Tortured and outraged nerves," he said, "played upon by the imagination."

"I do not imagine I hear it," said Mostyn; "I do hear it—plainly—as I hear you speaking now."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the doctor, looking at him askance; "is it so bad as that?"

"Mostyn," he continued, after a moment's pause, "why don't you humour yourself in this matter? It may do good. The next time you hear the cry, respond to it. Go out in the street, and actually convince yourself beyond all doubt that no one is there."

Then he gave Mostyn a prescription, and offered him a hypodermic syringe—to be used if all other means failed.

It was now the third night—sixty hours passed without sleep—and evening was at hand. "Another night like the last," thought Mostyn, "and I shall go mad." He scarcely dared go to his room, although the desire for sleep raged within him like a caged beast.

At nine o'clock he lay down on the bed, without removing his clothes. He purposed to be ready, when the call should come, to run down into the street and defy his imagination with fact.

Hardly had his head touched the pillow, when, for the third time, the visions of death began to flit before him. Again and again he witnessed the old picture, always changing, yet always the same—Basil Redstock aiming and discharging the weapon, and he falling—falling. At last it seemed that sleep could no longer elude him.

In that moment came the cry—louder, fiercer, and more terrible than ever:

"*Mostyn! Coward! Come out and be shot!*"

Before it ceased ringing in his ears, he was leaping down the stairs towards the door that led to the street.

And now mark how Fate prepares for her victims. In a public-house near by two men had been playing cards, and pouring liquor into their brains. A word—a blow—a slash with a knife—a revolver is out—one runs—the other pursues. Now the fugitive comes round the corner into the street where stands the house of Edgar Mostyn. The door opens and the haunted man rushes down to the pavement. Once more he hears the cry reverberating in the tones of the dead:

"*Mostyn! Coward! Come out and be shot!*"

And he falls forward upon his face, his heart pierced by the chance-aimed bullet.

CHARLES DWIGHT WILLARD.

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 10.

The first prize of £5 goes this week to Mr. F. Revelt, 2, Pond Terrace, Lower Clapton, London, whose attempt was the only one completely correct. Each of the competitors whose names appear below have received £1, their solutions being the next most correct sent in:

Miss Sullivan, Hill House, Bandon, co. Cork, Ireland.
Mr. H. P. Wright, 72, Evilina Road, Nunhead, S.E.
Miss Bessie Adams, The Cottage, The Heath, Crayford, Kent.
Mr. E. Scants, 43, Gwendwr Road, West Kensington.
Mrs. C. C. Sloane, 33, Regent Square, W.C.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 11.

The London guinea goes this week to Mr. C. H. Ward, 32, Tasman Road, Stockwell; and the provincial guinea to Mr. E. A. Slaney, 49, Newport Road, Stafford.

The solution of the problem was:

THE LAST KING OF ATLANTIS.

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A Legend of Amsterdam.

On the Keizersgracht stands a grey and gloomy pile of nondescript architecture, with seven horrible, fantastic heads, carved upon its grim, mould-covered, stone façade.

Generations ago it was the property and the residence of a retired East India merchant who had amassed almost fabulous wealth, and who lived in the most unostentatious and solid style peculiar to the prosperous *bourgeoisie* of Amsterdam.

It was the custom of this good gentleman to leave his city home early in the season for his country seat in the Haarlemmer Meer, and during his absence the house on the Keizersgracht was left in the charge of an old servant—Anne—who belonged to a class fast dying out in Holland, if not already a feature of its past.

This faithful woman had nursed her master through earliest infancy, and, according to the old custom, had remained in his service after his marriage, attending his young wife and caring for his children in turn. When wife and children had passed away, the responsibilities of the household rested entirely on the willing shoulders of the loyal Anne, and she comforted her master in his days of sorrow, guarded his interests—knowing no others—as her own, and devoted her age, as she had given her youth, to his service.

The other servants came under her control, but during the summer she sent them away to the country house, preferring the peace and quiet of the deserted home to their troublesome society, and undertaking the task of the annual September house-cleaning entirely without assistance. She dearly loved every nook and corner of this old house, where her master and his dear, dead children had first seen the light of the world, and where the eyes of the poor little ones had one after another closed upon it for ever.

She wanted not frivolous maids tripping about among the rooms, bothering her under the guise of assistance. It was a labour of love to get everything in readiness for the return of the master, and she grudged neither time nor strength in the waxing of the floors until one could easily break one's neck by an unsteady step on the slippery surface—in polishing the old brass until it showed one's face as in a mirror, and in carefully dusting and re-arranging the quaint old Delft and Doulton which, together with many a heathenish curio from the strange countries to which her master had journeyed, lined the shelves of cabinets and adorned the tops of the presses and chests.

She carefully wiped the scabbard of one long, curving sword and then unsheathed the blade. Dear Heaven! but it was rusty. Only after a vigorous pull could she drag it from the sheath. Why not rub it up a bit? She was very tired, and this was really an unnecessary, added exertion. But Anne hated rust almost as much as she hated dust, and it was such a satisfaction to her to feel that everything, even these ridiculous swords in their scabbards, were shining with cleanliness. She set about the task, and in half-an-hour it was an accomplished fact.

A storm had been threatening all the afternoon. The wind was sweeping across the canal, the sky was black, the rain beat down with sudden fierceness, and, as she closed the last shutter at the front of the house, Anne saw the figures of two men huddled against the wide, projecting porch, apparently seeking shelter from the rising storm.

In the old Dutch houses, the cellar, or rather, an extension of it, runs out beneath the front porch, and receives light from a small, square aperture cut in the stone. This opening also permits a current of air from the windows of the main cellar, which are larger, also square and cut in the wall, a few inches above the street.

These windows were protected by light shutters. The opening in the front wall was left unprotected, for the stout door at the head of the cellar steps was provided with bolts and bars, and considered a sufficient defence against possible visitors who chose to enter the house by way of the cellar.

Anne placed her candle on the steps, closed the shutters to keep out the driving rain, and busied herself in collecting the firewood strewn over the floor of the cellar. This led her gradually towards the outer cellar, and during a sudden lull in the storm she distinctly heard the sound of voices in subdued conversation.

Advancing noiselessly, she peered through the opening in the wall.

The two men who had sought comparative shelter from the storm were still huddled against the porch. Anne could not see their faces—she was too far below

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She set about the task.

them, but what they said was perfectly audible, and while she was puzzling over a certain familiar tone in the voice of one of the men, the import of his words fell with a chilling force, which crushed in her every other thought.

"It could be managed without the slightest difficulty," he said. "The old woman is alone in the house, and we can step in here—one after the other."

He indicated with a motion of his foot the opening near which they stood. Anne could have touched it by stretching out her hand. She trembled violently with fear, and was obliged to grasp the stone ledge of the window for support.

"All very good," whispered the second voice; "but if, as you say, there is a strong door at the top of the cellar steps, how are we to get into the upper part of the house, after all?"

"How?" said the first speaker. "There will be seven of us in all. We shall have the necessary implements. We shall break through the door."

"And while we are doing all this," whispered the other excitedly, "what is to prevent the old woman from hearing us—from giving the alarm—from giving us into custody? And then, what of all this great treasure? For that matter, how do you know that anything has been left in the house?"

His companion interrupted him with a contemptuous laugh.

"One question at a time, my friend," he began coolly.

And again Anne recognised something strangely familiar in the soft, sneering voice.

"If, as you say, the old woman hears us at work, and cries out, who will hear her on the Keizersgracht, when all Amsterdam will crawl indoors? How long, too, do you think it will take seven men and a strong axe to cut through a few bolts? Bah! One, two taps, and it is done; a third tap for the old woman, who will doubtless be standing ready to take it, and so much the better, since dead women, like dead men, tell no tales."

Again he laughed disagreeably.

"As for the treasure, I know the house, and the ways of the people, and you will kindly remember that I do not often bungle in these little affairs. However," he added carelessly, "if you are timid, there are still six of us; and, should you leave us in the lurch, you will, at least, keep our secret. *Of that I am quite sure.*"

He spoke with a peculiar emphasis.

The other rejoined instantly:

"Enough! I will be one of you. Now, you wish me to remain here and keep watch while you go in search of the others. Give me your plan now; it will save time and talk."

Anne clung desperately to the window-sill in spite of her shaking limbs, which threatened no longer to support her weight. She was dazed—confused by the revelation of this horrible plan of robbery and murder. Yes, *her* murder! That was what they were plotting to accomplish. Dear Heaven! What could she do? At least, she must not lose a word.

"Do not leave this spot until I return. Should the old servant leave the house, strangle her from behind."

Anne, with difficulty, repressed a cry of agony.

"I will bring the others as near the house as I dare, and imitate the howl of a dog. If everything is quiet, and we can approach, you repeat the sound. If you are silent, I shall know that the unexpected has happened. We understand each other thoroughly now. One thing more. As I said before, this window," tapping the wall behind him again with his foot, "is better than the others; it has no shutters, and will necessitate less noise near the street. It is just wide enough to admit a man head first, and is not more than three feet from the floor; one can feel for the ground with one's hands, and so draw in the rest of the body. You had best enter first, I last; by that means we shall keep a watch on the others. Give a low '*Cuckoo*' when you are safely on your feet within—I shall tell the others to do the same. So, I go now to the 'Roode Leenw,' where the others are waiting, and we will return as soon as it is possible to do so with safety. How lucky it's such a black night. We can begin our work early."

He moved away, Anne intently watching.

"Wait!" called the other softly.

A dim shape rose again, close beside the window.

"You are sure about the treasure? Come, now, is there enough for seven?"

"Ay, man," was the reply; "and for eight—we shall need a man outside to give an alarm if necessary. I tell you there is not only money, but a service of solid gold, and another of silver. In better days I have eaten off both!"

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He was gone.

Anne, unable longer to stand, sank despairingly to the ground.

She was unconscious of the darkness, for the candle end she had brought into the cellar had long ago burned itself out on the stone steps.

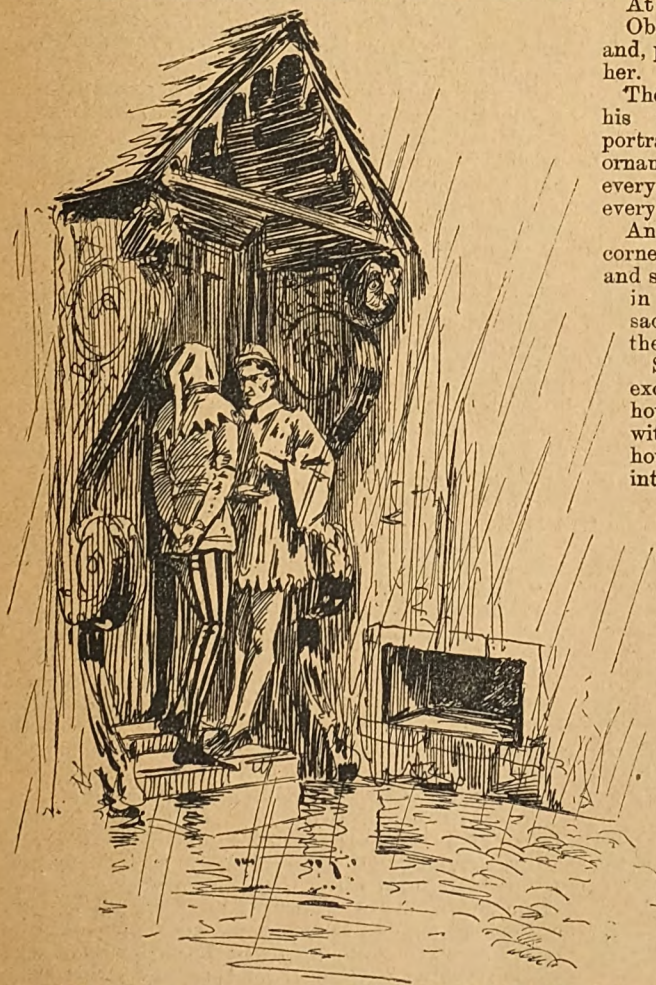
She covered her face with her hard, old hands, and a few heavy tears crept through the knotted fingers. She had lived an honest life. She had served her master faithfully. She had hoped to close her eyes peacefully, at last, in his service. To die to-night, to be murdered, struck with an axe beneath this very roof, where she had spent nearly her whole life, or *strangled from behind*, should she try to escape from the house! Horrible! Horrible! Would Providence let such a thing be?

She had suddenly a stupid sensation of being another than herself. The rain beat fiercely down. The wind sobbed and moaned about the house, then tore madly over the canal, lashing the placid water to fury. A bell in the town tolled ten strokes, muffled and irregular, through the noises of the storm.

Ten o'clock! So late!

Anne struggled to her feet.

What was she doing here, weeping, inactive, when her life was at stake? Surely there was some way to prevent this awful, needless, crime! This man without, watching, waiting, to strangle her, he could not see in all directions at once. They had not counted on their plan being overheard. They would not expect strategy from her. There were the windows at the back of the house! She could drop from one of them, and, by making a long detour, reach a neighbour, or even the watch in the town. There was a chance of her meeting the other wretches, but it was one in twenty. Here, in the house, she had no chance at all.



The two men . . . . were still huddled against the porch.

Dear Heaven! He was right, the villain! How long would it take seven men and a strong axe to break down a few bolts? She had no time to lose.

She crept through the darkness straight to the cellar steps—she knew every inch of the ground—made her way softly to the door above, opening it as cautiously as though a sound might steal through stone walls and wooden shutters to the wicked ears without.

In the kitchen she lighted a candle, and, shading it with her hand as she passed before the windows, moved quickly towards the dining-room, at the back of the house, the windows of which were consequently furthest from the watcher on the Keizersgracht.

At the door of the library she paused.

Obeying an irresistible impulse, she entered the room, and, placing the candle on a small table, she looked about her.

There was her master's favourite chair drawn before his writing-table, his books, his pictures. The portraits of his children and his wife. The curious ornaments on the shelves, in niches in the walls—everything dearest to him was in the room—yes! and everything of most value.

Anne's eyes fell on the metal-bound chest in the corner. Within it were the two services of plate—gold and silver—heirlooms in the family, and more precious in the eyes of her master than the rolls of bills and sacks of coins and the cases of jewels stored beside them.

She wondered vaguely, in the midst of her strong excitement, how this hiding-place as well as the house itself had become so well known to the robber with the strangely familiar voice. Alas! in an hour's time, perhaps in less, all this would have passed into his hands, this dear room, almost sacred to her, would be desecrated by the presence of these murderous ruffians, and she, the faithful one, who loved the belongings of her master, as she loved her master himself, would be flying along the Keizersgracht, flying for her life.

What! She would then be running away? For her life? Yes, to be sure.

A doubt, perplexing, agonising, crept upon the old servant—slowly at first, then it assumed strength in her thoughts, merging at last into the certainty of a forceful conviction.

Her place was here—here—to defend what had been given into her charge? How? It mattered not. With her life, if need be. This would be better than the abandonment of duty.

A certain exaltation, following upon this righteous resolve, seemed to deprive of all its bitterness even the certainty of the terrible death which was fast stealing upon her. They would find her here, in this room, the dear master and his servants—they would find her dead, *murdered*, beside the press, cut down at

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her post of duty! The master would shed tears at this affecting sight, and he would know that she had been faithful unto death. Yes! She would be faithful—to-night—as through all the past she had been to him, and to what was his.

She looked again about the room in which she now knew she was to die. Her eyes lingered lovingly on each familiar feature of its furnishings. They rested on the swords she had been cleaning that evening—the last duty she would ever perform in this house which had so long been her charge. No! not the last—one was still to come.

She moved slowly towards the weapons, and laid her hand on one of them—a great broadsword, with a blade as thick as an axe. Moved by some strange influence, Anne unsheathed the weapon, clutched it firmly with both hands, turning it slightly, so that the dim light from the candle played on the dazzling steel.

A single dull note sounded from the town bell. Half-past ten. Perhaps even now her fate was creeping upon her, stealthily along the Keizersgracht.

Remembering the signal, she listened intently for the howling of a dog, but no sound came to her save the moaning of the wind and the beating of the rain.

Suppose the cry was lost in the storm, and that at this moment a head was being thrust through the cellar window, and a pair of murderous hands reaching for the ground!

Her own hands closed nervously on the weapon in her grasp, and unconsciously she lifted it as if to strike a blow.

The action was suggestive—a host of thoughts crowded swiftly upon it, but thoughts so terrifying that the old woman, after abandoning herself to them for one delirious instant, fell suddenly on her knees, and prayed God to snatch them from her heart.

But they pressed in even upon her prayer, and even while upon her knees, with eyes upraised to Heaven, she found herself plotting, planning to foil these cowardly robbers with their own weapons—how she might with this good sword in her hand, station herself by the little window in the cellar; how each man would enter alone, offering his head, as it were, for the blow. The cry was known to her.

Why was she praying to God to help her to resist this voice in her heart, since He Himself must have bidden it speak? Was it not right to defend one's life—"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." And, strongest conviction of all—in this way alone could she risk her life to some purpose. Should she succeed, the treasure was safe. Here, on the contrary, of what avail the sacrifice of her life, since the robbers would step over her dead body to rifle the safe of its contents.

"My God! Have mercy upon me!" whispered the old servant, struggling to her feet and seizing the weapon which had fallen to the floor at her side. She took the candle in the other hand, placing first a few matches on the edge of the candlestick; then, closing the library door softly, she swiftly made her way to the cellar steps. Here she extinguished the light and removed her shoes.

Descending the steps without haste, she moved towards the outer cellar, listening intently for the howling of a dog above the confusion of the storm.

She had not long to wait.

As the instigator of the robbery had said—the elements, wild and wicked, lent their aid to the furtherance of the evil deed.

Anne laid her formidable weapon on the ground convenient to her hand, and then fell upon her knees. Again the horror of what she was about to do closed upon her senses.

"*Thou shalt not kill!*"

The words rang in her ears and were graven in flaming letters in the darkness about her. She was intensely, almost superstitiously religious, but perhaps the fanaticism to which her nature was prone found its greatest expression in her idolatry of her master, and the fetish-like reverence with which she worshipped even his smallest belongings.

The struggle between these two passions of a long, narrow life was sharp and severe. But it was also short.

The words of the simple prayer: "My God, pity me! My God, show me what is right!" repeated again and again, died away suddenly in the old servant's throat. The prolonged howl of a dog sounded above wind and rain. In a moment it was answered by another howl much nearer to the house.

With the necessity for immediate action came the requisite courage. There was no further need of prayer, as there was no further hesitation.

Muffled, stealthy footsteps approached the house. Not a word was spoken that could be overheard by the woman, who stood rigid, with upraised arms, ready to deal the fatal strokes, her burning eyes fixed upon the shadowy opening in the wall so faintly outlined against the darkness of the night.

But her eyes, grown accustomed to the gloom, saw plainly the rounder, darker outline of the man's head which was thrust cautiously forward through the opening; saw even where the line of hair ended sharply against the back of the neck; saw by some second sense of sight where the shoulders followed the head, and the arms were drawn slowly in, one after another, and were extended downwards to reach the ground.

Now!

There was a vibrant shock, a slight resistance; then it went on cleaving through a life. The head fell with a heavy, sickening sound, prolonged by a soft gurgling. And all this with such hideous speed, such appalling silence.

The woman's head swam, and she staggered as she moved a step or two nearer to seize the headless body and drag it through the window. Then she must stoop and push it aside—*for the next!*

And the signal! She had almost forgotten. Where was her voice?

She made a fearful effort, but the sound—rough, husky, yet harsh; could it be her voice?

"Cuckoo!"

She shivered with anxiety. Would they detect the strangeness of the voice, suspect a trap—fly? Oh! If God would have it so! Suppose, indeed, He did not sanction this awful bloodshed! Was not this murder? And murder deliberately planned, and not one victim, but seven! The prayers rose again to Heaven—this time voiceless, but the same poor words went up from the tortured soul.

"My God! Pity me! Show me *what* is right!"

A second head, a second blow to sever it from the body, after a pause, as before, to gain the same advantage, only this time an added horror, since the falling head rolled between her feet, and, when afraid to risk a miss-step, she stooped to push it aside with her hands, they touched the hair and beard, wet and warm with blood. Its sickening odour remained upon them, and shaking as with ague, yet with the heat of fever in her brain, Anne dragged the second body after the

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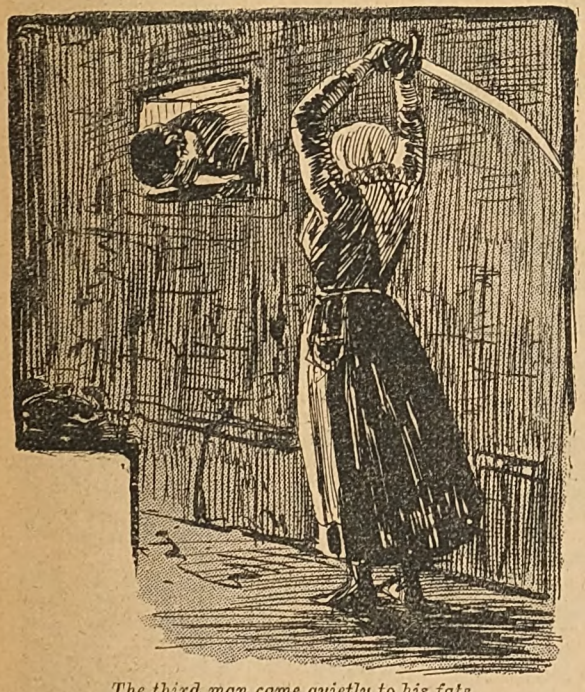
first, and, as it was that of a slight man, her strong arms lifted it from the ground, and flung it back into the cellar.

This time she gave the signal in a clearer voice, and as she again took her position to wait for the third victim, she was conscious of a certain lightness, a vague exhilaration, which she could not have analysed had she tried. Her lips still moved in silent prayer, but unconsciously to herself, the words of her supplication had changed, and she intreated only for strength; yes! strength to kill!

The third man came quietly to his fate, as had the two before him, but with the fourth it was different.

He had followed closely on his companion, and Anne had not had time to push aside the preceding body before aiming a blow at his neck.

His hands, feeling for the floor, came in contact with the gaping throat from which the blood still streamed, and passed swiftly over it to the lifeless arms and shoulders.



The third man came quietly to his fate.

"What is this?" he muttered. "Where are you?"

Receiving no reply, he tried vainly to wriggle back as he had come, through the narrow opening from which he dangled head downwards. But his struggle was short and his fate differed from that of his companions only in that his upraised head met the descending sword which crashed through his skull, cleaving it, and striking only one-half from the body.

There was no indecision, no fear, no remorse in the action of the woman who seized the limp figure and drew it in through the window with one vigorous movement of her steady arm. There was no hesitation in the rough voice which gave the cry to which the fifth robber responded. Into the limbs, stiffened by years of labour, a new strength was creeping. The thin blood of age was leaping and dancing like the hot torrent which courses through the veins of youth, urging it to desperate acts of heroism, or of evil. The wrinkled face of the old servant grew flushed and eager; her dim eyes sparkled. The smell of blood was in her nostrils, and they quivered like those of a wild beast. Her thin lips parted over the toothless gums in a smile of hideous cruelty.

The lust of murder was upon her.

The sixth head fell with its horrible, heavy sound beneath a terrific blow from the avenging sword, and angrily, as one impatient of delay, Anne snatched the body of the man roughly by the belt, and flung it violently behind her.

"Cuckoo!" she cried at the window, and her voice was like the growl of an enraged brute.

This time, the head put through the window was instantly withdrawn and a murmur of hushed voices ensued.

The woman within stamped on the ground in her impatience.

She thrust her foot forward. It touched some soft, heavy object. The headless body of a man. She kicked it furiously. Then, as the murmuring continued and the delay waxed longer, she became possessed of rage, and fell to hacking with the sword in her hand in all directions—to the right, to the left, wherever she thought a body lay.

Wait! Suppose it might be heard from without. Anne paused in this drunken carnival of blood, sobered by the fear that the seventh victim might escape her. She turned again to the window. The voices had ceased.

A head was thrust through the opening.

"Are you all there?" whispered a cautious voice. "Is everything all right?"

The woman with the uplifted sword feared to answer, thinking her voice, so near him, might betray her. She had grown cunning in even this short madness that had come upon her.

She bent forward with incredible swiftness, and, before the head could be withdrawn, she seized it firmly by the hair. The man uttered a stifled oath, and struggled to free himself. He might as well have battled with an avalanche. The crazed creature twisted her hard fingers in and out of his hair, dragging his head down inch by inch, and so holding him, as a child might hold a doll, with one hand, she swung her weapon high in the air, and struck off his head with the other. But the body, over-weighted on the outer side of the sill, fell headless into the street.

A shriek of horror rose from the almost paralysed watcher on the Keizersgracht.

It was answered by a howl of triumph from the frantic and bloodstained woman within.

"Seven! Seven!" she screamed. "Seven heads! And they are all mine! all of them mine!"

The man fled for his life.

The sound of his flying steps came faintly—ceased altogether.

The storm had died, and suddenly the moon came out, shone down on the waters of the canal—turgid and troubled—on the dripping trees and the river of mud running along the Keizersgracht, looked in at the unshuttered windows of the cellar, and flooded it with light.

There lay a heap of headless bodies, with the blood streaming from their necks, and from a dozen gaping wounds, dealt by some weapon and with terrific force. Seven heads, all with wide-opened eyes, in which a vague presentiment of terror seemed dawning—all save one, and

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that was but half a head, smitten from its other half, which might be found clinging to the limp neck of a disfigured body.

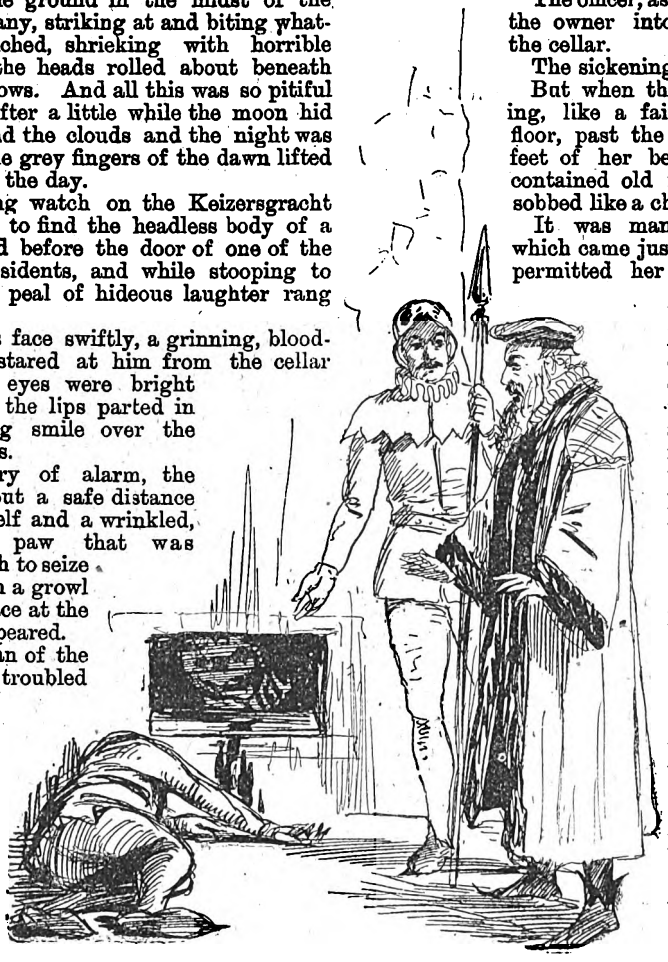
This, too, the moon saw—a little, mad old woman, laughing, chattering, crying to herself, who stared about her with unseeing eyes when first the moon looked in, and then suddenly seeing all, gave way to frenzy, cast herself on the ground in the midst of the ghastly company, striking at and biting whatever she touched, shrieking with horrible laughter as the heads rolled about beneath her furious blows. And all this was so pitiful to see that after a little while the moon hid her face behind the clouds and the night was black until the grey fingers of the dawn lifted the curtain of the day.

The morning watch on the Keizersgracht was horrified to find the headless body of a man stretched before the door of one of the wealthiest residents, and while stooping to examine it a peal of hideous laughter rang in his ears.

Turning his face swiftly, a grinning, blood-stained face stared at him from the cellar window—the eyes were bright and cunning, the lips parted in an unmeaning smile over the toothless gums.

With a cry of alarm, the good officer put a safe distance between himself and a wrinkled, bloodstained paw that was stretched forth to seize him, and, with a growl of rage, the face at the window disappeared.

The guardian of the peace, greatly troubled and disturbed, was about to hurry to the town to seek assistance in unravelling the mystery, when a heavy travelling carriage rolled into view, and he recognised the equipage of the owner of the house.



He pointed to the corpse.

He waited its approach, and, when it stopped before the door, which covered this unknown tragedy, he advanced quickly to meet its occupant.

With a few words of explanation, he pointed out the corpse stretched before the house, and, at the same moment, attracted by the sound of the wheels, Anne's scarcely-recognisable face appeared at the cellar window.

At the sight of her master, who stared at her with an expression of mingled wonderment and horror, she gave a bitter, incoherent cry, and great tears forced themselves from her eyes, and, mingling with the blood which bespattered her face, formed two red and muddy rivulets, which ran heavily down the furrows of her cheeks.

"Anne! Great Heaven!" exclaimed the master.

Then, suddenly regaining his self control, he turned angrily to his servants, who had huddled behind him.

"What are you doing, standing there? Why do you not open the doors? Come, get out your keys."

But in spite of his firm and angry tones, he shuddered as his gaze fell on the ghastly corpse before his door, and the poor distorted face which looked out above it.

The officer, ashamed to betray hesitation, followed the owner into the house, and followed him to the cellar.

The sickening spectacle unnerved both men.

But when the poor, mad creature came creeping, like a faithful dog, over the bloodstained floor, past the mutilated bodies, to kneel at the feet of her beloved master, the pompous, self-contained old merchant broke into weeping and sobbed like a child.

It was many days before the lucid interval, which came just before the death of the old servant, permitted her to tell the whole terrible story.

In her fevered ravings she had betrayed her sufferings little by little, but towards the last the delirium left her, and at the close of one bright autumn day, when the rays of the setting sun lay across her bed, she opened her faded eyes, clear at last of the terrible hallucination which had possessed her mind ever since that awful night.

Her master was summoned and stood beside her with her faithful hands in his, while hurriedly, all-unconscious of her heroism, she told him at what a price she had saved that which he had intrusted to her care. The end came that night.

And so in grateful commemoration, on the grim stone façade of the house on the Keizersgracht were carved the seven heads of the men who were slain in self-defence, and, in the protection of another's property, by the hand of a single woman.

Yes! although one of them was the nephew of the owner of the house, and had many times been made welcome beneath its roof; he, too, with the rest, was copied in death, and perpetuated in stone to the memory of a faithful servant. And all Amsterdam knows the legend. A. S. V. W

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE BOOKSTALLS

For next week's issue of *Short Stories*, which will contain the opening chapters of Mr. George C. Wallis' new serial, "The Last King of Atlantis." It is the translation of a parchment discovered in the bed of the Atlantic by submarine explorers, and deals with the life history of Arnon, by turn, pirate, priest, sailor, soldier, courtier, and king.

It is an excellent story in every way, and is well worth following up.

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THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

The short autumn day was closing in fast as a girl stood at the door of a private studio in one of the side streets off a main thoroughfare in London, watching the retreating figure of her shabbily clad model till nothing but the echo of the weary steps came back through the fading light.

As the last sound of them died away, a man strode rapidly up the street towards her.

"Come in; it's cold outside. I thought you might have been here before this," she said, with a fresh light in her face, as he stopped beside her.

In a few minutes they were sitting over their tea by a crackling fire.

"You are silent to-night—what are you thinking about so deeply?" said the man playfully, putting his hand under her chin to see the better into the face he knew so well.

"I was thinking of my model, she looked so thin and ill, and seemed so tired and forlorn. Do you know lately, since I have had *you*, I feel so sorry for everyone who is lonely or unhappy."

"Dear little girl," he answered fondly, "it is nice of you to feel like that, but we cannot make everyone happy, or, were it possible, I know you would do so."

"Would not you also?"

"Yes—yes, of course."

She sighed. "Well, if I cannot make everyone happy I hope at least I may never make anyone very unhappy. I don't think I ever have yet. Have you?"

"What nonsense you do talk, child. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. Except that, much as I care for you, I sometimes see something in your face which warns me that you *could* be hard and even cruel. Remember, I know so little of you really, though we are to be married when success arrives. Oh, when will that be!"

There was a pause, during which his eyes, wandering over the various sketches pinned against the wall, were arrested first by one, then another of them.

In a minute she went on: "Perhaps it is an indiscreet question, but tell me, have you ever cared for anyone before, as you care for me, now?"

"Not as I care for you, dear," looking at her bright eyes, near his own.

"Am I really the only girl you have ever asked to marry you?" she persisted.

"No."

"Oh!" and she paused again. "You have been engaged before, then?"

"Yes."

"What became of her—did she die?" lowering her voice.

"I don't know. No. I never heard that she died. But don't let us talk of all that," he went on quickly, "it was over so long ago—before I knew you, or had even seen your dear face."

He was gazing with sudden interest at a sketch opposite where they were sitting, of water, and sky, and little else.

"What is that? Surely it is a new acquisition? Where did you get it?"

"Which? Oh, that. Did I never tell you—it is such a curious story. But, you see, when you are here everything else seems to go out of my head."

She fetched an old portfolio from a corner of the studio and then, pushing a footstool beside his chair, settled herself on her lowly seat, and began:

"That is the rough sketch from which that marvellous picture, 'The turn of the tide' (you remember it?), was painted, which was in the Academy some years ago. By-the-bye, did you notice what a long price it fetched the other day on being resold by its former owner? It was a wonderful piece of art."

"Yes, but how on earth did you get the rough sketch of it?"

"You remember I wasn't very well a short time ago, and went over the Border for change and rest? Well, by an odd chance, the place I pitched on was the very place where that picture was painted, and the cottage I took, the very one in which the lady lived who painted it."

"Lady! Impossible! It was too masterly a style to be a woman's."

"So I thought. But I know now who the lady was, and a good deal about her. I made friends with an old woman in the village, who, knowing me to be an artist, one day offered to sell for a few shillings this portfolio you see, which, she said, had belonged to a former tenant of the cottage I had taken, and who had been a great picture maker, as she called it, like myself. Taking my 'find' down to the beach I found a flat rock to sit on, and began my investigations. I confess at first I was a little disappointed at discovering nothing more than some rather crude sketches, though with a certain latent power in them, evidently the productions of a beginner, more or less, and all dated some ten years previously.

"I was just shutting it up when I espied a curiously-concealed flap, out of which I drew two objects. This,"

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holding up a thin manuscript book, "and, to my surprise, the sketch of the picture I remembered so well, and had admired so much—for was it not that day at the Academy which began *our* acquaintance?—and, suddenly, holding that drawing so, in my hand, I recognised the broad waters and sky stretching away before me as the original of the picture."

There was a short silence before, in a lower tone, she added:

"And then, with the gorgeous sunset flaming in my eyes, and the 'weird chuckle' of the gulls in my ears as they fought and chattered on the mud-flats below—for the tide was going out fast—I learnt something of the life that had been lived out in the lonely cottage before I came. It was always very quiet down there—only a few barefooted children sometimes paddled in the water after sundown, when the tide was out as it was then."

The shadows gradually deepened in the untidy studio as the girl began reading a few extracts from the manuscript book by the leaping firelight, the man's hand resting tenderly on her shoulder as she read:

"'March 26th, 1886.—Passing up from the little wayside station over the bit of common-land, no one would guess that just beyond the fringe of weather-beaten pines edging the land and half hiding the wide sheet of water, there nestles close under the cliff a little old cottage amid the straggle of trees, having its foothold on a projecting tongue of land. The trees hide it, and also hide from its inmates' view everything but that which lies directly in front of it which is, water at high-tide. water and mudflat at low tide, twice in the twenty-four hours, and the hills beyond that and the sky beyond and over all.

"'When the water comes weltering in it is as though the cottage were built on piles in its midst; the sea-mews, and gulls, and black scarts, float on its calm breast; the sun sinks in all its wonderful glory of colour over yonder hills and is reflected in ethereal beauty on its shining surface. And then, as the waters recede, leaving rivulets between the islets of mud, the gulls are there, again screaming and chattering and laughing in the weird and desolate way that only gulls can, in lonely places.

"'This is the spot to which I have drifted after the fever of life is spent. Here is peace. In my little cottage by the silent waters, I can pile up the wood on my own hearthstone, and the smoke, curling upwards, adds its brown to the colour of the rafters above, which have upheld the roof over generations who have come and gone; all with their manifold joys, and sorrows such as mine—but perhaps over none quite so lonely as I.

"'It is three years to-day since I left the old life and set up my household gods here. And in the early winter twilights, as I sit by my flickering firelight, they speak of the departed grandeur—gilded grandeur, which crumbled like dry-rot at the first breath of trouble; and now I am glad of this shelter, literally from the storms and winds of heaven, where I am beholden to no one, paying my way with honest coin of my own earning and not with money to which I have not the slightest right.

"'I wished, when I came here, to cut myself off completely from everyone I had known before, and have done so, except in my dreams and recollections. Their photographs are around me, but troubles and poverty have come between them and me. Sooner than linger on, despised and barely tolerated, I have preferred to be as one dead, with the struggle towards fame as my goal. Life could not well be lonelier, and yet it is not altogether unhappy. I am my own mistress at last, and there are no petty jars and frets. I can sit over my handful of fire and be warm. I have my piano and can play the dear old airs I love so well, in the quiet dusk of the summer evenings when the roses are nodding at the open windows, and the salt breeze floats in to mingle with my pot-pourri in the old china bowl beside me. My books and my sketches are around me. I am alone, but the ghosts of the past are always close at hand to keep me company.

"'Sometimes, the remembrance of *him* and the most bitter humiliation of my life comes to upset my content, though I try to persuade myself that a love which could not face even the reflection from disgrace for its beloved object, was of little worth, but yet I loved him so, and it was all I had, all I ever had in a life that has been so full of sorrow.

"'April 12th.—It is coming! I feel it, I know it. I shall make a great name, a new name, to redeem the old, which was disgraced through no fault of mine. To-day my picture, "The Turn of the Tide,"—was it not well-named?—has been accepted at the Academy. To me it will justify its name. Dear little cottage, how I love you, for you have brought me fame.

"'May 8th.—Yesterday I went up to town. My picture is well hung, and there was quite a crowd round it, an admiring crowd. *He* was there, talking to a young girl as once he talked to me, looking down into her eyes as once he looked into mine, but his eyes were even more tender than I remember them; and his mouth more cruel.

"'May 28th.—Fame is very sweet. I have had a more than generous offer for my picture, and more than generous criticisms in all the papers. *Can* I part with the former? Poverty is a stern master. I must. But my little rough sketch—never. I will hide it where no one will find it, so that I may not be tempted by any high price which might be offered, and when I am dead I hope it may fall into the hands of someone who has loved me and can understand the thoughts that were with me as it grew under my fingers.

"'The artist who is painting in this old-world place, was here to-day to congratulate me on my success. I often see him; he is the only friend I have here, or, indeed, anywhere else. It always rests me to be with him—he is so gentle and thoughtful when I have one of my restless, unhappy fits. I sometimes wonder if I am growing to depend too much upon his never-changing sympathy in all my moods. I shall miss him, I confess, when he flits south as he will do when the summer is over, which even here will not last for ever.

"'June 10th.—My artist has been here this evening, as in many past ones—I feel almost young again. He has asked me for that which I thought I had long ago given away completely and for ever to someone with beautiful eyes and masterful ways and a cruel mouth—my love.

"'But is it not preposterous of me to dream of such things? I have begged for two days in which to look into my own heart.

"'I have not been feeling well lately. It must be the result of the excitement of success coupled with the unusual heat we have had for so many weeks. I am so tired, too tired to think any more to night. Good-night, dear gulls, I need not be lonely much longer if I choose.

"'June 12th.—He has been and is gone. At last, at

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last I am happy! Is is not wonderful to be able to say that? I know that I love him, and I cannot doubt that he loves me, and we are to be married next month, and fight the world together.

"'I wish that the pain in my side hurt less. I have promised him to see a Dundee doctor to-morrow about it. But I shall be all right when the cool weather comes. I am happy, quite happy. How sweet the roses smell to-night, and the waters are asleep, and the moon-beams are playing on its untroubled breast I hear only a faint sigh from the trees upon the shore—even the gulls are asleep.

"'JUNE 13TH.—Can it be only twenty-four hours since I shut this book—only twice that the little rivers of water have run in between the cushions of mud impressed with the trident marks of the sea-birds feet? That is all that separates life from death.

"'I went to see the doctor and he told me, very kindly certainly, but inexorably, that he can do nothing for me. Had I gone to him some months ago it is possible he might have been able to prolong life, but that, as it is, he gives me one month! One month in which to live out my life and bid my good-byes, but that I am not to suffer much pain, not until quite the end—thank God for that.

"'I have thought it all over as I came home, and I shall make no visible change in my daily life, nor shall I say anything of this to him who was to have shared the life that is ebbing so fast. Nothing can be done; before the end, when the pain comes, I shall send him away on some pretext or other and on his return—where shall I be?

"'JULY 4TH.—*How* did I bid him good-bye? The evening has been divine. We sat on the flat stone facing the hills, down on the beach. Everything was very quiet, and we waited there till the sun sank, and the line of dim blue hills was all that divided the opal sky from the opal water; up from the streaks of green and yellow, blue and orange, rose the sepia rocks like a small archipelago of islands. The indescribable beauty of it all wrung my heart. Up behind, in the fir-wood, some youths and maidens were laughing and shouting. Their voices floated down to us on the rock below the bank. They sang a hymn together, and the notes seemed to rise and fade at last into that changing vault of colour above and to die away in the golden glow, at the very gates of heaven. Far, far away a tiny boat crept slowly along under the purple hills.

"'Ah, how the gulls cry! I look out of my little casement-window and see the flicker of their snowy wings glancing in the ghostly moonlight as it sleeps on the mud-flats and shines in the narrow streaks of water. The pain, the pain, how shall I bear it, alone——?'"

The firelight died down. The girl's voice faltered in the quiet studio.

"There it ends," she said, "I suppose she died soon after. There is only her name, not the one she was known by in the Academy catalogue, but I suppose, her real one—after those words."

"What is that?"

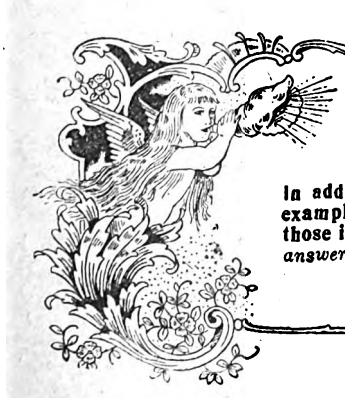
"Marian Dacre."

The man's eyes gleam, his hand shakes like a leaf as he hastily lifts it from the girl's bowed shoulder, his lips are pressed together tightly. But no word escapes him. Only, before he leaves, he says: "There is something in what you have read which takes my fancy—may I have it? I believe I could make something out of it as a story."

* * * * *

Before the summer is over, "The Turn of the Tide" has run through two editions, lifting its author—a man with tender eyes, and a cruel mouth—high and dry into the land of promise, whither he has taken his new-made artist wife, and together they are invited everywhere on the strength of his wonderful book.

VERNER FENTON.



POST-CARD COMPETITION No. 13.

On page 411 will be found two columns of figures. A guinea is offered to the reader who first forwards the correct total, and another guinea to the provincial reader who does likewise. In adding the figures together tot up each digit independently. For example, 12, 124, 79=26, NOT 215. Do not include figures other than those in the column—from 1 to 124. *Post-cards only please; and only one answer allowed on each.*

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY NO. 10.]

THE EVENING BEFORE.

(OUTSIDE Maud's house, and rather dark. Harry approaching.)

Harry (in joyous soliloquy): "Eight o'clock! At this time to-morrow we'll have been married just seven hours and a quarter. Jove! Doesn't it seem queer—and, delicious. I want to see her once more—tell her how much I love her—hear her say how much she—uh! Eh! Confound you; take care where you are going!"

Indistinct figure (which has collided with Harry): "Beg pardon, sir, but I couldn't see. We're putting up an awning frame out here."

Second indistinct figure: "Hi, there; look out for your toes." (Drops heavy scantling almost on Harry's foot.)

Harry (somewhat discomposed): "This is jolly, I vow." (Rings.)

Servant (opening): "Well, you are here at last, are you? Oh, excuse me, Mr. Spooner. Thought it was the man with the——"

Voice (over banisters): "Has he come, James? Tell him——"

Servant: "It's Mr. Spooner, ma'am."

Voice: "Oh! It's only Mr. Spooner, Maud. What can have become of that man? Now, Maud——" (Voice recedes.)

Harry: "Hum!"

(Enter down the stairs, with a dove-like swoop and rustle, Maud, all smiles and happiness at seeing Harry.)

Maud: "Dear!"

Harry: "Oh, Maud."

Maud (staying Harry's impassioned rush): "No, not here, you reckless boy! Don't you notice that carpenter? He's fixing the——and, oh, my darling, I don't know where to take you, for, you see, the florist is at work in the parlour, and then——"

Harry (hopefully): "The music-room?"

Maud: "The presents are displayed there."

Harry: "The dining-room?"

Maud: "No; the caterer's men have possession of that, and the women from madam's are in the library and all my things are being packed upstairs, and——"

Harry (sarcastically): "Perhaps the kitchen——"

Maud (quite seriously): "It's a perfect pandemonium!"

Harry (same): "Or the stable?"

Maud (same): "Why, Patrick says he can't ever stow away—you're laughing at me, you wicked—but I'm simply wild to-night with all this bother—oh! papa's little studio! But it's a mass of confusion, for everything not immediately wanted is put there."

Harry (aside): "Just the place for me, then." (They enter.)

Maud: "Now, dear, we'll have a nice, delightful chat; for, as you know, we've only seen each other four times to-day, and I've so many things to tell you."

Seamstress (opening door): "If you please, Miss Maud, would you step upstairs? That back needs to be fitted again, and——"

Maud: "Oh, Harry, you can't think what trouble we've had with that dress. When it was sent home we found that—— Coming, mamma!" (Exit).

(Harry comtemplates ceiling with what patience he may for ten minutes, when re-enter Maud.)

Maud: "That's settled. Now, to begin again. It's so sweet——"

Maud's mamma (entering hurriedly): "Maud! Would you—oh, good evening, Mr. Spooner!—would you put all those light things into the tin box or the little sole-leather? I think perhaps we'd better——"

Maud: "Any way you like, mamma—I don't care." (Exit mamma.) "And, as I was saying, Harry——"

Bridesmaid (outside): "I'm awfully sorry to disturb you, Maudie, but won't you please come out here for an instant? I don't quite understand how I am to——" (Maud slips out, remaining some time, while Harry listens to the following):

Maud, The bridesmaid, the bell, and various voices: "There's two dozen, I think, of white silk—lilies for the arch over the door—ding! ding!—where's James?—in the bottom of some trunk, I'm sure—if those are roses, bring 'em here—and drive tacks through the dead centre of every one—ding! ding!—Mrs. Smith's compliments, and she sends—three cakes of toilet soap—so please pack the handkerchiefs in—a salad-bowl or soup tureen—for there aren't bags enough to—flavour the creams—and your Paris hat is put—in the ice-chest, where it ought to be—ding! ding!—you must see the floral bell; it's made of—one hundred chicken croquets, sprinkled with—Mr. and Mrs. Snyder's best wishes, mum—and set off by—four dozen dessert spoons—and the minister's fee—tied up in a brown-paper bag!"

Maud (re-entering): "Oh, Harry, isn't this awful?"

Harry: "Well, we'll be at peace now. Come, one little kiss——"

Maud (shrinking away): "Ow!"

Harry: "What is it? Oh!" (Before him stands a messenger-boy, silently holding forth letter.)

Harry (petulantly): "I know well enough what this is!" (Reads letter and tears it up.)

The messenger-boy: "Any answer, sir?

Harry: "No! Off with you. (Exit boy.) You see, Charley has never been best man before, and he's frightfully nervous about it. This is the fifth note to-day from him. He's asking whether he shall wear a white scarf or a pearl-grey one like mine! Let him wear both or neither or none at all, and be hanged to him!"

Maud (tearfully): "Oh, now you're getting cross—I shouldn't think you would—and I don't blame you, it's so exasperating! I've been going through it all day, and I'm just t-t-tired to—de-death——"

Harry (remorsefully): "Poor little girl! There! There! forget all about it, and we'll talk about something else. There! There!" (Brief bliss, broken by voices).

Voices: "Maud! Miss Maud! Maudie!"

Maud (springing up): "Oh, dear, it's no use! Just hear them!"

Harry (in despair): "Well, I'll go. But——"

Maud (tenderly): "But remember, dear, that I love you just as much as if I weren't so awfully busy—getting ready to prove it!"

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FIGHT PLAY.

A Comedy off the Stage.

By G. Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A True Wife Speaks.

Another edition of the evening paper had come out, giving the correct news this time, and an apologetic editorial note after three asterisks, regretting the slip that had been made; but Olive had long before this known the real state of the case.

Lady Braetoun, the senior, was prostrate in bed at her son's house, wildly hysterical still, and under the care of her own special doctor, with Olive's maid to attend, for her daughter-in-law had shrunk from her in horror and shame that she could not define, so strange and confused were they in her agonised state. For it seemed to her that she herself was somehow in fault, and that the mother would feel a kind of hatred against her for her son's misdeeds.

There was a peculiarly hard, stony look in her eyes, and her face looked marble in its whiteness behind her thick veil, as she went silently down the stairs and entered the drawing-room, gazing at the heavy, bent figure in a chair,

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with its back to the window, elbows on knees, and face buried in his hands.

At last she glided more than walked to its side, drew a deep breath, and softly laid a hand upon the bowed down figure's head.

"Father!"

Emsworth started up as if suddenly awakened, and gazed at her wildly for a few moments before he could speak.

Then, as if grasping the meaning of her being dressed, he caught at her hands, as he cried huskily:

"Olive, my darling! Oh, my poor child!"

Then his hands dropped to his side, and he shivered in his misery and anguish, for she shrank from his touch.

"Yes; quite right," he said hastily. "You are ready to come away. This is no longer a home for you."

"Father!" she said, in a low, deep voice little above a whisper, as she fixed her eyes on his, and instinctively he winced again, and his eyes vacillated and fell before her stern judicial gaze, which seemed to read his every thought.

"Yes, yes," he said; "I have had a cab waiting. Let us go at once."

She did not seem to grasp his meaning, or to hear it, and she said in the same cold measured way:

"You must have known of all this and hidden it from me."

"My darling! The report was false, and as soon as I had heard the truth from Murray I came on to try and spare you the agony that I knew it must cause you."

"But you knew—all that Lady Braetoun told me in her misery and despair, while she thought that her son was dead."

"Olive, my child!"

"Don't speak to me—for a minute," she said, as she pressed her hands to her temples, "I cannot think. Something like a black cloud keeps coming over my brain."

"Yes, you are suffering terribly; but come—come with me—home, at once,"

"It has gone again," she said, with a piteous sigh, and as if speaking to herself. Then aloud, and in a low, sad tone, but full of bitter reproach: "You must have known—all this. Why did you leave me to find it out in this cruel way?"

"Olive, my own darling," he whispered imploringly, "I

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believed him to be a manly, upright fellow who had been, as so many are, a little wild. God help me that I should have to speak to my own child like this! How could I foresee that he would behave to you as he has?"

"But you have known of that for some time now?"

"Yes," he groaned, as he looked at her as if asking for mercy.

"Why did you not tell me? Why did you let me go on believing as I have believed till awakened from my dream as I have been to-day?"

"Olive, my darling, be merciful to me," groaned Emsworth. "How could I, as your father, come to you and strike such a blow at your faith and love as would make you hate me to the end?"

She stood gazing at him as if her brain was once more numbed, her power of thinking paralysed, and, trembling and ghastly-looking, the old man softly took her hand to raise it reverently to his lips.

That touch seemed to break the ice, and with a wild cry she threw her arms about his neck, to burst into a hysterical flood of tears.

"My own darling! My own little one!" he whispered as he drew her closer and closer to his breast. "Yes, cry—cry, the tears will relieve you. Don't—don't be angry with your poor old father, whose one thought these many years has been to make you happy, and always will be. You shall come home at once with me, and we will go right away and try to think of it all as a bad dream. Law—man and wife—curse all such laws! They shan't stand between us, my darling. Come, can you bear to rest on me again? It is your father, Olive. You can trust him, dear, even if he did hide the truth."

She made an effort to draw herself up, but flung herself upon his breast again and kissed him passionately.

"Where is he?" she said at last.

"Where is he?"

"Yes; take me there at once. I can bear it now. The black curtain seems to have gone."

"Take you—take you there?" said Emsworth, looking at her aghast.

"Yes. I ought to have gone before—directly, but I felt as if I had had some dreadful blow, father, which stunned me."

"Olive, my own darling!" he cried, "you must not—you shall not talk like this. I cannot bear it. You are everything to me—your mother and my child in one. But there, pray don't talk like that. Come, let us go at once."

"Yes, to him, dear," said Olive gently, and she returned his caresses. "They say it is a woman's lot to suffer, dear, and I am going to try and be strong. There, it is all past now. I do not blame you, dear. I have nothing to forgive."

"But, my darling, it is impossible. You cannot go to him now."

"Cannot go?" she cried, flushing slightly.

"No; he has forsaken you and chosen his path. You shall choose yours, and that is along with me."

She shook her head sadly.

"Let him have the place—everything. You shall take nothing away but your own self, the treasure he could not value, and that I shall claim once more as my very own."

"No, dear; no, dear," she whispered, as she nestled to him; "he is my husband."

"He has broken every tie."

"I swore to cleave to him, and, because he forgets his oaths, shall I forget mine?"

"You shall not be weak and foolish," cried Emsworth passionately.

"No, dear, I will be neither; but he, my husband, lies dangerously injured, and am I at such a time to forget the duties I owe him?"

"To such a man—yes."

"No, no, no, dear. I must go—I ought to have been there long ago. It is no time to think of his trespasses now. Come, take me to him quickly, dear."

"I cannot, I will not, Olive; it is madness."

"My heart says no, father. I tell you I must go."

"But do you not see, dear? How can you go there at such a time?"

"By my right to act, father, as his wife. Take me there at once."

It was no longer the gentle, yielding girl who spoke, but the firm woman, in whose eyes were reflected a will stronger than his own, and in place of angry opposition he feebly protested with a gesture.

"Come," she said, taking his hands, and without another word he suffered her to lead him down to the hall, a loud whispering coming through an open glass door, and telling that the servants were assembled below to discuss matters.

The next minute father and daughter were being driven towards Brompton Square.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Facing Temptation.

A pretty-looking maid, very smartly dressed, and whose eyes were red with weeping, opened the door, and stared at the strangers, who pressed forward to enter. Then, recovering herself:

"What is it?" she said. "Missis can't see visitors. The doctors are here, and someone's very ill. Can't see nobody."

"There, my dear," whispered Emsworth; "you hear. Come back. It is better so."

Olive did not seem to hear his words, but stepped forward, and the girl involuntarily gave place.

"Take me to the room where Lord Braetoun is," she said sternly.

Her manner mastered the girl, but she made another attempt.

"But, please, ma'am, there's two doctors with him, and missis said I was to let nobody in."

"Where is he?"

"In the drorin-room, ma'am."

Olive gently pressed her aside, and passed on to the little staircase, upon whose landing, beneath a stained glass window, a number of pots of gay flowers had been roughly thrust aside, and lay broken and crushed as they had been since Braetoun had been carried up from the fly in which he had been brought to the door, and as Olive mounted the stairs there was a quick rustling sound of silk, and, pale, haggard, and dishevelled, Lucy stood upon the landing to bar the way.

Face to face again, Olive with the light from the stained glass window glorifying her pale features, Lucy now in shadow, and for some moments they stood gazing wildly at each other.

Lucy was the first to break the silence by drawing a long, deep gasping breath, and speaking desperately now in her effort to be firm.

"What do you want?"

"Where is Lord Braetoun?" said Olive coldly, and she took another step upward.

"Ill, very ill—with the doctors," panted Lucy. "You must go. No one can see him now."

"Stand aside, please."

"No, no," cried Lucy passionately. "The doctors will not even let me go in."

"Let me pass," said Olive sternly, and she pressed forward till they nearly touched.

"I will not," cried Lucy in an angry whisper. "It would kill him. You cannot—you shall not go."

Olive spoke in a stern, low, unmoved tone of voice, as cold and unimpassioned as her manner was irresistible.

"I must see him—I am his wife."

"Yes," whispered Lucy, as she stood her ground, "and you cannot love him, or you would not risk his life at a time like this. You shall not go."

For answer Olive stepped forward on to the landing, and, in spite of herself, Lucy gave way with a shiver of dread.

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But, as Olive ascended the second flight, the girl recovered herself, and bounded up after her visitor, caught her by the dress, darted by, and faced round again at the door, across which she stretched her arms.

"This is my house," she cried. "This is infamous. You shall not go in. It will kill him, I tell you. Stand back."

At that moment the door was softly drawn inward, Murray appeared, and as he closed it after him Lucy was fain to give way.

"You here, Lady Braetoun?" said Murray, with a look of pity and surprise.

"Yes. My husband—tell me."

Murray made no reply, and a passionate sob came from Lucy's lips.

"You have killed him—you have killed him!" she wailed.

"Hush! There must be no noise or excitement here," said Murray sternly. Then, with his voice full of the emotion he felt: "Lady Braetoun, this is no place for you."

She darted an angry glance at him.

"Take me to my husband, Doctor Murray," she said haughtily.

"It is impossible now," he said, recovering himself.

"Impossible? I must—I will see," cried Olive, in an angry whisper. "You are in league against me."

He raised his brows a little, and then, speaking more sternly:

"A doctor has but one thought, madam—to save his patient's life. My colleague and I are fighting to do this, and any interruption may prove fatal. No one can see Lord Braetoun now. Will you be good enough to retire?"

"No. It is impossible," she whispered. "Doctor, pray, pray don't you turn against me. You know all."

"Yes," he said, in the same low tone, and his voice was full of pity for the suffering woman by him, for every word sent a pang of misery to his heart. "Yes, I know all, but believe me, I am right. No one," he said, with emphasis, "can see him now, but I promise that you only shall be taken to his side."

She caught his hand in hers and kissed it.

"Now pray be advised by me, and leave this place. You are so short a distance from here, and I will communicate every change to you."

"I believe you," she said earnestly; "but I cannot leave here now. My duty is to stay."

"But I have told you that no one but the surgeon and a nurse can be in the room. Now I must return—pray, pray leave here at once."

"Yes. Go back to him now," said Olive, as she held firmly by the balusters.

"And you will go?" he whispered anxiously.

"No," she said firmly. "No: I shall stay. My place is here."

Murray made a sign to Emsworth at the bottom of the stairs, and he came up and stood on the landing close to where Lucy was leaning against the wall, one hand on the paper, the other crushing a bunch of lilies pressed in the corner half behind a curtain.

"You have heard what has been said, Mr. Emsworth?" he said, in a quick, irritable manner.

"Yes, every word."

"Kindly exercise your influence with Lady Braetoun, and ask her to return home."

"Hush! Do not speak to me," she said, turning her face to the door, and gazing at the beflowered panels as if she would pierce them through.

"It is of no use, Murray," whispered Emsworth; "I can do nothing."

"You must have been mad to bring her," said the Doctor angrily.

"Bring her, man! She brought me."

"But I cannot leave her in this situation. For Heaven's sake get her away."

"Tell me how," said Emsworth bitterly, and he turned to look at Lucy, as if there might be some solution of the difficulty.

At that moment the door was softly opened, and the white cap of the nurse appeared.

"Doctor," she whispered; "come, please, quick!"

Murray hurried in, and as he was closing the door a low, deep groan fell upon the listeners' ears; and as Olive sank upon her knees with clasped hands and laid her head against the panel, Lucy uttered a low, sobbing cry and turned her face to the hall.

Emsworth looked from one to the other, and then, after listening for a few moments to the creaking sounds he heard, as if the two attendants were changing the position of their patient, he laid his hand upon Lucy's shoulder, and then placed his arm about her little waist, for she was evidently on the point of fainting.

"Let me help you downstairs," he whispered.

She turned upon him resentfully, then with a low moan sank helpless upon his arm, and he bore her down to the passage, where the maid was waiting.

"Fainting," said the old man abruptly, "where am I to lay her down?"

The maid opened the door of the little dining-room, and as Emsworth bore her in a piteous voice from a lounge said softly:

"That you, my dear? Oh, how long you've been!"

"Please 'm, it's missis, and she's fainting.—Lay her on the sofy, sir, and I'll fetch some water,"

"Oh, dear; oh, dear," came in a groan; "my poor darling, and me not able to help her! Is that the doctor? My arm's as if it was red hot."

Emsworth was busy arranging his senseless little burden on the couch, and hardly heard the words, while the next minute the little maid was back with a glass of water.

"You please go now, sir. I'll soon bring her to, I'm used to faints."

Emsworth obeyed without a word, and the door was closed after him as he went softly up to the landing, where he could bend over Olive where she knelt.

A good ten minutes elapsed before the silence was broken again, and this time by the re-opening of the drawing-room door, and Murray stepped out, Olive now shrinking away, and holding up her hands to him as if in prayer.

"Much calmer now," he said in answer to her appealing look. "Now, Lady Braetoun, pray be advised. Go back with your father, and wait patiently for the news that I will send you every hour."

"Are you going to stay with him?" she said quickly.

"Yes; I will not go away."

"Ah!" she sighed, and there was again silence, and her father took her hand.

"You heard what Murray said, my dear," he whispered. "Come, be a brave, little woman. You can do no good, you see, so let's go back."

"Father, dear," she said imploringly, "I am suffering; don't, please, make it worse. I have told you. My place is here. Do you think I will give it up to another now?"

"I wouldn't say a word, my own, but it is impossible for you to stay."

"In some people's eyes," she said, with a pitiful smile. "I am going to prove that it is possible, for I will not stir from here till I am allowed to go to Roderick's side. My husband, father."

"Ah—h—h!" cried Emsworth between his teeth.

"It is his time of greatest need. It would be too horrible to leave him now."

Emsworth looked helplessly at Murray, and he bowed his head.

"Everything must give way to my patient," he said. "Take possession of the place and see that your child has proper attention."

This to the father. He turned then to Olive.

"One word," he said gently. "For your father's sake—for yours—I give up everything, and if Braetoun's life can

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be saved it shall be done; but there must be no excitement, no such encounter as that we have had."

Once more she caught his hand and hysterically held it to her lips long enough to send a thrill of mingled agony and pleasure through every fibre of the strong man's frame.

"I will obey you like a child," she said in a trembling voice, "but I must, I will, maintain my place here. Promise me that you will bring me to his side as soon as he can bear it."

She waited, but it was some moments before he answered, and she looked up wonderingly in the grave eyes so full of love, reverence, and pity; but she could not read the first, as he said softly:

"I promise you," and he hurriedly turned and once more entered the room to find his colleague bending over the prostrate patient, the nurse passing out to fetch something needed.

"I wanted you back," he said in a low whisper after an uneasy glance at the door. "You had better speak low, or they will hear, as I could hear nearly every word. Sad case. I pity the poor wife; but she will soon get her divorce."

He gave Murray a meaning look, and a spasm made the listener's face contract. It was instantaneous, and he was listening to the surgeon once again.

"I am going to ask you to spare me for two or three hours, or, if you can give up the time, till the morning, for I have three important accident patients whom I must see. Shall we leave it like this—that if you want me I will come at once?"

"Yes, I will send for you."

"Thanks. I have no one I can ask, or would ask, to go to my people, and it is not just to them to stay for this case. You are, of course, an old friend?"

"From boyhood."

"Ah, yes," said the surgeon, looking down at the motionless form stretched out upon the mattress. "It is a pity—young, of so good a position, with such prospects. But, there, I am not going to moralise; the world is the world, after all. I'm his surgeon, not his judge."

"Then you think——" began Murray, looking at him searchingly.

"Think, my dear sir?" said the surgeon, with a shrug. "Yes; don't you?"

Murray let his eyes fall to the pale, bandaged face, and made no reply.

"You see, as I said before, if he were some robust young fellow, with a constitution, we could have another operation and give him a chance; but anything more than we have done would be fatal, eh?"

"Yes, fatal," said Murray, "at once."

"Yes, at once. There, I will go. I'll come directly, then, if you want me; but a few hours, I suppose——"

They stood gazing in each other's eyes for a few moments, and then Murray was left alone, gazing down at his old companion, who was breathing feebly, his eyelids slightly apart, and cheeks and temples already assuming a terribly hollow look.

And as he gazed, he mused upon what had taken place. The surgeon's words, cynically brutal as they sounded, rang in his ears: "She will soon get her divorce." How soon? In a few hours; and then she would be free!

He went down on one knee, and with the delicate touch of the experienced practitioner, softly raised the eyelid and gazed into the eyes in turn.

A matter of a few hours and then the bright, clever man, the brilliant fellow-scholar of their old days, would be motionless for ever, and Olive freed from the trammels of her unhappy marriage. Free—and then?

He suffered an agony in those brief minutes, for the old temptation came back. It was as if his evil spirit were sneeringly asking how he could be such an idiot as to trouble himself about this worthless being. He had done a physician's duty by him, and prolonged his wretched life, as it was, for years, even to his own misery and despair; while now it was pretty well all over, the case was hopeless, his colleague gave him up, and he must die.

Murray rested on one knee, gazing down at the pallid, shrunken face, changed so rapidly since he was stricken, and self gave way to a higher feeling—the clever student of Nature's mysteries asserted itself, and Roderick Braetoun as he lay there was no longer the man who had caused him an agony of despair—no longer him whom he had, as it were, led to Olive Emsworth's feet, but the suffering patient, one whom it had been the study of his life to try and save from ill. This surgeon had spoken truly when he said that he was weak, and justified in looking upon the case as hopeless; but he was a stranger to the sufferer; he had not studied Braetoun's constitution, and treated him again and again. Why should not he, Allan Murray, with the knowledge that he grasped, make a great, a daring effort, and bring him, as it were, back to life, if not health. It would be almost a miracle, but science was achieving miracles now—at least, such triumphs as the people of a hundred years ago would have looked upon as marvellous.

"I might, perhaps, I might," he muttered; and he softly placed his hand upon the sufferer's breast, and then started and turned sharply, for he had been too intent to notice the quiet opening of the door, and had felt a consciousness of being overlooked.

It was so, for the nurse was standing there watching him.

"Go down and wait," he said in a husky whisper; "I will ring when I want you."

The woman looked at him strangely, but turned and left the room without a word.

Then like a cold chill came the thought of what he was going to do, from his own personal point of view—strive to save the life of his greatest enemy.

Something whispered to him that it would be madness. If he let Braetoun quietly pass away, a year hence matters might be so changed; Olive might be looking smilingly in his eyes, and he would be knowing true happiness in the love of one of the sweetest women who ever breathed.

The temptation was horrible. He felt that he must succumb.

(To be continued.)

Rudyard Kipling's new serial, for which he is being paid more than a shilling a word, starts in the Christmas Number of Pearson's Magazine.

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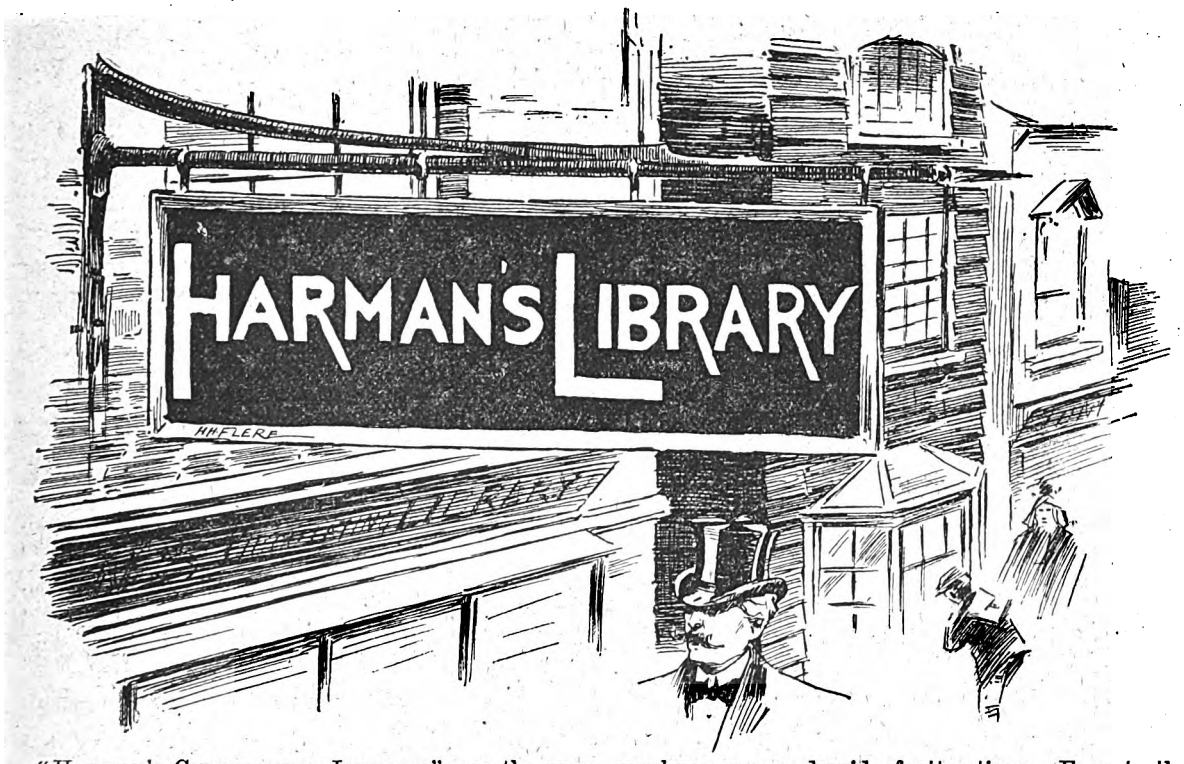

"Harman's Circulating Library" was the way the sign read under the little window.

Properly speaking, it should have been "Miss Harman's Circulating Library," but the lady considered anything feminine unbusinesslike, and so she eliminated the "Miss."

The library was kept in a small shop with one window. The window was large for the size of the room, letting in plenty of light, and so making the place cheerful.

The walls were lined with shelves, and on them stood the books, each volume neatly covered with brown paper, and its name boldly printed with a stub pen on the back.

Down the middle of the shop was a counter on which rested a glass case containing stationery and religious photographs.

Although the library was composed of little besides novels, old and new, good and bad, Miss Harman was a very devout woman. She did not at all approve of novels in such excess, but then, as she very truthfully remarked, without them the library would never "circulate."

There was a room at the back of the library where Miss Harman supplied herself with the necessaries of life, and a room over it where she slept.

She looked upon her surroundings with much pride and satisfaction, and was quietly happy in her own way.

Happiness, after all, is a very relative matter. Miss Harman had struggled bravely through deep waters and found great bliss in being quiet.

She had been educated for a public school teacher, had taken a position in a primary school, met a Dr. Richard Rand at the house where she boarded, and fell in love with him. It is but just to say that Dr. Rand had first fallen in love with her, for Miss Harman was by no means devoid of attractions. Even to the casual observer she was pleasing, with a strong, earnest face, pretty eyes and soft brown hair that rolled back from her forehead in a kind of curl.

Dr. Rand was a young physician, with an extremely limited practice and unbounded energy. His patients were all among the poor, many of them he treated out of charity, and matrimony seemed a long way off.

Then came a dreadful time of sickness among his people, in their crowded streets and houses. A terrible, loathsome disease that all fled from. The young doctor worked like a hero, and died like one. His patience, and courage and kindness will never be written of; his deeds of charity are forgotten, no doubt by those who benefited most; for man at best is an ungrateful animal.

Only one faithful heart worships his memory.

When he was stricken down Miss Harman went to him. She was alone, and he was alone. She had no fear of idle tongues, so she stayed by her hero. She had the comfort of his last words, she followed him to his grave, and then, after she had cried until there were no more tears to shed, she sat down and tried to think what she should do for a living.

She felt herself totally incapable of going back to the public school; she wanted something that would give her more time to herself.

After many trials and disappointments she got the position of companion to an old lady, who was a little deaf and nearly blind. Miss Harman used to look at her and wonder if she too would grow to be as helpless and lonely—only too poor to have a companion. The idea of marriage never occurred to her. She felt that such a thing had become impossible for her from the moment she had stood, a silent figure in black, that bleak March day, by the open grave, and listened to the

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sharp, quick rattle of the earth, as it fell upon his coffin.

She believed in all sincerity that her heart was dead and buried.

The old lady in time became warmly attached to Miss Harman, and, dying, left her a little legacy as a token of friendship.

The legacy was not enough to live on, though it was

"Ain't a boy," said the mite.

a great help. Then it was that she opened her circulating library.

It was not in a fashionable part of the town, but mostly surrounded by lodging-houses and small shops. The lodging-houses were filled with students from the university, whose ambitions were great and incomes meagre; the shops carried on every variety of retail trade.

Miss Harman was thirty-five now, and the soft brown hair was showing streaks of grey, which made her look much older. Her eyes, though still her point of beauty, had lost their brightness, sorrow and tears had dimmed them.

Thirty-five! When you think of it, that is comparatively young, even for a woman. Thirty-five and in perfect health; possibly thirty-five more years before her, and no one to live for but herself.

To be sure, she interested herself in the people about her, and was often helpful in time of trouble; but at the best this was only an outside interest. She wanted someone to love who belonged to her. Finally, Fate, who is not always so kind, interposed and gave her what her heart hungered for.

Directly opposite the library was a lodging-house, and in its first floor front lived a Professor from the university.

He was the ideal Professor—completely absorbed in his studies and entirely neglectful of all that pertained to the ordinary affairs and the business of life.

He was always alone; being of an extremely shy and reserved disposition, he had never got further, in a social way, with any member of the university than "Good-morning."

Any other man would have been miserable. Fancy not having a single person who knew you well enough to call you by your first name! The Professor's name was Richard—Richard Blair—and it must have been a long time since anyone had called him "Dick."

One afternoon in May the Professor came slowly home from the university. Usually he was a rapid walker, but to-day there was something in the spring sunshine that made him loiter and carried his thoughts away to green pastures and babbling brooks and shady woods.

The memory of certain days in the country, long ago, came back to him—of blue eyes and bonny brown hair, and a gracious presence, making the world a glorious place to live in.

From force of habit he stopped at the right house and mounted the steps. At the top he was brought from dreams to reality by a small figure that suddenly rose up before him. A tiny bit of humanity that stood, directly in his pathway, weeping bitterly. It had been many years since the Professor spoke to a child, and he was doubtful how to begin.

Just as the silence was becoming embarrassing he thought of a formula he had heard used with effect on such occasions and began hesitatingly: "Don't cry, little boy," and as an afterthought: "Run home to mother."

"Ain't a boy," said the mite with a sob. "Mamma's gone."

This information left him helpless, as he had exhausted his suggestions, so giving the child a penny, he went in.

But he was not to get off so easily, for she followed him; and when he turned, after entering his room, he saw her standing in the doorway.

"Run home, little girl," he said, beginning to feel annoyed, "your mother will want you."

"Mamma's gone," she repeated, and then walking up to him she laid her rosy little cheek, all streaked with tears and dirt, against his hand.

"Pet me," she commanded.

The Professor's intercourse with children was extremely limited, and "petting" them an art unknown. He lifted her up in his arms, however, and that seemed to answer, for she at once laid her golden curls upon his shoulder, and sighed with satisfaction.

"Now sing," she said.

Then it was the Professor realised the seriousness of the situation. He rang for his landlady, and told her how he found the child.

"Yes," she said, she knew her. "She was an orphan, poor baby—her mother had just died. She was going to be put in the 'asylum.'"

The woman came forward to take her, but the child threw both her arms round his neck.

"No, no," she sobbed. "Mamma's gone. I like you. Stay here. Shall stay."

There was no doubt about the clearness and conciseness of her remarks.

The woman stood waiting—of course the child must go—but the tiny arms clung warm and tight. The Professor hesitated, and "he who hesitates is lost."

"Let her stay," he said, "for the evening."

He ordered supper to be brought to his study; he stirred the fire, and put on fresh coal, for the evenings were still chilly, and then he drew up his easy chair, and

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the mite climbed upon his knee as naturally as if she had been doing it all her life.

After looking at him gravely for a few minutes she began abruptly: "My name's Jo. What's yours?" His eyes wandered over the golden head and into the fire beyond, where they rested.

"Dick," he said, half lost in reverie.

"Dick," she repeated, "Dick, I like you."

Soft, warm, lingering lips were pressed against his cheeks, and a responsive thrill shot through the Professor's heart. In an instant he saw his lonely life spreading out before and behind him, and with a sudden longing for love he folded his arms about the child who nestled close to him. From that moment till the end of their lives nothing ever came between them.

He paid Mrs. Toots, the landlady, for taking care of her, and when he was at home she always stayed in his rooms.

Her name was Josephine Burt—but everyone called her "Jo" for short.

She was a quiet child; giving the Professor very little trouble, and always content of evenings in his study, looking at the pictures he gave her, or talking to her doll. Having generally been in perpetual motion since early morning, by eight o'clock she would be sound asleep in one of his big chairs. Then Mrs. Toots would carry her off to bed, and it was entirely by accident if the Professor saw her again until the next afternoon.

It was during one of the many mornings, when Jo was left to her own resources, that she just made the acquaintance of Miss Harman.

The black cat brought about the introduction in a perfectly natural and informal manner. Jo saw the cat in the street and was so delighted with it that she immediately determined to have it for her own.

The cat evidently read her thoughts, and did not approve of them, for, as she advanced, he retreated until, the shop door being open, he was safe under Miss Harman's skirts.

With only her head visible above the counter, and the light shining through her dishevelled golden curls, Jo presented quite an angelic appearance. She looked to Miss Harman like a cherub's head on a Christmas card.

She speedily made known her earthly tendencies, however, with her usual abrupt conciseness, and explained to Miss Harman: "Jo want black cat."

"Jo want black cat."

It never occurred to Miss Harman to deny such an autocratic demand, and the cat, who was evidently a fatalist, yielded without cry or scratch.

Jo now looked about for some place where she could comfortably enjoy her new-found treasure, and, coming round the counter, spied the old sofa.

It was Monday morning, and Miss Harman was very busy. All the books taken out on Saturday night, for Sunday's reading, were being brought in; so Jo remained undisturbed, as no one ever troubled about her till it was time for the Professor to come home.

About midday she demanded her dinner, and they ate it in the room at the back of the shop, with the black cat seated gravely on a chair between them. Of course, Miss Harman knew who Jo was, but she wanted to hear her talk, so by way of starting the conversation she asked: "Who's little girl are you?"

"Dick's."

"Who is Dick?"

"Dick?" looking surprised and puzzled. "Oh! Dick is Dick."

Then seeking information in her turn: "Wha' 'ou cat name?"

"Dick," said Miss Harman, smiling.

Jo's eyes opened wide. "After my Dick?" she asked.

"Oh, no!" said Miss Harman hastily. "Another one."

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The idea of another Dick in the world was too much for Jo to take in all at once, and she fell into deep thought on the subject. Silent pondering, when one's years are between four and five, is dull work, and presently Jo closed her eyes, and sailed away to the "Land of Nod."

Miss Harman carried her to the sofa, laid a shawl over her, and pushed up a chair to keep her from rolling off. Then, after a moment's hesitation, she carefully cut from its mates a tiny curl, and laid it away—in memory of one of her vanished dreams.

About six the Professor came back from the university—he had stayed late to do extra work—and asked for Jo. Then it appeared she was nowhere to be found, and had not been seen since the morning. For a moment his heart stood still with fear at the thought of losing his darling—his little girl.

He started out to ask for her among the neighbours, and the first place he went to was Miss Harman's, because it was the nearest.

She had been watching for him all the afternoon, and when she saw him coming, opened the door for him.

"Jo is here," she said, "she has been with me all day. Won't you come in, Professor?"

It was the first time they had ever spoken, and the Professor entered rather diffidently. Then from his superior height he caught sight of Jo asleep on the sofa with the cat beside her.

"Ah!" he said, with a sigh of relief, "there she is. I am much indebted to you for taking care of her, Miss Harman; I feared for a moment I had lost my little girl."

He lifted her up tenderly, wrapping the shawl about her with true manly indifference as to whose it might be.

Jo was awake in a moment.

"It's Dick," she said, with sleepy surprise, then, her mind going back to the early problem—"Dick, the black cat's Dick, too, and she says it's named after you." Instantly she was asleep again, but her revelation considerably embarrassed the Professor. Miss Harman came to his aid with the suggestion that Jo had been dreaming.

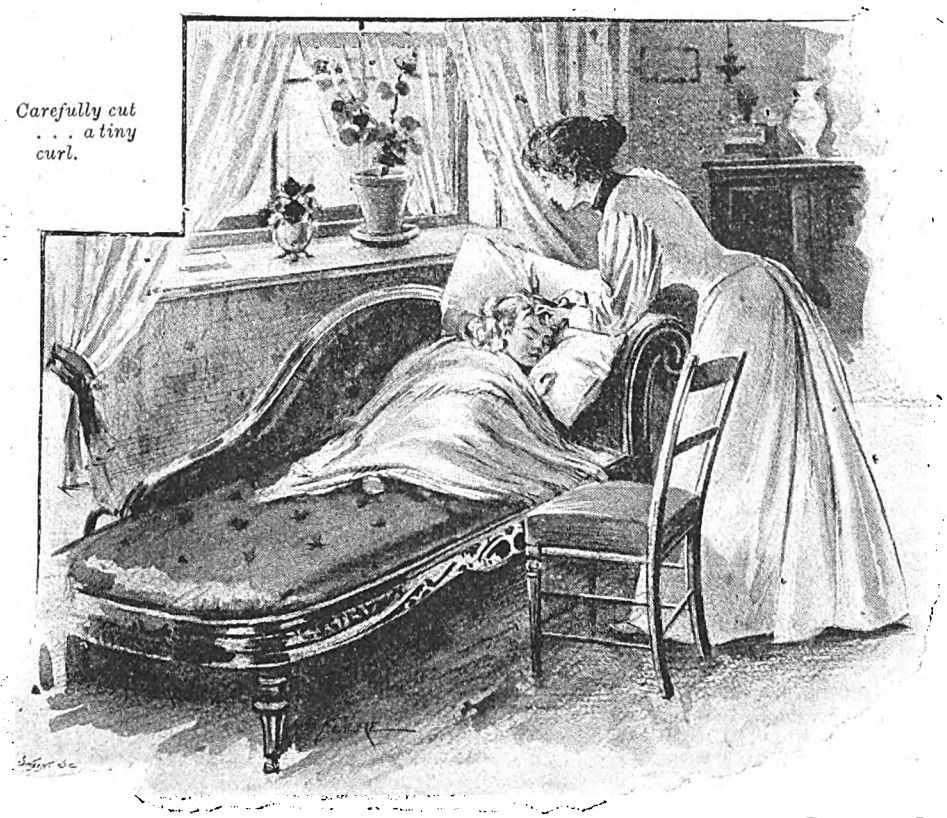
From that day a warm friendship sprang up between Miss Harman and Jo. The child had come into her life at one of the times when she was feeling her loneliness most keenly, and her whole heart warmed to her.

Every day Jo came to her. At first she only stayed to play, but as the weeks went by, her visits grew longer and longer, and Miss Harman fell into the way of sewing up rent garments and supplying missing buttons.

The summer drifted by, and everyone who had means or opportunity left town. Even a number of Miss Harman's customers vanished to "green fields and pastures new," probably to visit country cousins.

The Professor spent his vacation in reading and taking Jo for short excursions into the country. On several of these occasions Jo imperatively demanded that Miss Harman be taken also; but when invited that lady always pleaded attention to business as an excuse—much to the Professor's secret relief.

Jo, however, was a young person of great perseverance, and, having once made up her mind to a thing, was determined to accomplish it. By careful observation she discovered there was one day in the week upon which everyone seemed to be at leisure, Miss Harman among the rest. This day was called Sunday, and when it next came round Miss Harman was duly invited to go a-pleasuring with them.



Carefully cut . . . a tiny curl.

She had seen nothing now for weeks but dusty streets and glaring hot brick pavements. She longed to walk on green grass, under the shade of the trees in pleasant company, and so she went.

That was the beginning, and many other pleasant days came after. They were surprised to find how much they had in common.

As the autumn came on, the Professor got in the way of dropping into the library to take his little girl home, and often stayed to talk.

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One day Miss Harman gained courage to ask him to let Jo live with her.

"You will see just as much of her," she said; "she will be safer with me, and I am very lonely."

"I, too, am lonely," said the Professor with a sigh, "but Jo has brought me many pleasant hours. I shall be very glad to have her live with you."

Thus it was that Fate was kind to Miss Harman and gave interest to her life. From that time on she lived only for Jo—and that young person—such is the way of life—always cared most for the Professor. He had comforted her in her first real sorrow, and his place in her heart was before anyone else; not even a lover, when she had one, being able to usurp it.

When Jo was about six she was taken ill with a fever. For nights the Professor paced his study floor, anxiously watching the window opposite, where Miss Harman sat by his little girl.

In time the child got better, owing to careful nursing, and was much the same as ever; but during those nights of restless watching a great change had come over the Professor. He had looked into his heart and found there a love of much depth and strength and tenderness for Jo's other guardian.

He raised her hand to his lips.

It took him by surprise, and he was rather inclined to struggle against it, but he soon recognised that she had become too much a part of his life to be lightly dealt with.

Now that Jo was convalescent, the Professor would go over to read to her in the evening. They made a very homelike picture in the little back room. Miss Harman on one side of the fireplace sewing, the Professor on the other, with Jo on his lap, and the table with a lamp between them.

One night, after Jo had yielded to the soothing influence of fairy tales and fallen asleep, the Professor laid her gently on the sofa, and coming back to Miss Harman, asked her to listen to him.

He told her of his youth, of struggling ambition and poverty, of a romantic dream of love, such as young men dream, that he had of necessity been obliged to put away from him. Of how his ambition had, in a measure, been gratified, and that now for years he had been well enough off in worldly goods, but the one thing to glorify life and to make it beautiful to live was denied him.

"There is yet a hope," he said, "that this great good may come to me, and I am asking for it now. It is your love."

Miss Harman looked at his kind, earnest face for a moment in silence, and then she gave him her hand.

"Professor Blair," she said, and she spoke softly, for her voice was full of tears, "it is useless to hope. What you ask can never be." For between her and the man before her rose another face, and she knew that too much of herself was buried in the past ever to be resurrected.

He raised her hand to his lips with old-time courtesy. "It was presumptuous of me," he said, "to expect it. Forget, if possible, all that I have said to-night and for Jo's sake, as well as mine, let our friendly relations be undisturbed."

The Professor went away for a week on business, so he said, and when he came back his life went on as if nothing had happened.

Sometimes, perhaps, Miss Harman wished things could have been different. So they lived on, side by side, each working for Jo, who went back and forth, making a link of sunshine between them.

MADELEINE BRIDGES.

Just the Book for Bicyclists!

"ON THE DOWN GRADE,"

BY MISS WINIFRED GRAHAM, *Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," and other popular stories.*

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

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THE REWARD OF COURAGE.

Acidalie, who was a woodcutter's daughter, had of course heard that happiness exists; but she did not in the least know where she should find it. It certainly would not be in the paths of the wild wood, where she often journeyed in company with her father, her shoulders bowed beneath the weight of faggots of thorn, her bare feet among the briars and stones. Neither did she know what it was nor what it looked like, although a secret instinct counselled her to believe that it had the appearance and manners of a good-looking young man, with a proud glance, clad like the son of a prince in blue or rose-coloured satin, brocaded with silver or gold.

"What!" said she to herself one summer morning, as she sat by the side of a road in the forest, "am I fated never to know happiness? And yet I was sixteen last month. If it delays much longer it will have nothing to do with me, for I shall be an old maid."

She grieved so bitterly that the pebbles in the pathway were touched, which is a rare occurrence; for pebbles, as a rule, are not very tender-hearted. They are the rather inclined to be ill-humoured, because they are always being trampled upon without having the power to complain. And little Acidalie did not cease to grieve.

Luckily for her, not far off, there was a good fairy presiding over the wedding of a glow-worm and a fire-fly. As soon as the ceremony was ended she turned to the woodcutter's daughter, and said:

"Come, little one, do not be in such despair. Happiness is never so near as when you think it is far away. Only look across the road. Do you see that young hunter, asleep, with a smile on his lips, under a great, blooming rosebush? He is the king's nephew! Although he has never seen you, he is thinking of you in his dream. Cross the road, go quickly, and sit down beside him. As soon as he wakes he will put his arm around your neck and he will take you away to his palace, where you will be the happiest of princesses." At this the good fairy disappeared.

As for Acidalie she did not stir at first, she was so delighted. Never, never would she have believed that there could exist on earth anything as lovely as the young hunter sleeping under the blossoming branches. At the thought of having him kiss her and take her away with him, she was ready to faint with joy. But she lost but little time over these agreeable ideas, and, tucking up her home-spun skirt in order to run the faster, she started towards the happiness that awaited her on the other side of the road.

Alas! in this forest there were not only good fairies, but also bad ones. It was something like life, in which evil is side by side with good. So a bad fairy, who was presiding over the divorce of a couple of butterflies, turned to the little girl and stopped her with an imperious gesture.

"You must not hope," she said, looking very disagreeable, "that things will turn out like that. What! Attain happiness by only taking a few steps? That would be, indeed, new and curious! Why in that case there would be nothing more delightful than the fate of men or women! I have no idea of such a thing happening. As for you, little one, know that you are not at the end of your troubles. Neither to-day nor to-morrow will you be the happiest of princesses in the palace of the king's nephew."

"Oh! madam, are you as malicious as all that? What displeasure can the satisfaction of a poor girl like me cause you? Anyhow, I have nothing to fear from you. As the good fairy told me to cross the road, no power can prevent me from doing so."

"It is true that one fairy cannot go against the will of another," retorted the fairy, "but she who protects you omitted, in the haste of her kindness, to specify the manner in which you should pass to the other side of the pathway. Go, hurry, run if you can; but look! high up in the air there is a thread of gossamer, trembling light, almost invisible, which stretches from an oak to an elm. Upon this you must walk to get across the road." And when she had thus expressed herself the bad fairy disappeared, not without a chuckle which frightened all the birds in the forest. Even the trillings of a black-headed linnet were suddenly hushed, as the babble of a spring might be silenced by one frozen drop of water.

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At first Acidalie was unwilling to believe in her misfortune. She started again. Vain attempt. A mysterious power kept her on her own side of the road. It was impossible for her to take a single step forward; she could not even stretch out her arms to the happiness that was smiling in its sleep, so close to her, under the rosebush. Then she burst into tears. What! could it be possible? Was it really true? She would not be seated at the hunter's side when he should awaken, a moment later? He would not take her away, to make her his wife, in the king's magnificent palace?

She raised her tear-wet eyes to the thread of gossamer which stretched from the top of the oak to the highest branch of the elm. Alas! it was so fine, so delicate, ever ready to fly away in the breeze. A wren could have severed it with one stroke of its wing; it would have been a very tiny butterfly that could have alighted on it without breaking it. If Acidalie, having climbed the tree, should risk barely the tips of her toes on this quivering nothingness, she would fall upon the pebbles and break her bones; she would be found dead, covered with blood. Well! never mind: in spite of certain destruction, she would try the only path that offered itself towards the happiness which was so near and so far. Yes; small and frail as she was, ready to weep at the sting of a bee, she would have the courage to brave dreadful death!

She climbed the oak, reached, branch by branch, its leafy, whispering top, leant towards the thread—Oh! how afraid she was! how she trembled! But she only hesitated for an instant.

"Oh, you who are sleeping with a smile on your lips, under the roses! beautiful young man! dear happiness! good-bye, good-bye!" she said, "I have never known you, and I die for love of you. Good-bye! I will try not to cry out as I drop, for fear of frightening you. May the noise of my fall be so light that it will not awaken you from the dream in which you are thinking of me!"

Then she resolutely advanced; and you doubtless imagine that she fell to the stones through the air. Not at all.

Before she had touched the frail-moving whiteness she was changed, by the good fairy, no doubt—and this was the worthy recompense of her bravery—into the smallest of lady-birds, which ran quickly on its tiny feet along the gossamer thread from the top of the oak to the highest branch of the elm. But once across, she turned from an insect into a girl again, sat down by the hunter under the blooming rosebush, and the king's nephew put his arm about her neck, saying: "You are even prettier than my dream! Woodcutter's little daughter, will you be a princess in my palace?"

For so hummed the good wife's spinning wheel—it is in vain that jealous powers try to deprive us of the joys which are due to us. If one has enough courage to deserve the help of the good fairies, one never fails to reach the happiness which is waiting on the other side of the road.

H. Lucelle.

THE TWO SHEIKS.

During the reign of the Caliph Achmed II. there lived about two days' journey from the city of Bagdad, a venerable Sheik, whose reputation as a devout Mussulman extended throughout the entire kingdom.

His habitation was the mausoleum of a Hadji, whose origin was enveloped in mystery, and whose name had been lost to posterity; his memory, however, as a faithful follower of the Prophet was venerated by all true believers, and the odour of his sanctity was an everlasting monument to his many virtues. Many were the miraculous cures said to have been effected at his tomb, and worshippers from far and near were wont to make pilgrimages thereto in order to perform their devotions. Great numbers of them found relief from bodily ills, and many were the gifts the good Sheik received in testimony of their gratitude; the choicest of their flocks and fields, silks and other precious stuffs, and many purses of gold were laid at his feet.

He devoted his entire time to prayer and meditation on the mutability of human affairs, and his renown increased day by day.

The young dervish whom he had taken as a pupil, and whose duty it was to feed the lamp kept burning continually before the sacred tomb, praised Allah that it had been granted him to serve so holy a man; and whenever his duties permitted he could be found listening to the words of wisdom and instruction that fell from the Sheik's lips. His term of probation, however, being ended, he took leave of his master with many tears and soon after attained great renown in one of the neighbouring cities.

Now it so happened that the new dervish, whom the Sheik took as pupil and servant, was a most indolent and good-for-nothing fellow, whose sole ambition was a full stomach, and who, after serving ten years, showed no inclination to better his fortune, as his predecessor had done.

The Sheik thereupon addressed him thus:

"Allah Kerim, God is great! My son, it is useless for you to remain longer in my service; you have attained all the knowledge it is in my power to bestow on you! go, therefore, and seek your fortune in the world; I give you this ass to help you on your journey, and Allah and his Prophet be with you and grant you long life."

The dervish humbly kissed the hand of his patron, and taking the ass by the halter, led him forth, intending to mount him as soon as he had left the precincts of the holy place.

Alas! hardly had he gone a few steps ere he became aware that his companion was woefully lame and decrepit, and that it would be utterly impossible to make

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use of him. He therefore procured a stout cudgel from a neighbouring thicket, and with many blows persuaded him to continue the journey. Thus he drove him the entire day until well into the night, when suddenly the beast fell by the roadside and expired.

"Alas!" said the dervish, "what shall I now do? If I allow this miserable ass to lie where he has fallen, his carrion will in a short time pollute the air, and I, being a stranger, shall doubtless be thrown into prison and bastinadoed. I will therefore dig a pit and bury him here."

He then, with much labour, dug a deep hole, threw the body in, and having covered it decently, sat himself down on the mound to rest from his exertion, and commenced bewailing his mournful plight.

While thus lamenting and weeping, he noticed a body of horsemen, magnificently mounted and attired, riding rapidly in his direction, across the plain. Their attention was at once attracted by the dervish and the mound on which he sat, and upon arriving near by, they halted.

"Doubtless there were two dervishes," said one of the horsemen to the leader of the party. "One of them has fallen by the wayside, and his companion has buried him here and is mourning his loss."

This view of the case seemed to them so probable, and showed such devotion on the part of the mourner, that they dismounted and approached the dervish, offering words of consolation and sympathy.

"Allah be with you and give you long life!" said the leader, who was none other than the Caliph's vizier returning from a hunting expedition. "We see, with much sorrow, that you have lost your brother. I pray you console yourself and dry your tears, for, Allah be praised, we are true believers, and we build a mausoleum over the remains of your departed brother, who is now, doubtless, in the arms of the Prophet, and you shall keep watch over the sacred relics. Be of good cheer, therefore, and take no heed for the future."

The dervish moaned piteously for a few moments, and then looking up, with tears streaming down his face, replied: "Allah is great, and his goodness is beyond human knowledge; yet it is a terrible affliction, my lord, to lose one who has been my companion for these many years, and who in all that time has never given me a harsh word, nor have I ever heard him speak an untruth. Verily, he was a model of patience."

Only after much persuasion, and cheered by the thought that befitting honours would be paid the deceased, was the dervish's grief assuaged: and the party took their leave with the assurance that their promise would be speedily fulfilled.

In a short time a splendid mausoleum was erected over the mound; the eternal lamp was placed before the tomb, and the devoted dervish was installed as Sheik to keep watch over the remains. The faithful flocked in great numbers to the tomb of the new saint, and ere long it had become the most renowned mausoleum in the land.

The wisdom, knowledge and piety of the Sheik were extolled above all others, and many wonderful cures were performed. The blind were made to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk, and in a short time the old Sheik, his former master, found that the rising glory of the new star was speedily eclipsing his own, and that the number of worshippers at his shrine was rapidly diminishing. He therefore resolved to visit the new Sheik, with the hope of acquiring some of the wisdom of which he had heard so much.

The journey was for him a long and weary one, yet he was sustained by faith, and at length arrived at the mausoleum. Who can, however, describe his amazement when he entered and recognised in the occupant his former servant and pupil, whom he had turned away in despair at his ignorance.

The recognition was mutual, yet neither gave any sign, and the young Sheik began to hope that age had so impaired his former master's faculties that he would not remember him. He therefore gave him the "musasir," or sign of salutation, and for several days they performed their devotions at the holy tomb.

One evening, however, as they were sitting alone, the old Sheik bent his head to the other's ear, and whispering, said: "May Allah grant you long life! Tell me, I pray you, by what change of fortune were you enabled to attain this greatness?"

And the other made reply: "My father, all that I am I owe to the miserable, lame and dying ass you presented me with when I left your service; this is his tomb, all merit belongs to him."

For a long time the old Sheik sat in silent meditation, stroking his venerable beard. At length, raising his eyes from the ground, he said: "Allah is great, and Mohammed is his Prophet! What you have told me is passing strange, for learn, my son, that under the mausoleum where I found so much honour and profit lie buried the bones of the sire of thy ass."

C. L. Breidenstein.

NEW CONDITIONS.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 13.

In order to lessen the amount of work undertaken by competitors in pasting up the separate lines of the story in these competitions, each line is now numbered, and all that readers need do is to write clearly on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order they believe to be correct. The title and author's name are jumbled up, and should be correctly given.

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday*,
2 awarded to the reader whose solution first
3 *JUMBLED STORY*.
4 Six Prizes—one of £5 and five of £1 each—are
5 *September 28th*, and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reaches this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose key is most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

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THE NIGHT LORD TAGAWENGEN DIED.

Jumbled Story No. 13.

On a bright morning, early in autumn he was happy, but somewhat anxious.

On his face was the pleased expression of one which few tourists know?"

He was waiting for his wife.

A fierce struggle was raging within him. This laden man, whose mouth, and jaws, and nose turned at a trot from over the bridge, and came on his breast. Occasionally, he raised his hand to storm, a whirlwind of words.

The door opened, and his man came in, bearing a casket of jewels that he had prepared as a surprise when he encountered a group of peasants who were to mount the ascent. The guide approached his tray in his hand, with a note upon it.

He recognised immediately one of the occupants drew a revolver from a cabinet. He placed it towards him.

His wild laugh echoed down the mountain side. His face was very white. He gazed round the room he came to madame, and for a moment, during the many dangers; madame's head grew dizzy; and her hair. It seemed to stifle him. Ah, how well he were so horribly mutilated?

Madame smiled and nodded.

Then he drew the trigger.

His hand trembled, and the bullet did not reach his eyes.

Afterwards, three mutilated bodies in a confused room, after bringing the note, hearing the report of Dupois, and fastened it securely round him. Then opened it with trembling fingers. There was no life, everyone that he had ever known, and set out with a despairing look, noting every detail. Each standing on one of the Grindewald roads, waiting operation, his arms encirled her body.

* * * * *

Three years later he found himself in Switzerland. He stopped in the middle, and turned on the rest.

"Mother of God," he cried, "surely you have to wander over the face of the earth.

Occasionally he put out his hand, and opened a wound in the lower part of his face.

He loved the free life of the mountaineers, the rope from his shoulders, he approached Monsieur anxious to enlist as guides. Without pausing to make your own arrangements."

When, three weeks later, Monsieur Martigny spent with his wife. Finally, his eyes rested on the man and woman, who had robbed him of everything known in his old life. No one recognised him; who delivered them into my hands?"

With a groan he slowly crossed the room, and finally she fell almost senseless into the guide's arms.

Monsieur Salvator Martigny, painter, sculptor, who has done something magnanimous. He seemed steady.

"I trust," he would say, "that madame will find reason, he stepped forward and joined their number.

"She will not be long," he said continually to hate me, I can find lovers. In future, you may do so. She had left his house in the morning in a casket containing a superb tiara of diamonds.

Now, he was waiting for her return.

His man, who had but a moment before left the object reminded him of some happy moment he had almost enjoy. He saw many people whom he had himself. "Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Half-past——"

One morning he was wandering in the Grindewald, holding his wife to his breast, he sprang into the air. air suited him; above all, it would be something to this fellow?"

"What. An excursion which few tourists know? and a peace-offering.

Shortly afterwards the three set out together. What say you, little one, shall we trust ourselves to me now? I am your husband."

And madame his wife, at his side?

They climbed the rocky slopes to the foot of the floor, while the blood streamed from a horrible woman in his arms. Then he shook her roughly.

He could detect the faint scent that came from his brain.

Slowly, and carefully, each step planned before. They climbed the steep mountain sides, the strange mass, tied together by a rope, were found by the guide in front, with bent shoulders, and his head that he loved in life, were in his power.

Monsieur Martigny received it eagerly, and could have done so in the broken-hearted, grief-recovered consciousness he renounced his art, his hand, they ascended the glacier. They encountered peasants at the foot of the abyss.

He found his master lying unconscious on the side, and addressed himself to the gentleman.

"You scoundrel," he cried.

The driver of the *calèche* had slackened his pace against his head.

It was, indeed, to be hoped that madame would date or address.

Then suddenly, drawing the rope in close, and the revolver, rushed in again.

"Would monsieur like to make an excursion for tourists, when a *calèche*, drawn by superb horses, as M. Dupois.

"It would be wise, monsieur," said the guide, "if artist, sat alone in his salon.

"Wake up," he cried. "The time has come.

For a moment he gazed silently down on the glacier. On the edge they paused for a moment to we were now to attach ourselves."

He placed his pick against a rock, and taking his knew it.

Finally, he fastened the rope round his own Listen. I am Salvator Martigny. Do you know frightened man.

"Forward!" he cried, and his voice was firm and my peace offering acceptable."

It was written in his wife's hand-writing.

"I left your house this morning for ever. If you do. It was an experience, which, he found, he could waist.

Monsieur Martigny read the words many times.

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BY MISS WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

PAUPER BLUE BLOOD.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IT ISN'T THE SAME!

"I AM going to Cairo for the season," said Georgina. "The Humpherys have asked me to go with them."

"Really," replied Sefton, not looking up from the book he was pretending to read. "All right, I'm sure I've no objection."

And that was all they said on the subject.

Georgina did not ask what he would do in the meanwhile, for the sole reason that she did not care. He might stay with the Macphairsons, and it would not give her a pang now. She had got over all that. Occasionally it troubled her that the Dowager Lady Ravenscroft had never once visited Ravenscroft Park since her son's marriage. "The recollections," she said, "would be too painful."

As Georgina thought of this, she concluded that she had been badly treated all round, and thirsted for fresh fields and pastures new.

It would be pleasant to stay away till the early spring, return when Ravenscroft Park was growing green again. For in spite of her troubles there, Georgina loved the old place more passionately than ever, especially since wealth had enabled her to deck it to her liking.

She was due at the Humpherys the day before starting, and having sent her luggage on with her maid, asked Sefton to drive her to the station.

He ordered his dog-cart, with one of the youngest and wildest horses.

"You know I dare not sit behind that brute," she said. "Take it back to the stables, and have it changed for something quieter."

"It's too late now, you will lose your train," he replied, springing into the driver's seat, and speaking impatiently. "Come along."

Georgina obeyed, greatly against her inclination, but, knowing her husband to be a first-rate driver, controlled her fears. He gathered up the reins, lashed the horse so that it nearly broke the traces, and galloped down the avenue.

Lady Ravenscroft was too taken aback to speak, till they twisted a corner sharply, narrowly escaping catching the wheel on the lodge gate.

"Do you wish to upset and kill me before I go?" she asked, "for it certainly looks like it. Anyone would think you were drunk!"

He did not reply, nor yet abate his speed.

"Stop and let me out," cried Georgina, suddenly panic stricken. "I've no wish to have my neck broken."

Her terror seemed to please Sefton.

"Oh! you are safe enough," he retorted. "Don't fear for yourself."

She dared not attempt to jump out while the cart was in motion, and her protestations were of no avail. It was with a prayer of thankfulness that she espied the station in the distance, wishing with all her heart she had gone comfortably in her brougham. Sir Sefton watched her alight, raised his hat, and saying he hoped she was not cold, drove away without waiting to see her off.

Cold indeed! Georgina was hot and panting with agitation.

"Why was he so reckless?" she asked herself. "He drove almost like a madman!"

She came to the conclusion it was a petty piece of spite, because she had demanded this small service from him. But her spirits rose as the train whirled her off to London. She threw care to the winds, and thought only of life's pleasures for the moment.

But Sefton dwelt upon her iniquities, which, during her absence, grew and multiplied in his mind, till occasionally he seemed swamped by an avalanche of Georgina's misdeeds!

While Lady Ravenscroft was enjoying the season in Cairo, Sefton received a letter from Douglas Shirling, announcing his engagement to Dolly Blandford, with the usual comment that he was the luckiest man in the world.

"I'm looking out for a place," he wrote. "We want to live in the country. I wish I could find something suitable in your part of the world, but there seems nothing on the market in that direction. If you hear of anything, you might let me know. Dolly and I both disapprove of long engagements on principle."

Sefton drew a long breath as he folded his friend's letter.

There seemed but one answer to it. "Ravenscroft Park!"

In all its beauty, in all its hideousness, he would let it pass willingly—thankfully—into his old friend's hands. What an ideal spot for those two glad souls, just commencing life

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together! What a miserable home to the fretful and unharmonious natures whom Fate had thrown mercilessly upon each other!

"Georgina's presence," he said, pacing the empty room, "has contaminated Ravenscroft Park enough, it is sacrilege that she should inhabit the old ancestral house! I will drive her out. On returning, she shall find I have placed it beyond her reach. For the last time she has set her feet in these doors. And here is my opportunity!" holding the letter aloft.

He wrote quickly, watching the clock to see if he had time to catch the afternoon post.

"Dear Old Boy,—A thousand congratulations. I know it is the wrong way round to put it, but Miss Dolly is jolly lucky to get you; she is marrying the best fellow in the world. Now, about your future home, I have found the very place for you; it is going cheap, too, as the owner is dying to sell. Come down the first day you can, and see over it. But I'm forgetting to tell you the name—Ravenscroft Park. Yes, I expect you will open your eyes, yet I am writing this in regular down right earnest. Of course, if the child had lived it would have been different. But, as you know, my domestic affairs are not very rosy."

"I wonder how Douglas will take it?" he thought, folding the sheet.

The letter caused a good deal of surprise at Ermyn Way, but Douglas Shirling was delighted. Of all the places in the world Ravenscroft Park was the one he coveted. The very next day he wired to Sefton to expect him, and though he was somewhat startled by the alterations made by Georgina he saw they need only be temporary.

"Of course, if you buy the place you will do away with all this tawdry gilt and painting," said Sir Sefton. "These wall papers are positively disgusting—my wife's idea of beauty!"

But he did not add that by no word or hint had he betrayed to the absent Georgina this idea of selling their home. She was completely and entirely in the dark. Now and again she sent him newspaper cuttings mentioning her name as being at various entertainments, but their correspondence was thus limited, and she never even knew if he received them.

He wrote to his mother, however, and broke the news that Douglas Shirling had made him an offer for Ravenscroft Park, which he was about to accept. It came like a thunderbolt in her calm, uneventful life. Though she had set her face against visiting Georgina, she still clung to the desire that Sefton should live in the place and keep it in the family.

She wrote him a most urgent letter, imploring him, if there were yet time, to reconsider his decision.

"I can't see that it makes much difference either way," said Eva, talking the matter over with her mother. "We never go to Ravenscroft Park now."

The girl spoke sadly, a yearning in her voice.

"But you don't *want* to, Eva; you could not wish to associate with that woman! She has brought nothing but misery upon your brother."

"Oh! no," with a little shudder. "Of course, I never liked her, but I should love a good prowl round some day by myself, over the old house and grounds. Now I suppose it will go, and we shall never see it again."

"That depends on Sefton's answer. I asked him to write at once."

The letter was anxiously awaited by both mother and daughter.

Sefton replied by return, telling them he had accepted Douglas Shirling's offer by word of mouth, but no agreement had yet been signed.

"If you knew," he wrote, "how wretched I am here, I do not think you would regret the place. Won't you come down with Eva and see for yourself? If, after going over the house, you still want to keep it in the family (though I have no heir), well and good; it shall be Georgina's to the end. But I fancy when you see the trace of her hand in every corner, and remember that her friends are the people that infest these bedizened rooms, you'll agree that dear old Douglas and his wife are fitter inmates."

"I shall go," said Lady Ravenscroft, "if only for an hour."

"It is a tiring journey from town, unless you stay," declared Eva, glancing at her mother's delicate, pale face.

But Sir Reginald's widow shook her head. She would not sleep a night under Georgina's roof even in her absence.

"We will go to-morrow, Eva," she said, "and you shall have your prowl."

The girl was delighted; she longed to revisit her old haunts.

The arrival of his mother made Sefton strangely nervous. He had a perfect terror of tears, and sadly feared she would break down as they passed the spot where her husband died. But the Dowager Lady Ravenscroft was quite self-possessed and calm. He noticed she averted her head as if not wishing to look, but that Eva glanced back several times while driving to the hall door.

They neither of them spoke, as they passed up the broad staircase to Georgina's *outré* drawing-room. Numerous photographs of herself in affected attitudes adorned the mantelpiece, and the sight of her face gave Sefton's mother a strange pang of pain. Eva was the first to remark on the alterations.

"It isn't a bit the same," she cried in a dolefully disappointed tone. "I don't like it half as well, do you, Sef?"

"No," he replied, "Ravenscroft Park is to me only a memory now; I love it no longer."

The sight of his mother there amongst Georgina's knick-knacks seemed like a ghost of his happy youth, before the blow fell.

Eva wandered round the room with a discontented expression, then out into the hall and passages, and up into the rooms she had inhabited in her childhood. The nursery door was locked. She rang for a maid to open it. But her old crib, kept in latter years for the benefit of dolls, had been taken away, and a disused cot that was strange to her, stood in its place.

"I suppose John Reginald slept here," she said, in an awed undertone, "the poor little nephew I never saw."

"Yes," replied the maid, "he died sudden, he did! But there! the servants do say as this is an unlucky place, and they don't wonder a child could not live in it."

"Then tell them from me," replied Eva indignantly, "that they talk a great deal of nonsense. I was born and brought up here, so was my brother."

With this convincing statement she turned away from the cot in which John Reginald had been foully murdered by his father's hand.

When she rejoined her mother, she found her leaning over a desk, in which Sefton unlocked a drawer, and drew out a large document. He took up a pen, and looked Lady Ravenscroft straight in the face.

"Here is the agreement. Have I your sanction to sign it?"

She bowed her head, and spoke tremulously, her voice vibrating with emotion.

"Yes, Sefton, yes, *indeed!*" Then she turned to the girl, and placed her arm lovingly round her.

"Eva is right," she said. "It isn't the same!"

And Eva thought, as she gazed wistfully up into the calm blue eyes, that her mother's heart was broken.

Sefton wrote his name with a flourish, flung done his pen, and stretched his arms with a ringing laugh.

"Done!" he cried. "By Jove! what a sell for Georgina!"

"Do you mean to say she doesn't know?"

"Rather not! That's where the joke comes in."

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CHAPTER XXVII.

"Only for Life."

"Delightful, being so far away from England and getting the Society papers," drawled Georgina. She had cultivated her drawl on the voyage out, in imitation of a beautiful woman, whose natural fascination carried off what must necessarily have marred one less gifted. This latest form of slow and languid speech in Lady Ravenscroft occasionally drifted into a lisp, which proved singularly irritating and unattractive.

But on account of her money and position tuft-hunters and fortune-seekers continued to pet and spoil Georgina till her conceit and affectation knew no bounds. It had been rumoured that she was a *divorcée*, and she had even received several proposals of marriage on the strength of this assertion.

"Nothing wildly exciting," continued Lady Ravenscroft, turning the leaves of the periodical lazily and running her eye across the pages. "The usual gossip—weddings and long-waisted women in fashion-plate finery. Hulloa! What's this?"

In the last three words she dropped her drawl and caught her breath sharply.

Mrs. Humphery looked up to see Georgina's fingers trembling as she held the paper, her eyes dilating, while her colour came and went in quick succession. She devoured the paragraph without speaking, being in truth too dumfoundered to utter a word.

"What is the matter, dear? No bad news I hope. You look quite staggered!"

"Staggered!" muttered Georgina, rising to her feet, and clutching the page fiercely. "I should rather think I was!"

She breathed the words through clenched teeth, though her lips twitched nervously.

"I *won't* believe it! I can't!" she continued. "He would not dare to go to such lengths. It is impossible."

Mrs. Humphery's curiosity was now thoroughly aroused. She tried to take the paper from Georgina, but Lady Ravenscroft snatched it back with a hasty: "Listen; I'll read."

For a moment the print danced before her eyes. She placed one hand upon her forehead and cleared her throat.

"We hear with regret that Sir Sefton Ravenscroft has sold Ravenscroft Park, one of the oldest family estates in England. The fortunate purchaser of this ideal seat is the Hon. Douglas Shirling, second son of Lord Gatton. His marriage with Miss Blandford will probably take place in the spring, and he is to be congratulated on securing so charming a residence. We herewith present to our readers a picture of Ravenscroft Park, whose historical interest is known to all."

"Now," cried Georgina with tragic emphasis, "come and tell me if I am dreaming? Is this some horrible nightmare, or can you confirm with your own eyes that mine have not deceived me?"

Mrs. Humphery re-read the lines, and gazed upon the portrait of Georgina's home with a doleful shake of her head.

"No doubt about that, Georgy, dear. It's gone as sure as a gun! Your husband has taken advantage of your absence to make you houseless. I call it one of the meanest tricks that was ever played, and I feel it is all my fault for asking you to come with us. Thank goodness, Jacoby does not treat *me* like that."

Georgina felt paralysed, an icy chill crept through her veins. She did not realise till it was gone how much she prided herself on the possession of Ravenscroft Park.

"What will you do?" asked Mrs. Humphery.

Georgina started as if waking out of sleep. Then she folded her arms in a masterful manner, and replied:

"Go back at once, and tell him what I think of him!"

"Yes, but that will not give you back Ravenscroft Park."

Georgina moved to and fro like a caged panther, she was too furious to think of anything practical. Her wrongs were eating their way into her soul.

"I must return and demand the truth," she muttered. "Perhaps there is some mistake. How could Sefton ever face me again if he had done this thing, and after all the money I spent in improving his place! Oh! the ingratitude of husbands!"

"The average man," declared Mrs. Humphery, "is the incarnation of selfishness! In Jacoby I have an angel, a diamond of the first water."

"Oh! for mercy's sake don't talk to me of Jacoby's virtues *now*, unless you wish to drive me mad!"

"Who is taking my name in vain?" asked Mr. Humphery, entering the room.

Georgina poured forth her troubles, and asked him to find out how soon she could depart. Jacoby was intensely sympathetic, but protested against her leaving.

"It's too bad, just as we are having such a rattling gay time, and everyone is at your feet," he declared.

"Do not talk of gaiety to me; I am thoroughly knocked over by the loss of Ravenscroft. I could have borne anything better. Besides, it looks so bad for us, just as if we'd smashed or something. I can't think what induced Sefton to part with it, even though Douglas Shirling tempted him with fabulous sums. It is not as if money mattered, and what his mother will say is past my imagination. She'll never forgive him—*never!*"

Georgina's wrath increased as she dwelt on her husband's unexpected action. She nearly drove her maid distracted over the packing, finding fault with everything, and flinging herself on the sofa, demanded eau de Cologne and sal volatile. The Humpherys at last grew weary of her lamentations and perpetual self pity, involuntarily heaving a sigh of relief as they bade her good-bye.

Throughout the voyage Lady Ravenscroft's temper showed no signs of abating. She preserved a gloomy reticence, informing those who pressed their acquaintance upon her, that she had "something very serious upon her mind," and "required solitude in which to consider."

After this hint they left her alone, and she nursed her grievance day by day, until it was commonly said on board that Lady Ravenscroft had never once been seen to smile. Yet hers was the silence of extreme vexation and displeasure, more than actual sorrow.

She wired the news of her return to Sir Sefton, and the intelligence caused him some dry amusement.

"Great Scott, what a meeting ours will be!" he said. "She has scented a rat, and will return with her claws well displayed. Not that they are often hidden. But I care nothing for them now, since Ravenscroft Park is beyond her reach. I've paid back two blows for the many she has dealt me—the child and the house. I took them both from her. All good things go in threes. What shall my last move be, to wipe off the old score?"

Sir Sefton's eyes glistened.

He felt like a cannibal scenting blood as he fingered his wife's telegram.

Georgina felt strangely lonely when she arrived in England. Not that she had expected to be met by her husband. She came straight to London, and took rooms at the Grand Hotel, writing from there to demand an interview the following afternoon. Her excitement was intense as she awaited his coming in her private sitting-room.

Sefton was at his club; he dared not stay with his mother, knowing, in his calmer moods, that he was no fit companion for her or Eva.

He dreaded lest they should suspect the terrible chaos of his brain; see him in his darkest moments, devoured by an inward fiend, who swayed his actions and destroyed his will!

Georgina's summons brought joy to his soul. At last he had got the upper hand, and could triumph over her. He

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went, prepared for her fury, with scorn in his heart and a smile on his lips.

She did not advance as the servant announced him, but watched the door close in silence. Then she took a step nearer, the slouching step he had almost forgotten, and spoke in acid tones.

"What have you to say for yourself, Sefton? How can you account for selling our home during my absence, without consulting me? Have you forgotton that I spent hundreds of pounds on the place?"

"Shirling gave a long price," he muttered, his eyes flashing, "you have nothing to complain of as far as hard cash is concerned. He would not let me sacrifice Ravenscroft Park, as I would have done to get rid of it. Douglas is a straight chap, and he'll do credit to the old house, instead of bringing it to disrepute!"

"Then, money apart, what right had you to treat me in this disgraceful manner? I am your wife before all the world; in that position I claim your consideration. I demand justice. I have never disgraced you. I bore your sullen temperament uncomplainingly, till you outraged my feelings beyond measure, and declared war! Then I accepted the challenge and took up arms. We have fought—figuratively speaking—for the last year."

"Then can you wonder," he cried, "that my patience was exhausted, and the perpetual friction made me loathe and hate the house in which you were mistress? Are you surprised under the circumstances you have just named, that I thanked God when Ravenscroft Park passed into new hands? It's beyond the clutch of your greedy fingers—you can contaminate it no longer!"

His words seemed to stifle Georgina with fury, but she saw reproaches were useless, and divined a surer way of cutting Sefton to the quick. Drawing herself up to her full height, she laughed scornfully.

"You can take the place away," she cried, showing her even white teeth, "but not the *name* which is secured to me for life!"

The shot told. That bitter taunt burnt into his soul, rang in his ears, goading his unhinged mind.

"For life! Yes, for life, but only for *life!*"

Why should this worthless existence continue, that had brought a curse on the Ravenscrofts since the days of his father? Why should her poisoned breath flow on, to defile the air?

He checked this sudden rush of deadly thought with an effort. Mad as he was, he knew an attempt to terminate that life would bring damage to himself. He was still sufficiently sensible to realise his name was less sullied by Georgina bearing it, his blue blood less tarnished by her relationship, than if he were detected as a murderer. He restrained his wild desire to grasp her uncovered throat, for this consideration which alone allowed her to retain life and the name!

She saw that her shaft had made a profound impression, and congratulated herself accordingly.

"You are right," he said at last, "as Lady Ravenscroft I should have honoured you. God help me, I only remembered you were a Pluff!"

He turned sadly to the door with bent head, and slow laboured gait, like a man utterly broken, weighed down by sorrow.

"Why are you going?" she asked. "Have you nothing more to say? No comment to make upon the future? What is to become of me? Where am I to live?"

He put his hand to his forehead, as if these questions bewildered him.

"Wait!" he replied. "Give me time to consider. I will come again this day week. Then I may be able to talk over definite plans. Now my head is in a whirl. Let me go!"

He flung off the detaining hand she laid on his arm. It was the first time she had touched him since he entered the room.

Something compelled her to stand back, and watch him pass from her sight without another word.

Sefton returned to his club, muttering again and again to himself, "the *name* is hers for *life!*"

He sank into a low chair before the fire, and did not hear a friend who addressed him with some casual comment. He sat there for hours, lost to the world and his surroundings, as a man working out a great problem. His acquaintances gave up attempting to draw him into conversation as this silent mood lasted and increased.

After a time, however, a change took place. Sefton brightened up, surprising his friends by greeting them in the old light-hearted manner of his youth.

He was smoking and telling stories one night after dinner with Francis Stephens, a former friend, when he mooted the idea uppermost in his mind.

"I say," he began, somewhat hesitatingly, "you know I sold Ravenscroft Park."

"Yes."

"Well, I want another place. The fact is my wife's rather upset about it, and I mean to make up for the loss by getting, if possible, something that she will like even better. I had thought of an old castle which I might rebuild. I believe I've heard you mention some ruins near your shooting-box."

"Rather! I know the very thing for you, in one of the loveliest spots of Derbyshire. It's on my shooting—an old feudal castle. I can't imagine why some romantic-minded person has not scented it out before. The walls and turrets are there, and, with a little art, one of the finest castles in England could rise out of the ruins. If you would care to see it, my gamekeeper and his wife would make you comfortable at my box and show you the place. You can then judge for yourself of its possibilities."

Sefton thanked him warmly, and accepted his offer.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Georgina's Castle.

Sefton went to Derbyshire the following day and was apparently enraptured with the old ivy-grown walls. He roamed about the place like one in a dream, appearing especially fascinated by a turret, still in fair preservation, being well roofed in. The top room commanded a beautiful view, and from admiring the fair scene just bursting into early spring verdure, Sefton exclaimed approvingly at the old oaken door, which he moved slowly to and fro on its rusty hinges. It was in wonderful condition, the lock even answering to the mighty key.

"That is a fine piece of carving," said Sir Sefton, pointing to the panels.

"Yes, sir," replied the gamekeeper. "We often use this room for luncheons when shooting, though it's rather gloomy, the windows being so high and small."

Sefton returned to town jubilant, and kept his appointment with Georgina, entering the room smiling agreeably, his step light and his voice cheerful.

"Well," she asked, "have you anything worth telling me?"

"Yes. I have not been idle since this day last week. My future plans have formed and need only your approval to complete them."

He took her hand and patted it. His attitude surprised her.

"What—are—these—plans?" she asked uncertainly.

"Listen. I thought seriously over your words, Georgina, and came to the conclusion that I had not treated you fairly. I cannot get Ravenscroft Park back. I sold it in a temper, and must abide by my folly. For all that though, *you* shall not suffer. You must have a place—a home—worthy of you, and the noble name you bear. I have discovered a castle in Derbyshire, the beauties of which are beyond description. At present it is merely a ruin, but we will build it up together, and bury our past differences

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under its mighty turrets and lordly walls. Do you think this is possible, Georgina, my wife? Will you help me to raise my life to a higher standard? Will you mould two fallen edifices to their former stature?"

A gasp of joy broke from Lady Ravenscroft. She wound her arms about his neck, and kissed his lips. He felt as if a serpent were strangling him.

"Now you speak honourably," she said. "You have seen yourself in your true colours, and can pity me!"

Then clasping her hands joyfully, she cried:

"A castle, a beautiful castle. Oh! Sefton!"

"Yes, one in which you can make merry, free from the ghosts of our old sorrows. We will fill it with guests, and wake up to the joys of existence. When will you come to your castle, Georgina?"

"To see it?" she asked.

"Yes. It is on Francis Stephen's land, and he says we may stay as long as we like at his shooting-box. Suppose we go down together, remain a week or two, and get an idea of how we like the country."

"Lovely! It would be a chance of exploring the neighbourhood," replied Lady Ravenscroft, her spirits rising at the idea. She drew her husband to the sofa, and side by side they wove pictures of the long future, vague with unrealities.

When Sefton left he had arranged what train they should go by, and saw, as he bade his wife good-bye, that her eyes were bright with unshed tears. But they were neither tears of joy nor sorrow, only triumph, pride, exultation!

The journey to Derbyshire in no way fatigued her, for Sefton appeared in quite a new light, that of a devoted husband, anxious to please her every little whim.

They spent the evening amicably before a blazing fire in Francis Stephen's sporting sitting-room, and the following morning Sefton declared he would take Georgina alone to see the Castle for the first time in all its wild solitude.

"You can walk three miles," he said; "it's such a jolly spring day."

Lady Ravenscroft declared she would enjoy nothing better, and they started at a brisk pace.

Before they had gone far Sefton asked her to wait while he, on some trifling pretext, returned to the lodge. He met the gamekeeper at the entrance.

"We've changed our plans," he said hurriedly, "and are returning to London to-day. We want you to keep our luggage, as we shall be back again in a week or two. We'll find our own way back to the train after looking at the ruins."

With these words he bade the man and his wife good-bye, and hastened to rejoin Georgina.

They strolled through the beautiful scenery, talking of many things. The trees were bursting into bud; the birds were singing wildly for joy that spring had come.

"There! what do you think of it?" cried Sefton, when the first peep of the castle came in view.

Georgina broke into a run, almost childlike with excitement. "Beautiful! beautiful!" she exclaimed.

He followed her delightedly.

"Do you think you will be happy there?"

She nodded her head, too breathless for speech.

Together they explored the quaint old remains of that noble building, coming last to the Turret Chamber.

"Now you will see the view," said Sefton, pointing to the narrow slits of windows.

As Georgina crossed the room he closed the heavy oak door, and turned the big key. She was gazing in dreamy wonder at the space beneath the blue, when he leant over her, his hot breath fanning her cheek, his eyes dilating, and one fierce hand grasping her shoulder, while the other flung out into the mild sweet air a large rusty key. It whirled down—down—down! She watched it without grasping the meaning, and turned in questioning surprise to her husband.

"Did you see," he muttered, "it has gone, the key of Death and Hell? Escape woman if you can!"

Georgina read the awful truth in his look. With a shriek she rushed to the iron-clamped door, but it did not yield to her frantic efforts, only wild peals of mad mirth rang round the walls. The terrible reality crept over her, paralysing her limbs. Sefton had made exit impossible. She was locked away in this deserted castle, with the brainless horror of what had once been—man!

She staggered to the window, and screamed till her voice died with parched hoarseness, while Sefton listened unmoved.

"So this," he muttered, when she sank in a shuddering heap on the uncarpeted floor, "is the end of Lady Ravenscroft and her name! You wanted me once, do you want me still? Do you crave for me now that nothing can separate us? I bound myself to you from the first. I share your fate to-day. Together we have lived in a purgatory worse than death, together we will die in our castle, Georgina! How do you like the exchange? This is better than Ravenscroft Park!"

She rose on her knees, livid and trembling; her voice came in a whisper, though she was not yet hopeless.

"They will come from the lodge, they *must* find us, save us!"

Sefton smiled.

"We have gone to London by the afternoon train, I told them!"

A moan of abject despair parted Georgina's lips.

"You brought me here with murder in your heart! It was premeditated!"

"Are we not better out of the world, you and I? Hands soiled with the blood of a child, hearts rank with sin, souls accursed!"

Georgina leapt to her feet. "Is this your revenge for John Reginald?" she cried.

Sefton's eyes grew radiant.

"No, *I* killed your son, he is there now in the corner, can't you see, under the silk hangings? I leant over the cot *so*"—crossing the room—"I crushed the breath out of his body, I robbed you of him, and of Ravenscroft Park, now I take your life and give you mine. Have I repaid your trespasses against me sufficiently, do you think? Is the old debt wiped off? Speak, Georgina, justice is done, speak and own the truth. My father's honour is avenged, and the name of Ravenscroft stamped out for ever! Confess here in the tomb, I have done my uttermost, I have defied Fate!"

"Murderer!" she yelled. "Oh, God! my son! my son!"

She rushed to where the visionary cot had stood, and fell upon her face.

* * * * *

In the agonies of thirst and starvation, Georgina stretched her emaciated hand through the narrow window and clutched the air. Her eyes started half out of their sockets, she was past recognition.

Her husband had fallen into a state of coma, his body shrunk to a skeleton.

Georgina's head fell forward, she died with her hand stretched outwards to the sky.

Sefton dreamed of a sweet face in a green lane, and murmured "Norah!"

It was his last word.

THE END.

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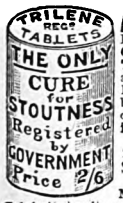

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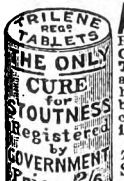

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 405.] For the Week ending October 3rd, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

OR,

The Romance of a Lost Continent.

By Geo. C. Wallis, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION.

LONDON, *May 27th*, 1963.

THERE has been much speculation of late—amongst that large class of people who have little better to do—as to the relative merits of the twin discoveries of aerial and submarine navigation which have so revolutionised the conditions of life within the last half-century.

The enthusiasts of mechanical flight point with pride to the speed and directness of modern travel, to the defiance we can bid to the severity of winter journeys, to the stamping out of war with all its horrors, to the ease with which the hitherto inaccessible regions of the Poles and the interiors of continents are now mapped out and known, and to the greater accuracy of astronomical observations taken from stations suspended above the clouds, where the observer can always depend upon a clear sky.

To this the advocates of the claims of submarine navigation reply by referring, with equal pride, to the splendid security of voyaging under water, where the ship is ever in a calm; to the vast stores of sunken treasure recovered by the various governments; to the great increase in our geological and biological knowledge which a thorough examination of the sea-bed has given; to the quantities of chalk, coral, lime, pearl, and sponge, which are now easily taken from the depths; to the great facility for deep-sea fishing now afforded; and last, but not least, to the historical relics that have been dug up from submarine excavations, bearing witness to the existence of nations which flourished when the proportions of land and water were different to the present.

This latter claim of the "submarines," I think, turns the scale in their favour. From this the reader may surmise that I am one of those who have little else to do than discuss these profitless questions. In justice to myself, however, I must say that I am a submarine by experience as well as by conviction, and that I have brought up from the sea-depths the material on which my conviction is founded.

Amongst other things we submarines have traced out the shores and mountain ranges of Lemuria, that vast continent now buried under the Indian Ocean; we have discovered and marked out the thickness and limit of every reef and every shifting sand on all the coasts of the world; and, above all, have discovered and systematically explored the greater part of the submerged land once named Atlantis.

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For centuries its very existence has been looked at as an idle dream by the majority of thinkers, but now we know its sunken shores, its buried cities, its river-beds, and mountain chains; some of its history, many of its customs, a little of its religion. Since the *Sealion* first sank down on the ooze-covered ruins of one of its towns, and brought to light some of the iron implements of its long-forgotten people, a great advance has been made in our knowledge of the world's past history.

We now know that Atlantis was a continent whose shores once stretched from the western bounds of Europe to the eastern coast of America, and afterwards, gradually at first and at last suddenly, subsided till it reached its present level, and the ocean shut off the new world from the knowledge of the old. We know that it was a kingdom and that its people were a warlike race, in language and beliefs akin to the ancient Egyptians, a maritime and colonising nation, once having great dependencies in Africa and America. We know that it supported a large priesthood and boasted many splendid temples, and that its religion consisted mainly in the worship of a trinity—three spirits in one—with a number of lesser gods, and the belief in a future state called the shadowland, wherein was supposed to be an everlasting garden of delight.

All this we knew before my great discovery of last year, and the classical legend of Plato, so long considered false, is now acknowledged on all sides to be either a remarkable coincidence, or due to the rumours of Atlantis which must have reached Europe from the Atlantian colony in Nubia. The later hypothesis seems to me the correct one when we recollect the tradition of the ancient Ethiopians—that they came originally from a country in the west, beyond the sea. Professors Herr and Unger, who in 1861 suggested that Atlantis united Europe and America in the Miocene period, giving biological reasons for their belief, and the writer of the article in the NATURAL HISTORY REVIEW* on "The Atlantis Hypothesis in its Botanical Aspect," are now avenged on their critics. But all this is to the story I have to tell as the dancing of the dry bones of scientific research is to the nervous, forceful action of a living novel.

On the 8th of February, 1962, I set out in the *Octopus*—an ugly name, by-the-way, for a splendid ship—from the Government Docks in the Thames, to assist in the work of exploration on the Atlantic bed, taking with me three scientific men and a crew of capable sailors. Travelling on the surface of the sea at the uniform rate of one hundred miles an hour, we reached our destination in a little over a day and a half, and prepared to sink to the ocean floor. Some of my colleagues were new to this mode of pursuing knowledge, and M——, in particular, though chosen by the Bureau of Science from forty eager applicants for his post—that of geologist to the ship—openly wished that he had been among the thirty-nine rejected and forlorn!

However, I told him to keep cool, and that I would answer for his safety in the silent depths. The engineer then pulled the actuating lever of the mechanism, the sliding doors closed automatically and hermetically, and with a slight rocking and a muffled roar the great ship sank through the yielding waters. M—— clutched the furniture of the cabin, and looked at the dense darkness outside the thick glass windows with scared eyes, his face turning pale. Then I touched the light signal, and streaming past the window, the glare of our search-lamps lit up the still water. Great monsters of the deep, open mouthed, flashed past as we sank down, lithe-bodied snake-like creatures twirled and twisted as the ray of light swept over them, scintillating sparks shot up from below as invisible denizens of the sea dashed through the line of our vision, and, except for the faint muffled wash of the water on the curved steel sides of our vessel, all was deathly calm. I looked at my manometer after a few seconds had passed.

"We shall soon be resting on the solid earth," I said to M—— "with a pressure equal to some hundreds of atmospheres on our hull. Look out for the blue hills of Atlantis!"

As I spoke I signalled for more light, and looking through the most illumined window we saw the dim, misty peaks of the submarine mountains rising into the glow of our electric rays, and very soon the *Octopus* settled gently down upon a wide, ooze-covered plain, not many yards from where another ship was lying, with a score of dark figures creeping slowly about on the ground near her. It was the old *Sealion*, which I knew to be then engaged in the work by the American Congress, and so we lost no time in donning our diving suits and joining them on the sea-floor. The scene was magnificent, the dense darkness all around contrasting vividly with the brilliant area lit by the search-lights, into and out of which so many strange forms of life were passing and repassing, that the effect was kaleidoscopic.

The men of the *Sealion* were laying a blasting charge, and, deciding to join forces with them, we laid a hand to the work, and soon had the compound of litrolite in a Harrison patent case connected to the time-fuse set for twelve minutes. That done, we scrambled on board our vessels, and, setting the engines to work at their utmost speed, dashed away from the spot. Exactly on the stroke of the thirteenth minute a dull, red orb of fire appeared for an instant in the black water behind, then vanished, immediately followed by a rending thunder-crash that caused the ships to toss and shiver in the shaken sea. Returning, we found that a great portion of the calcareous deposit had been broken up, revealing the long-hidden ground.

We repeated the operation till a large portion of the sea floor was laid bare, and then, renewing our store of air by releasing some of the solidified atmosphere* in our reservoirs, took pick and shovel and set to work.

It proved a rich field for our labours, and on the 13th the *Sealion*, having filled her hold with what was deemed a good collection of valuable antiquities, rose to the surface and set her prow for home. Three days later—that memorable 16th February—we made the crowning discovery of the expedition.

On that day, for the first time, I succeeded in inducing M—— to venture from the ship and accompany me to the ruins of a large city we were then exploring. It appeared to have been a large and populous city in the palmy days of Atlantis, but was so wreck-strewn that it must have suffered some great disaster even before sinking under the waves. About a mile from the outskirts of it, to the north, the weed-hung walls of what must at one time have been a tower of immense size and strength, jutted from the sea-bed. Judging from the dimensions of its base and the slope of its sides, it could not have been less than a hundred feet higher than the Eiffel Tower of Paris, or just fifty feet lower than the Tower of Babel, which Yankee emulation erected in Chicago in 1907.

Walking over the rough ground, hampered by our heavy helmeted suits, was no light toil, and M——, unused to this method of locomotion, stumbled once for every three or four steps he made. Something unusually heavy caught my feet whilst laughing at my friend's antics, and stooping, I found a large, thick roll of beaten copper, green with verdigris in places, but untouched in others, doubtless having been well covered by dirt and fallen masonry before the lime deposit had formed on it. I took it to the ship without attaching any extra importance to it, and soon afterwards, having as much weight in as her hull could lift, floated the *Octopus* to the surface, and put her head about for England.

When I came to examine the roll of copper I found to my surprise that it contained a number of sheets of parchment similar to dry papyrus leaves, well fastened in between the metal folds, and written closely over in the Atlantian

* NOTE—(1862) p. 149.

* Professor Dewar (1893 or thereabouts) was, I believe, the first to successfully accomplish this solidification.

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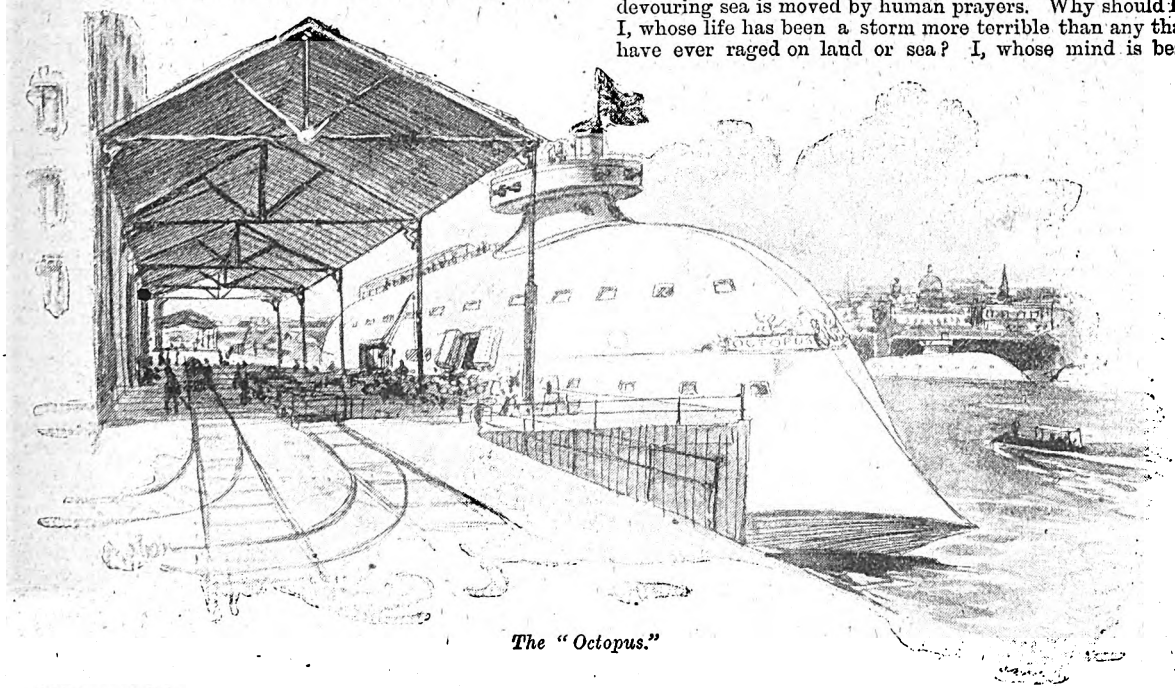
character. My curiosity was roused, and, leaving all our other finds in abeyance, I resolutely set myself the task of translating, by Richard's key,* the whole of that lengthy, ancient MS., which I have named "The Last King of Atlantis."

The news of my discovery has already been bruited abroad, and several experts in archæology having confirmed the accuracy of my translation, I think the time has come to give the story to the world. The chapter divisions and headings, and some of the terms used, are, of course, of my own choosing, but in substance I can affirm that the English version is a true reflex of the famous manuscript, which may now be seen by the curious in the British Museum, Atlantian Section, No. 48.

Of the story I need say little, since the history of the last king of that most unfortunate country, who went through the most desperate adventures in Nubia, Egypt, and Mexico, cannot fail to interest the reader on its own merits.



The "Octopus."

With regard to the supernatural appearances and priestly premonitions of which Arnon tells, particularly the vision of Isis, the thousand years sleep by Marenso, and the last words of Briseis, I venture no opinion. Modern science will probably question their reality—modern scepticism certainly will—but I have thought it better to tell the story as its author put it down, rather than break the continuity or detract from the interest of the oldest autobiography in the world.

F. Ernest Hamlyn, F.R.S.

CHAPTER I.

On the Shore of Life.

Swiftly flows the foamy tide on the sullen shores of the Bay of Kronos; heavily boom the breakers on the distant bar; hoarsely screams the seamew in his wheeling flight; resistlessly tosses the ocean far and wide in its restless majesty; sobs and sighs by turns the rising, threatening gale. 'Tis an even presageful of storm, of mighty conflicts of wind and sea and rain, and I, Arnon, sitting here in my lonely watch-tower, already seem to feel the massive fabric rock and sway before the fierce impetus of the tempest's breath. But though the gale should roar ten thousandfold its worst, and the very heavens be rent asunder or the earth be split in twain, it will not move me nor stay my hand from writing, unless in the sudden shock of elements and worlds my spirit and my body be torn apart with one fell stroke of fate.

Yes, the storm is rising, and the sky, already sparkling with the light of a thousand stars and silvered with the gleam of the crescent moon, will soon be swept from end to end with the rolling banks of curling cloud, passing, re-passing, and over-passing one another, or charging in confusion hither and thither, until the thunder rolls and the lightning darts its deadly shafts at the stolid earth below, riving the giant trees and ploughing furrows in the very rock.

Let it come! I shall heed it less than yonder granite column heeds the fanning of a firefly's wing, or yonder all-devouring sea is moved by human prayers. Why should I? I, whose life has been a storm more terrible than any that have ever raged on land or sea? I, whose mind is best attuned to the crash of empires, the fall of kings, the rallying cry of battle, or the thunders of a people's praise?

Yet, oh! thou who read'st this—it may be in ages after I am gone to the shades—think not that the sound of conflict is the only melody that has moved this heart. You shall hear without straining of ears to listen, above and through all the other notes in the harmony of life, the grand keytone of an undying love. And should you in your incredulity mistrust my words, I hold your unbelief of small account—care for it less than I care for the tempest that is already warring without my solitary chamber overlooking the heaving bay.

Yes, read, and you shall learn how time and circumstances have filled up for me the sixty years that lie between this day and the day on which I first gave vent to a wailing cry. You shall learn how the mightiest power the world has ever known has been humbled to the dust by the very magnitude of her victories and the squandered luxury of her unsurpassed prosperity; how I have been, in turn, pirate, captive, priest, sailor, soldier, courtier, and king; how, through all the wreck of wealth and name, and all the gain of war and cunning, and all the shadows of my transient loves, one great affection has held me in its chains for good and ill for now nigh forty years: and how the surging, restless ocean

* Richard has been aptly termed the Champollion of the 20th century.

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ever creeping forward with insidious steps, treacherous, cat-like, has seized upon our country, pace by pace, until but a curving reef now remains of our beloved Atlantis, the mistress of the seas.

It makes the salt tears start to my eyes e'en now, as I think of it, for out there, beyond the white-crested bar, is

I clung to the lowest step of a stairway.

buried under the waves the quiet glade where first I breathed my love to Briseis. Back! ye bitter memories, and let me write—as the wind rises higher and higher, and the billows dash further and further up the tower—faster, faster!

* * * * *

Faintly limned upon the misty background of the past, the first image that my memory can clearly trace is a vision of the ocean that I love so well. I see myself, a tiny youth, wandering alone upon a strip of sand at the foot of a frowning cliff, so high above my little black, curl-covered head that I thought the top must surely be above the sky. To the right of me the sand and shingle lay in a narrow path at the base of the beetling crags, nor could I see its end; while to the left it ceased, and the rock-bound coast curved out upon the sea, fading away in sullen greyness far as the eye could reach.

Above, far above the giddy height where the sea-birds wheeled and screamed their harshest notes, the sun shone fiery in a heaven of cloudless blue, heating the rocks and pebbles till the skin was blistered by the very touch of them, and it seemed as though I were walking in an open furnace. Shelter I could not find, and out there in front of me, temptingly, tantalisingly, lay the sparkling liquid sea, rising like a dark, cool bank beyond my reach.

As I stood and gazed with all the wonder of childhood, a mast, and then another, and then a sail, and last a ship, appeared on the rim of the sea, moved slowly across and disappeared in reverse fashion at another point. Angrily I shook my tiny fist at the vessel, for not coming to take me off the lonely shore, and when it came not nearer for all my demonstrations, sat down on the hot sand and wept a flood of petulant tears.

Strangely enough, I remember that I seemed to know, instinctively, the nature of that moving speck on the sea, and from that have been led to think that I must have been abandoned on that desolate beach by an unnatural parent; but whether it be so or not, it has never been granted me to know. At the end of my life's journey I am still ignorant of its beginning. Since the day I woke to find myself an outcast, alone with the careless elements, I have never lost my hold on the thread of memory. Before then I can only recall a few faint flashes of intelligence, darting meteor like across a sky of densest gloom.

A glimpse of the sea in calm and storm, the recollection of a ship with its banks of oars, a few fierce dark faces, and one face unlike the others, calm and lovely, with a look of motherly tenderness; that is all the first half-dozen years have left me, and that little even grows fainter with the gathering age of time.

After I had cried until I was tired, the more especially as there was no one whom the sound could annoy, I ceased my pettish bewailings and set about to pry into my surroundings, as is the wont of children left to themselves.

The tide was ebbing when I first gazed at it, but now as I have turned my steps to the right and trotted along close to the towering cliffs, it turned, and each roller breaking on the shore sent its spray further up the sand. Presently the part on which I walked, as far from the sea as I could get, began to swell and then to sink beneath me, and presently the waves washed my little bare feet at each step. Soon I was wading in the bubbling surf and drenched to the skin by the salt spray that curled up, dashed itself in mighty impotence against the unresponsive rock, and then fell down upon me in a soaking shower.

It was not so very long before I was lifted off my feet, and then and there learnt the useful art of swimming. I am inclined to think that I had been in the water before then, so well did I progress in the rude lesson, but whether it was so or not, I managed to keep myself above water for a considerable time, assisting myself, whenever possible, by the ledges and angles in the cliff-face. At last, tired and bruised by the buffetings of the rough and thoughtless waves and the heavy knocks I received when swung sharply up to the hot, steaming rock, I began to feel my little strength give way. I called for help, screamed, wept, and called again, but all to no purpose. Beyond me lay the sea, without a speck to mar its glittering surface. Above, the sun shone pitilessly in the same unclouded sky.

Now I was nigh to the end, and in a very short time my struggles would have ceased, so that this history would never have been written, when, with a last despairing effort, I seized a projection in the rock that rose so menacingly above me, and clung to it with all the tenacity of a limpet. And I found when I had hung there till my breath came back, that above it was another like projection, and then another; and I saw that I clung to the lowest step of a stairway cut out of the solid stone, leading up I knew not whither.

This put fresh nerve into my little mind, already aged in experience in the last hour, and with eager joy I began to slowly climb the narrow steps. About a third of the height from the summit the cliff frowned outwards, so that

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no one on the top could see the rough stairs, and at that point they ceased, the last step being the threshold of a dark, wide-mouthed cavern, in whose depths, as I peered, shone sundry curious gleams of light. A few more tottering strides and I was within, groping round for something on which to lay my weary body.

I slept long and soundly, waking with the rays of a newly risen sun shining full into the mouth of the cave. Then I saw that the place which I had so opportunely found was a very roomy cavern stretching back into the heart of the cliff for many fathoms, and lined on each side with long, rude, wooden shelves, on which stood rows of clumsy-looking earthen jars, and underneath which were several huge boxes, fastened down by ropes as thick as my own arm.

But what attracted my attention most were several heaps of shining stones that lay upon the floor, which sparkled in the sunlight like a myriad points of fire; and several long, square bars of a dull, yellow metal, which seemed to have a curious glow in the glare of day. For awhile I played with those strange toys, the shining stones, then, impelled by the pangs of hunger, began to search the cavern for something wherewith to appease my appetite. I was not long in discovering it. One of the earthern jars was full to the brim with deliciously cool water—none of the purest, I imagine, but quite good enough for my undiscriminating years. In another jar I found a plentiful supply of nuts, which wonderfully satisfied my cravings.

Then I went and played again with the pretty stones, and before long, feeling still sleepy, I lay down and passed into the land of dreams with all the carelessness of youth, one arm, upon which my head was pillowed, clutching one of the bars of yellow gold, the other hand still grasping the largest of the brilliant diamonds in its chubby fingers.

Thus I lay when they found me, and I was roused by the sound of voices.

It was still light, though the day was drawing to its close and one star shone bright and clear through the open mouth of the cave. By the faint light that found its way in, assisted by the flickering glare of half a score of torches stuck in sockets on the wall, I could distinguish some fifty men grouped around me in various attitudes, some amused, some angry, and all astonished.

One, who appeared to be the chief, dressed in a short tunic of dark cloth, pulled in round the waist by a belt from which hung axe and dagger, and wearing a pair of huge, high leathern boots with square-cut toes, was the first to address me, and it seemed as though I had heard the language he spoke from my birth upward.

"How came you here, youngster?" he asked roughly, giving me a slight kick with one of his dreadful boots to emphasise the question.

"Up the steps, when the water was too high for me to stay below," I answered, getting on my feet, and likewise on my dignity, which even then was not small.

"Ah!" cried he who questioned me, "and pray, what were you doing in the water below? And mind, young one, you answer me civilly, or I treat you to another kick."

I told him, not flinching in the least, but looking him boldly in the face, all that I could remember of myself, scanty as it was; but he only seemed puzzled the more.

"What were those men like whom you last remember?" he asked at length.

"Big and fierce and ugly, like all these," I said, waving my arm round comprehensively, "and one was thin and evil-looking, like that man," I added, pointing to a cadaverous individual who stood a little aside, regarding me fixedly with his piercing eyes. There was a general laugh at this sally, but the thin man, heeding it not, bent forward and solemnly caught me a stinging buffet on the cheek.

"Hold! Zerah!" cried the Chief, "the young one is but small and thou art strong. 'Twas a coward's blow. And he spoke truth, I swear!"

An angry scowl was all the reply Zerah made to this, but before he had finished the grimace I had recovered from the effects of the knock-down blow, and, with eyes blazing and teeth clenched, had snatched up and hurled at him one of the largest diamonds near my hand. The jagged jewel struck him full force on the nose, notwithstanding his dodging, and tore off a piece of the none too superfluous flesh on that large-boned facial ornament, and then drew blood across his cheek, raising a great weal in its track.

Overawed by the rest, the injured man made no effort at retaliation, but retired to the further end of the cave to restore his ugly visage to a state of comparative serenity, contenting himself meantime with the evilest of glances and the grimmest of smiles.

"'Tis a spirited lad, Didron!" said one of the men, addressing the chief after the roar of laughter at my act of defiance had subsided. "Methinks he would make us a handy novice aboard ship."

"Art right there," answered Didron, meditatively stroking his tawny, tangled beard; "yet I should like to know how he came hither. Thought I that he belonged to any who have discovered our hiding-place, I'd put an inch of cold steel across his gullet before I threw him out."

"'Twould be safest to cut his conceited throat in any case, and so make sure," growled Zerah, from the semi-darkness.

"Right, old curmudgeon!" said another, checked abruptly, however, by Didron, who said:

"As Nimno has remarked, the lad is plucky, and has a stout heart; we will take him to ship with us, and he shall join our band, when he shall have come to years of discretion."

So I was put into a corner and thrown something to eat, my masters having more weighty matters on which to talk.

One of the earthenware jars was full to the brim.

In a few days we put to sea, reaching their ship from the bottom of the steps by a couple of boats.

She was a long, low, murderous-looking craft, with high curving ends, the stem terminating in the graven head of a hideous tiger, with glaring eyes and gaping jaws showing

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the sharp gleaming teeth. On either side of the vessel was a bank of oars, pulled by fifty captives, bound together and constantly urged on by the application of a knotted leathern thong. For use when the wind was favourable she carried a huge lateen sail, which put us through the water swiftly as a shark after its prey. The crew, apart from the hundred miserable galley slaves, numbered two hundred brawny-armed, iron-souled, rough-looking fellows, mostly with dark, grizzled beards, and scarred, weather-beaten countenances, telling of many a storm encountered, many a fierce brush with foe on land and sea, and many a deed of evil import.

In fine, they were a gang of pirates, who harried the southern seas and the southern shores of Atlantis, the ship on which I was embarked was their stock-in-trade, the *Ravager*, and the cave I had so opportunely discovered was their secret treasure storehouse, wherein was hidden the gold and silver and precious stones that they could not at once dispose of. And a very secure hiding-place it was.

As I have said, it could not be seen from the cliff above, nor reached from the sand below when the tide was out, nor could a ship get near enough to enable its crew to discern its whereabouts if they did not know where to look. As the *Ravager* stood out into the offing I noticed that the strip of sand, upon which I had battled for my life with the rising waters, was unreachable by any direction than from seaward, being rounded off at each end by bold, jutting headlands, standing out sharply against the great green sea beyond.

With sails stretched taut by the favouring breeze, to the great delight of the hapless slaves, the *Ravager* ploughed her way across the ocean, and after many quiet days cast anchor in the harbour of a solitary islet lost in the immensity of the tropic sea. This was the pirates' home, where their wives and children lived, secure from the vigilance of the royal warships.

Here in this lovely spot, Didron the Chief adopted me as his son, in lieu of one who was dead, naming me Arnon, after the lost one, and bidding me be as a brother to little Viol, his only living child. This I gladly promised, feeling myself almost a man, in spite of my scanty years. Then, after a short rest, the anchor was upheaved, and the *Ravager* once more stood out into the trackless waste of waters.

The pirates had not met with much good-fortune of late, and their settlement needed things other than diamonds and gold. Also many of the crew had no wives in the islet, but had love-maids in distant ports. So all hands were willing and ready to spread the sail and clean the decks and polish their weapons, singing a rude war-chant the while, as the ship swept out of sight of their island home.

CHAPTER II.

The Son of a Sea-King.

Merrily sped the ship on the dancing waves as the sun climbed higher and higher in the heavens; loudly groaned the hundred slaves, and louder yelled the crew, when the wind failed, the lateen flapped idly on the mast, and the hundred oars dipped in and out of the water with a rhythmic sound.

Little Viol, my foster-sister, went with us on my first trip. Didron would rather she had not, but the little maid was wilful and spoilt through having no mother to keep her waywardness in check, and insisted so strongly and wept so prettily that the stern-faced chief was fain to yield to her intreaties. So she came on board to gladden our hearts, to amuse us with her quaint sayings, and vex us with her ceaseless questionings.

On that first voyage she and I struck up a boy and girl courtship, to the great relish of the crew, who teased us both unmercifully. But little we cared for that; I, indeed, answering jest with jest and taunt with taunt, for, feeling secure in Didron's protectorship, and finding, moreover, that the rugged-mannered pirates liked me all the better for my bluster and sharp tongue, I grew intensely conceited, and spoke and behaved as if on equal terms with every man on board.

Dear little Viol! I think I see her now as she looked through all those busy years I fought with the pirates and grew to manhood's age and stature. Small she always was, but sweet and dainty, as though such loveliness must needs be dealt out to the world in little quantities. Her wavy, sunny hair streamed down her shoulders in luxurious masses, seeming to clothe her in a garment of brightest gold, and to crown her head with an amber glow. Her cheeks were mantled with the rosy tinge of southern blood, and her eyes shone softly beneath their delicate arches as the eyes of a timid fawn. Small wonder is it that I braved a thousand daily torments on her behalf! E'en now, when her memory is overshadowed by a deeper, stronger, more abiding love, the memory of little Viol can sometimes give my heart a flutter, and set my soul a-longing for what can nevermore be.

Foremost amongst my tormentors was surly Zerah, whose face still bore the scar where my missile had struck him, and for which he never forgave me. Day after day, and especially when Didron's glance was averted, the great brute would pour out his clumsy jokes and blunt-edged jeers, and set me to work on the most irksome tasks, all of which insults I treasured up in my revengeful mind, waiting my time to pay him back in earnest.

As the years sped on, I grew in strength and skill. My hand was cool and steady in the whirl of the fiercest fight, my thews and sinews toughened and enlarged till I could hold out a full-sized man at arm's length and think light of it, and one stern grasp of my iron fingers round a foeman's throat could squeeze out his very life. I was also tall and broad of chest, and when I gained my twentieth year and stood on the threshold of full manhood I was the strongest, most daring, and most trusted of all that jolly band, so that Didron himself, feeling the chill of age creeping on him, looked upon me as his successor, and sometimes, when his life-blood coursed more sluggishly than was its wont, sent me out with the *Ravager* under my own command. Then, when the pirate-spirit came strongly upon him again and the thirst for action thrilled through all his veins, the old war-dog would once more take his place, tramping the deck of the good old ship with an air of mastery, and interlarding his orders with a profusion of words strong as the stiffest breeze that ever blew on the briny sea.

On one of these latter occasions, after we had stowed the treasure of three deep-laden argosies within our secret cave, Zerah and I found means to end our quarrel.

I was talking to Viol on the open deck while she busily plied her distaff, seeming but careless of my presence, though at intervals not very far apart, when our eyes met, mine read love writ plain in hers; when, in the midst of our quiet communing, like an ice-cold hurricane tearing through a leafy summer glade, came Zerah, chaffing and grumbling, and setting my teeth on edge with his cantankerous lugubrations.

At last, finding that I heeded not his sneers, he lost his temper, abusing me, and then my little Viol, as bitterly as his evil tongue could wag.

"'Tis a pretty sight," he said, with a fiendish smile, "to see our novice a-mooning about and taking his ease like a noble, when his betters have to shoulder-to and work in fair weather or foul! And 'tis a better thing that this yellow-haired chit should be aboard to keep your idleness in countenance. Surely I think our chief has no shame left, that he flaunts his love-child here in our faces!"

"Gods!" I cried, springing to my feet and snatching my sword from my belt, "look to yourself, viper, for by the beard of Amarunth, I'll wash out this insult in your life's blood!"

I had suffered his tormenting and clumsy jokes long enough, but when he turned his vile tongue against my

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darling and mocked at her motherlessness, the cup of my anger was full and my wrath was roused to action,

Then out flashed his sword, and the bright blades struck fire as we crossed them in savage shock, and then stood still, glaring and watchful, as old Didron, marking the jostle of arms, came hurrying up. He asked what made us fight, and a chorus of voices told him, for Zerah's coward sneer had been overheard by more than one.

"But that Arnon has taken up the sword against you, accursed wretch, this once stout arm, old though it be, should cut you to the earth like a stalk of corn," was all the old man dare trust himself to say to Zerah, thereafter bidding us go on.

But now Viol rushed between us and clung to me with all the feverish strength of a fearful maid, imploring, bewailing, beseeching, sobbing, intreating me not to put myself in danger, till I was well-nigh unmanned and my steadiness of nerve was gone, while Zerah stood and watched us, a confident grin upon his swarthy features. With a cry I roughly shook off my troublesome maid, who was at once seized by Didron, and, grasping my sword more firmly, I turned to my enemy.

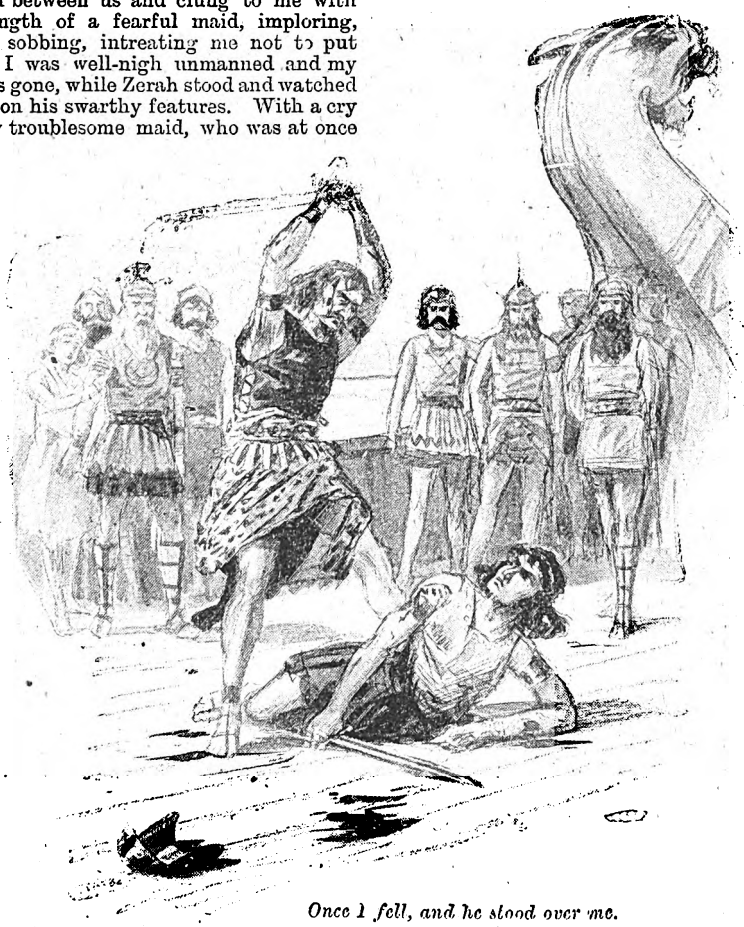
"Now, miserable wretch," I cried, "prepare to enter the shadows, for by all the Spirits you shall not live to see to-morrow's sun."

"Now, insufferable cur," he answered, his face livid with rage, "nerve yourself to feel the jaws of the monsters of the deep, for their prey shall you be before night falls."

Then we began in deadly earnest, thrusting, cutting, parrying, fencing, springing, advancing, and retreating, till the red blood flowed about the deck from each of us, and our arms grew weary with the struggle, though for a time neither gained advantage. Once I fell, and he stood over me with arm raised high to strike the fatal blow, but before the hissing blade had cleft the air one half its journey I had kicked his foot from beneath him, prostrating him headlong at my side. Once I had him on his knee, and the point of my weapon at his breast, but ere I could send the sharp steel home he had wriggled out of my grasp like an oily snake and stood upon the deck.

I began to perceive that my strength was matched by his skill, my youthful energy by his sober experience, and remembering that muscle is sometimes overcome by cunning, I resolved to save my strength and tire him out. On this our combat became a slow one of feints and passes and wary watchings for a false move, and of this my foeman tired, seeing as well as I that I must surely wear him down. So with a shout he threw himself upon me, sword and dagger and all, and down I went under him like a sapling felled by a single stroke of the woodman's axe, my blade flying out of my fingers a dozen paces down the deck. Then up at him I sprang like a tiger-cat, fastening one hand upon the wrist that held the dagger (I feared not his sword at such close quarters), and the other upon his throat. These I grasped and held like a leech, wavering not one item in my forceful clasp for all his writhing and plunging and his ashen face, for now my strength and build began to tell.

Soon his sword dropped from his free hand, his dagger fell from his nerveless fingers, his eyeballs rolled in horrid motions, his heart ceased to struggle, his breath stopped in the narrow passage I held so tightly, and Zerah lay still at my side.



Once I fell, and he stood over me.

Thereupon out broke the crew into a cheer, and old Didron called me his son, bidding me throw the carcase out to the sharks; and little Viol knelt by me and wept tears of joy for my safety, and, woman-like, a tear of pity for the wretch I had slain. But of all these voices I heeded only Didron's, and lifting the lifeless body high in the air, flung it overboard as far as my enfeebled arms would allow.

We were then sailing through a blue sea thickly covered with lumps of yellow weed, in which said weed live countless hordes of little crabs of the same sickly hue, and as the hideous body sank beneath the weeds, then for a moment came to the top again, out poured these ugly creatures, crawling over the carcase. When I saw this I said:

"So may all such wretches perish!"

And old Didron bowed low his head, thanking the gods for having given him such a son and rid him of such a pestilent follower.

Oh! it was a stirring life, was ours, in the days when buccaneering was an honest trade and a pirate was an honourable man. True, we waylaid ships and took their treasure and their women and slaughtered their crews if they resisted us, and made raids on the littoral towns, but so, in sooth, did our enemies the warships of the king if so it happened that they stood in need of men, or arms, or food, and made no discrimination, whilst we were ever ready to aid the poor and the distressed, wherefore many a needy fisherman would liever see a pirate ship upon his horizon than a vessel with the royal flag.

Yes! ours was a happy life when all is said and done. 'Twas calm and peaceful when we lay at ease in our fairy

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isle, drinking the sweets of success, and disporting ourselves with our wives and sweethearts, while the good ship was being repaired and fitted for her coming voyage; 'twas better when we sallied forth and laid tribute heavily upon the vessels of the rich merchants who plied between Atlantis and the spice-laden East; 'twas better still when the *Ravager* cast anchor in the harbour of a wealthy town and levied blackmail to a fabulous amount upon the trembling citizens; but 'twas best of all when we met a pirate-foe upon the sea—a rival who dared to hunt within our chosen waters—and with crashing of timbers and riddling of sails, with fierce clashes of arms and shouts of hatred upon men's tongues plentifully as beads thickly-strung upon a thread, our tiger-headed ship rushed on to battle and to victory!

Then did the blood course swiftly through the willing veins, and the hand grasp weapons eagerly, and woe to the foemen who crossed our path when the pirates' wrath was roused, for come sun or rain, or calm or direst storm, we jolly fellows rested not until our rage was quenched in streams and pools of reddest gore!

Sorrowfully I write this, looking back through all the years, and fain would have you bear in mind that we were not always in such angry mood. For our own sakes that was well.

A week had scarce gone since I had thrown Zerah to the crabs, when, it being my watch in the early morn, I saw a ship bearing down upon us with all the speed the slaves could row, and pressing hard behind, twenty lengths from her stern, a royal warship foaming through the water, her five hundred oars sweeping the sea with majestic regularity. It was a fellow pirate, pursued by a ship of the king. Not a moment did old Didron hesitate.

"Grappling-irons ready!" roared the old sea-king, his grey eyes sparkling with joy at the coming fight. "Art blind?" he went on impatiently, seeing the men hang back. "See not 'tis our old friend Sanaboul? On, then, and shear off the enemy's oars!"

The men sprang forward at this, all eagerness, and down we bore upon the pair of flying vessels. Sanaboul saw us, guessing our intent, and so, when he reached us, slewed round his ship till both our prows pointed to the oncoming foe. As we rode together, with barely the breadth of the oars between us, Sanaboul called from his deck:

"Good cheer, old comrade, thou comest but just in time!"

The old sea-dog answered that the last hour of the day is better than no time to-morrow. "And," said he, "if we strive but well, the king shall know of what mettle we seamen are made. Ha! ha!"

Now our ships parted slightly, and resting on our oars (for it was a dead calm) we stood silent, waiting the coming of the great warship. Then, when her prow was near upon us, our vessels sprang forward and closed inward upon her with a sudden shock, shipping oars as we touched, and one on either side of her we tore along, grinding slowly down her banks of oars, splintering, breaking and cracking them as though they were twigs dried in the sun, and hurling the luckless slaves in her hold, hither and thither in wild confusion, breaking the limbs of many, and killing not a few. And when we got alongside, our men who steadied the chains, threw the hooks and grip irons over the bulwarks, making the vessels fast, so that the royal ship was locked in our embrace. And then from both sides we poured in upon her with shouts of defiance.

Then began a struggle long and terrible, for our two crews together did not so much as equal the number of our foes, and these, moreover, were greatly helped by having a score of expert slingers in the rigging, and at the prow and stern, from whence their leaden bullets fell amongst us like a deadly hail. But fiercely we fought, chanting the *Ina-ana*, or war song of the seas, and ever as we battled our feet were planted further on their deck. Soon we met our friends from the further side, and Sanaboul stood side by side with Didron, as wild and dangerous a pair of tough old warriors as ever trod the timbers of a worthy craft.

Together strove that brawny couple, plying their swords so well upon the host of foes that it seemed as though they stood in the harvest field, mowing down the corn shaken by the wind. And like a field of corn blown here and there, yet coming no nearer, was that host of enemies. For a time no hurt came to these two, yet at each cut or thrust of their long, keen blades a foeman fell upon the slippery deck, and of all who fell none ever rose again, for behind and about them pressed we, with all the lust of blood in us, like wolves howling for their prey.

Now we had cleared the slingers from the stern, and cut down the mast which held the sail ropes, so that only the forward end of the royal ship was held by her crew, and seeing this, and that they were fast losing ground, their leader pressed to the front, and, grasping his huge, heavy-bladed axe, fell upon our chiefs fighting in the midst of the turmoil. They saw him, and both blades leapt up, like lightning flashes, to ward off that fearful blow. Like a reed snapped by a falling oak Sanaboul's sword broke short in his hand, and the awful weapon, crashing down through leathern helm and head and armour, clove through his body as though a splitted block of wood, and, falling to the deck, was there transfixed, quivering.

'Twas a mighty stroke, such as I have never seen since, but by its own greatness it cost that chief his life, for before he could wrench it from the deck, Didron's blade, with the swiftness of a thought, had cut his head in twain. With a wild cry of exultation, I placed myself at my leader's side.

"Well done, my son," said he; "but seek not to guard me. I feel that my hour has come now that my friend is dead. Yet I—I shall make my grave amongst the bones of our enemies."

How we wrought that day against those stern and bearded warriors of the king! At last we bore them down and slew them, one and all, till not an armed foe remained on board. But—maledictions on the evil thing—a fatal bullet from a sling guided by the hand of Amarunth, the god of death, sent Didron to join his friend in the Land of Shadows, even as the victory was nearly won.

Then, with one consent, they made me, Arnon, their leader, and for want of men to work both ships, what remained of Sanaboul's crew, with much persuasion, came on board the *Ravager*; and their ship, together with the royal vessel, we sank by boring auger holes in the barnacle-covered bottoms. The slaves of both vessels and the wounded of our enemies went down with them, for we were not minded that any news of our deed should reach Atlantis, lest we brought down stern revenge upon ourselves and our wives and children.

But how those wretches shrieked and cried for help and mercy as they felt the ships sink under them, and the water creep higher and higher! It makes my blood chill even now, when I recall that mad, despairing yell. Some, indeed, sprang overboard, but such soon perished, either by the sharks or the arrows of my men, and the rest, for all their fear, ventured not to meet their end that way.

That was the dark side of my pirate life, and now, scanning it from the vantage point of a life's experience, I shudder at my own misdoings, and wonder that the earth has borne with me so long.

After making sundry further captures I returned to our island home, taking with me the sorrowing Viol and the body of the old chief. We buried him with Sanaboul, on the slope of the little hill where our olden leaders lay, and being now enriched by our long, successful cruise, we rested from our voyaging for a year and a half, till our wounds and sicknesses were healed and cured, and by which time fully two-score of the young men who did not yet know more of the sea than the smell of it, were ready to take ship with us.

(To be continued.)

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY NO. 11.

TOO MUCH BLUE.

SEE PAGE 442.

11 Early on a fine summer morning, an old man
33 was walking on the road between Brussels and
20 Namus.
119 Having a good deal of time to spare, he amused
75 himself by watching the operations of a painter,
45 who, mounted on a ladder placed against the front
93 of a wayside inn, was busily employed in depicting
17 a sign suitable to its name, "The Rising Sun."
18 The old man commenced walking backwards
98 and forwards before the inn, the painter, mean-
104 time, continuing to lay on fresh coats of the
79 brightest blue, which appeared to aggravate the old
87 gentleman very much.
106 At length, when the sign-painter took another
124 brush full of blue paint to plaster on, the spectator
22 could endure it no longer, and exclaimed severely:
110 "Too much blue!"
82 The painter looked down from his perch, and
12 said, in that tone of forced calmness which an
105 angry man sometimes assumes:
74 "Monsieur does not perceive that I am painting
73 a sky."
70 "Oh, yes, I see very well you are trying to paint
123 a sky; but I tell you again there is too much
26 blue!"
2 "By St. Gudula, this is too much!" exclaimed
113 the painter, coming down from his ladder, at no
16 pains this time to conceal his anger; "I should like
61 to see how *you* would paint skies without blue."
30 "I don't pretend to much skill in sky-painting;
15 but, if I were to make a trial, I wouldn't put in too
109 much blue."
28 "I tell you what, old gentleman," cried the
13 insulted artist, crossing his maul-stick over his
84 shoulder, and looking very fierce, "I dare say you
125 are a very worthy fellow when you are at home; but
63 you should not be let out—alone."
4 "Nonsense!" exclaimed the critic, as he snatched
100 the palette from the painter's hand. "You deserve
68 to have your portrait painted, to serve for the sign
34 of the 'Flemish Ass!'" In his indignation he
127 mounted the ladder with the activity of a boy, and,
92 with the palm of his hand, effaced the *chef d'œuvre*
69 of Gerald Douw's great grandson's third cousin.
78 Then, using merely the point of his finger and
5 the handle of a brush, he sketched, in masterly
80 outline, three Flemish boors, with beer-glasses in
32 their hands, drinking to the rising sun, which
97 appeared above the horizon, dispersing the gloom
43 of a greyish morning sky. One of the faces
83 presented a strong and laughable caricature of the
51 supplanted sign-painter.
108 The owner of the inn was the first to cry
88 "Bravo!" and even Gerard Douw's cousin nine
99 times removed felt his fury calming down into
71 admiration.
50 The old man was about to descend from the
42 ladder, when a gentleman, riding an English horse,
40 made his way through the crowd.
90 "That painting is mine!" he exclaimed in French,
6 but with a foreign accent. "I will give a hundred
89 guineas for it!"
1 "Another madman," exclaimed the native genius.
23 "Hang me, but all these foreigners are mad!"

"What do you mean, monsieur?" said the inn- 41
keeper, uncommonly interested. 29
"What I say—I will give one hundred guineas 67
for that painting," answered the young Englishman, 44
getting off his horse. 47
"That picture is not to be sold," said the sign- 52
painter, with an air of as much pride as if it had 96
been his own work. 118
"No," quoth mine host, "for it is already sold, 59
and even partly paid for in advance. However, if 91
monsieur wishes to come to an arrangement about 122
it, it is with me that he must treat." 94
"Not at all, not at all," rejoined the Flemish 64
painter of signs, "it belongs to me. My fellow- 116
artist here gave me a little help out of friendship; 86
but the picture is my lawful property, and I am at 31
liberty to sell it to anyone I please." 10
"What roguery!" exclaimed the innkeeper. 27
"'Rising Sun' is my property. Fastened on the 120
wall of my house, how can it belong to anybody 46
else? Isn't it painted on my boards? No one but 121
myself has the smallest right to it." 66
"But suppose that *I* don't choose to have it 72
sold?" said its real author. 77
"Oh, my dear monsieur!" said the innkeeper, 62
"I am certain you would not wish to deprive an 56
honest, poor man, who can scarcely make both ends 25
meet, of this windfall. Why, it would just enable 112
me to lay in a good stock of wine and beer." 101
"Don't believe him, brother," cried the painter; 55
"he is an old miser. I am the father of a family; 38
and, being a painter, you ought to help a brother 60
artist, and give me the preference. Besides, I am 76
ready to share the money with you." 107
"He!" said Master Martzen. "Why, he's an old 115
spendthrift, who has no money left to give his 57
daughter as a marriage portion, because he spends 9
all he gets on himself." 128
"No such thing; my Susette is betrothed to an 24
honest young French cabinet-maker, who, poor as 65
she is, will marry her next September." 54
"A daughter to portion!" exclaimed the stranger 95
artist; "that quite alters the case. I am content 53
that the picture should be sold for a marriage 103
portion. I leave it to our English friend's 14
generosity to fix the sum." 58
"I have already offered," replied the best bidder, 102
"one hundred guineas for the sketch just as it is. 7
I will gladly give two hundred for it if the painter 39
will consent to sign it in the corner with one 126
word." 114
"What word?" exclaimed all the disputants at 111
once. 36
The Englishman replied: 48
"Meissonier." 49
The whole party were quiet enough now, for they 21
were struck dumb with astonishment. The sign- 85
painter held his breath, glared with his eyes, 117
frantically clasped his hands together, and fell 35
down on his knees before the great French painter. 19
"Forgive me!" he exclaimed, "forgive me for 37
my audacious ignorance." 3
Meissonier laughed heartily; and, taking his 8
hand, shook it with fraternal cordiality. 81

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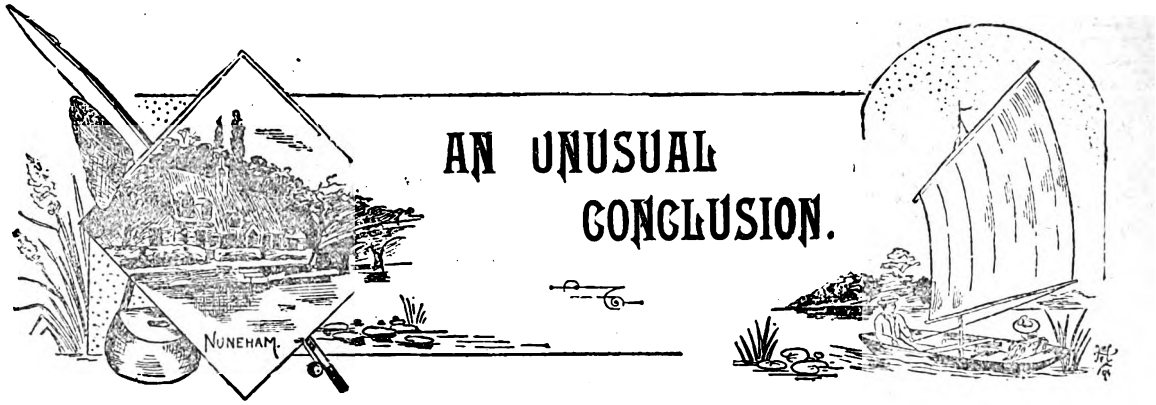

AN UNUSUAL CONCLUSION.

Mr. Clarke Randolph was stupefied by a discovery which he had just made—his wife no longer loved him, and the man who had stolen her from him was his nearest friend, Henry Stockton. If there had been the least chance for a doubt, the unhappy husband would have seized upon it, but there was none whatever.

Let us try to understand what this meant to such a man as Randolph. He was a high-bred, high-spirited man of thirty, descended from a long line of proud and chivalrous men, educated, refined, sensitive, generous and brave. His fine talents, his dash, his polished manner, his industry, his integrity, his loftiness of character, had lifted him upon the shoulders of popularity and prosperity.

He had been married four years. His wife was beautiful, winsome, and intelligent; and she had always had from him the best devotion that a husband could give his wife. He and Stockton had been friends for many years. Next to his wife, Randolph had loved and trusted him above all others.

Such was the situation. At one stroke he had lost his wife, his home, his best friend, his confidence in human nature, his spirit, his ambition. These—and essentially they were all that made up his life, except the operation of purely animal functions—had gone all at once, without a moment's warning.

Well, there was something to be done. A keen sense of the betrayal, a smarting under the gross humiliation, urged him to the natural course of revenge. This, as he sat crouched down in a chair in his locked office, he began systematically to arrange, struggling earnestly to bring his mind under control and direct his thoughts into coherent forms. The first idea—always first in such cases—was to kill. That, in the case of a man of his spirit and temperament, was a matter of course. Fear of the legal consequences found no place within him. Besides, suicide would settle that exceedingly small part of the difficulty.

So it was first decided that as the result of this discovery three persons had to die—his wife, his friend, and himself. Very well; that took a load from his mind. An orderly and intelligent arrangement of details now had to be worked out. A plan which would bring the largest results in the satisfaction of a desire for revenge must be chosen. The simple death of these two, the bare stoppage of breath, would be wholly inadequate. First, the manner of taking their lives must have the quality of strength and a force which in itself would have a large element of satisfaction; hence it must be striking, deliberate, brutal, if you wish; revolting, if you are particular. Second, it must be preceded by exposure, denunciation, publication, scorn, contempt, and terror.

Randolph was in the act of leaving his office to go and buy a revolver, when he was startled by what he saw in his office mirror. It required a moment for him to recognise his own reflection. His face was unnaturally white, a discolouration was under his eyes, which had a glassy appearance, his lips were pressed tightly together, the corners of his mouth drawn down, large dark veins standing out on his temples. Fearing that if, while in this condition, he should apply to a gunsmith for a revolver, he would be refused, he stood for some time before the mirror trying to restore the natural expression of his face. He kneaded his lips to remove their stiffness, pinched his cheeks to bring back their colour, rubbed down the ridged veins, and scraped a little of the white plaster from the wall, and with it concealed the dark colour under his eyes. Then he went forth with a firm step, bought the revolver without difficulty, tried it, satisfied himself that it was reliable, loaded it, put it into his pocket, and returned to his office.

For there were certain matters of property to be attended to. He had a considerable fortune, all his separate posession; his wife had brought him nothing. He now felt clear minded enough to dispose of his estate intelligently. He drew his will—a holographic instrument—devising his wealth to various persons and benevolent sccieties.

He glanced at his office clock. There would be four long hours yet before the time for going home to dinner. How should Randolph employ these weary hours? There was nothing to do, nothing even to think of. He tried to read a newspaper, then a book, and failed; looked out upon the crowds which thronged Princes Street; counted the cabs awhile; tried other things, failed at everything and then sat down.

Something was beginning to work in the wretched man. Let us see! His wife, whilst pretending the warmest affection for him, was receiving the attentions of a traitor in the house; she had wrecked his life, had driven him to his death. Really, therefore, she had swept aside all the obligations which the marital relation imposed. In essence she was no longer his wife, but a criminal enemy, who, with deliberate and abounding malice, had destroyed him. He could go to the grave with a willing heart, but he could not permit her to live and enjoy his downfall and gloat over his destruction. But would she really do that? And then, she was a woman!

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In spite of all that she had done, she was a woman. A strong man, his strength reinforced by a revolver, employs deception to bring a woman into a room, locks the door, insults, humiliates, and terrifies her, brandishes a revolver, and then kills her like a rat in its hole. Can a brave man, of mature judgment and in possession of his faculties, do such a thing? Why, it would not only be murder, but cowardice as well. No; it could not be done. She was still a woman, with all the weakness, all the frailty which her sex imposed. It could not be done.

After all, it would be far sweeter revenge to let her live, bearing through life a brand of infamy. That would be much better. She would lose her high position and the respect of her friends; the newspapers would publish her shame to the world, pointing her out by name as the depraved woman who had betrayed her husband and driven him to suicide; they would have her portrait in their columns; her name and crime would be hawked in the street by loud-crying newsboys. Not only that, but she would be stripped of all the property which she had enjoyed so much. She would be turned adrift upon the streets, for no one would help her, none have a kind word for her, none give her even the respect which money might command. Being thus turned out upon the world all friendless and alone, and soon taking to drink, as such women always do, down she would plunge into a reckless career, sinking lower and lower, losing her beauty, becoming coarse, loud, and vulgar—such a life would be infinitely worse than death, such a revenge immeasurably vaster than the pistol. Then it was finally decided that she must live and suffer.

The man who had stolen her from him.

As to the friend—as to Stockton, the betrayer, the sneak, the coward—*he* should die like a dog. *That* decision could not be reconsidered.

These things being settled, the wretched man re-read the will. As the woman was to live, she must be mentioned in the document. He tore up the will and wrote another, in which he bequeathed her one shilling. Then he wrote out a separate statement of the whole affair, sealed it, addressed it to the coroner, and placed it in his pocket. It would be found there after a while.

Well, why this trembling in every member, this unaccountable nausea, this unconquerable feeling of horror and repugnance as the draft of the picture was contemplated? Did instinct arise and dumbly plead for mercy? What mercy had been shown that mercy could be expected? None whatever. There was not only revenge to be satisfied, but justice also. Still, it was horrible! Admit that she deserved it all, deserved even more, she was a woman! No act of hers could deprive her of her natural claims upon the stronger sex. As a woman she had inalienable rights which even she could not forfeit, which men could not withhold. And then, where could be the benefit of adding physical sufferings to mental? One surely would weaken the force of the other. The lower she should fall and the deeper her degradation, the smaller would become the efficiency of her mental agony; and yet mental suffering was the kind which it was desired should fall upon her.

It would be well, therefore, to leave her some money—a considerable amount of money—in order that, holding herself above the want which in her case would lead to degradation and a blunting of the sensibilities, she might suffer all the more keenly—in order that the memory of her shame might be for ever poignant, for ever a cause for the sharpest regrets. This would be better in other ways; her shame published, she could never associate with those fine characters who had been her friends; her lover dead and his memory disgraced, he could not be present to console her; for society she would have only those whom her fortune would attract, and they were not of a kind to satisfy such a woman as she; she would always be within sight of the old life and its pleasures, but just beyond the pale—near enough to see and long for, but too far to reach, and for ever kept back by the cold glance of contempt, the disdain of the high circle in which she had been reared.

Therefore, it was better to leave her the bulk of his fortune. So he tore up the second will, and wrote a

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third, in which, while naming her as his principal legatee he incorporated the story of her shame. He felt better now than at any time since his discovery. He walked about the room, looked out of the window, then sank into his chair again.

Then, having faced the proposition that he had been considering his own case all along, he found the situation to be somewhat like this: He had a certain understanding which should operate to remove him from influences which with men of inferior conceptions would be more powerful; not being a brute, he should rise above impulses which a brute is constrained by its nature to obey. So much was clear. Then, what should he do? He pondered this long and seriously.

Was it possible to wipe out the past with exposure, humiliation, shame, and blood? He had been proud of her, he had loved her, he had been very, very happy with her. She had been his inspiration, a part of his hopes, his ambition, his life. True, she had undone all this, but the memory of it remained. Until this recent act she had been kind, unselfish, gentle, and faithful. Who could sound the depths of this strange mystery; who measure the capacity of her resistance; who judge her frailty with a righteous mind; who say that at that very moment she was not suffering unspeakable things? And then, was there anyone so noble of character, with integrity so unfailing and so far beyond temptation, that he might say he was better than she? Compassion is an attribute of a noble character. The test of manhood is the exercise of its qualities.

What good would come from this revenge of humiliation and exposure? It would not mend the wrong, it would not save life; it would be only proof of the vanity, the sense of self importance of the injured one. Would it be possible to spare her? Yes. That finally was settled. She should live, she should have the property, she should be left to enjoy life as best she could without the shadow of stain upon her name. That were the nobler part, the test of manhood. And then, the past could not be forgotten!

Randolph felt so much better after arriving at this decision that he marvelled at himself. He walked about the room feeling strong and elastic. He tore up the will because it charged her crime upon her; tore up the letter to the coroner; collected all the scraps of paper and carefully burnt them. Then he drew a new will, free from stain, leaving all his property to his wife. He did not only that, but he wrote her a letter—formal, of course—merely saying that he had found his life a mistake; this he sealed, addressed, and placed in his pocket.

Stockton—the false fiend, the betrayer and destroyer—he should die, he should die like a dog. But not with a stain on his name—that were impossible, because it would reflect upon *her*.

Here was a new situation. The two men would be found dead, likely in the same room—the friend and the husband. What would people think? A duel? For what reason? Murder and suicide! Who had handled the weapon, and for what possible cause? The road which suspicion would travel was too short and wide. The fair name of the wife was to be guarded—that had been decided upon, and now it was the first consideration.

Nor was that all. *She* loved him—that must be so. What would be the benefit of removing him from her life? It would be merely revenge—revenge upon both of them; and where lies the nobility of such revenge? If they both should live, both go unexposed, they might be happy together.

After all, whom would that disturb, whose pleasure interfere with? Surely no sound of their happiness could penetrate the grave; violence would be done to none of Nature's laws. Why should they not be happy? If they could, why should they not? Was there any reason under the sun that charity, compassion, and a high manhood could give why they should not be happy?

But suppose that she should suspect the cause of her husband's suicide; this would likely poison her life, for the consciousness of guilt would give form to suspicion. The result would be an abhorrence of self, a detestation of the participant in her sin, a belief that the blood of her husband was upon her head, and a long train of evils which would seriously impair, if not wholly destroy, the desired serenity of her life. Was there any way to prevent the birth of such a suspicion?

Yes; there was a way. As soon as Randolph had worked it out he felt as if an enormous load had been removed from him. His eyes shone brightly, his cheeks were flushed, and a look of pride and triumph lighted up his face.

He returned to his chair, removed the revolver from his pocket and laid it on the table; wrote his wife an affectionate letter, in which he told her that he had just become aware of an incurable ailment which he had not the courage to face through months or years of suffering and begged her to look to Stockton for friendship and advice; wrote to Stockton, charging him with her protection; burnt the last will that he had made and drew a new one, in which he left them the property jointly, on condition that they marry within two years. Then, with a perfectly clear head, he laid down his pen and sighed, but his face was bright and tranquil. He picked up the revolver, cocked it, placed the muzzle against his temple, and without a tremour of a nerve he pressed the trigger.

W. C. Morrow.

SEE NEXT PAGE.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 14.

In order to lessen the amount of work undertaken by competitors in pasting up the separate lines of the story in these competitions, each line is now numbered, and all that readers need do is to write clearly on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order they believe to be correct. The title and author's name are jumbled up, and should be correctly given. Only one attempt is permitted from each person.

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday*,
2 awarded to the reader whose solution first
3 *JUMBLED STORY*.
4 Six Prizes—one of £5 and five of £1 each—are
5 *October 5th*, and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reaches this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose key is most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

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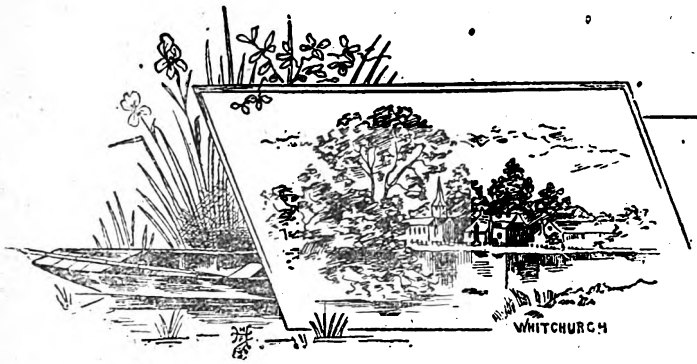

ETCHER'S CHOICE PIN.

Jumbled Story No. 14.

In the Rose Garden were forty maidens, the dark-eyed beauty. But while the Prince talked with the hedge and came suddenly upon this lady, who blossoms, in and out of the winding paths; and borne on the wings of the bees and the breath of the nightingales.

She was happy herself, and wanted her friends to clad in pale green the colour of the new shoots on rose-petals.

In the farthest corner it was known that the fluttering of a dainty dress, green, the colour of the golden hair.

Suddenly a murmur stole through the garden, the approach of the Prince, sank upon the soft moss, and, though he turned quickly into the next path pale, new shoots on the rose-trees, caught his eye. He had become quite pale. "You know," he confer great honour upon his wife, was justified in and the Prince's choice must be perfection.

A beautiful girl stood near. He spoke to her. Prince had come.

The Prince was to choose a wife.

Granting this, surely the Prince, who was to great and unusual privilege in this choice. He seeks the rose-trees.

He could not tell whether it was the sunlight course?"

Instead of following the path, the Prince parted from one fair face to another, ever pictured some noblest daughters of the kingdom.

As he passed on, a languid brunette paused at music of the wind and water, but she had no deep eyes.

The neck and shoulders were daintier than any excitement of the hour, dreading, yet longing for fairer face, hidden from sight in the winding wind!

Just then a gleam of gold through the trees again, there was nothing to be seen.

As he turned away from the fountain, the branch must have deceived him.

He was modest, and did not consider himself in his approach. He stopped to speak with the rose, and the pretty head glistened with a mass of her, he saw through the branches a slender figure, playing in her fair hair or in the heart of a rose; dazzled him.

"I wish to speak with you," said the Prince.

The lady's little hand slipped behind her.

"I must give him good and sufficient reason for are you besides the most enchanting of women? You deny yourself every virtue and every grace. You sing? I have not heard your voice; it must any way perfect; but naturally a man, however frail the selection I make. Tell me of yourself! What wonderful in any way.

No, she was not wise; the Prince was mistaken.

"I wish to put my ring on your little hand."

The lady bowed.

Such a slippery little hand! It stayed not a share in her happiness. But no! She was not too forward: one too serious; another too light—Prince would hear her later.

She was poised ready for flight; and the Prince, kissed her.

"I am your choice, and I can love you. Is it nothing of art; this one was too retiring; that one surrenders her life to his.

"But I must talk with you first," said the Prince. What are you? What can you do?"

This lady knew nothing of music; that lady knew my happiness and trusts my discretion.

No, she was not noted for benevolence and looked up with some suggestion of mutiny in her hand, as if to detain her.

"But shall your lover be less to you than your guitar was by the fountain. She could sing; the be purest melody."

No, the lady did not play. She liked to hear the word, though one by one he passed them by.

Some posed on the raised marble brim of the paths.

"Then you are fond of music? You play, of some, overcome by the perfume of the flowers, the friend?" cried the Prince. "I am unhappy! Give a careful search.

And the Prince put the ring upon her finger and continued nervously, "my father has given me a moment in his grasp, but the lady paused and had until now so successfully eluded him.

No, she did not sing, but loved to hear the fountain; some walked, with regal tread, among the who felt no inclination to seek further, caught her and cooled their feverish cheeks on the dewy enough?" she answered, smiling at him.

Quietly he entered; and his eyes, wandering was, it vanished so quickly that he fancied a waving he be, expects perfection in the woman who 'Twas only a momentary glimpse, for, whatever it me peace by telling why I should choose you. She answered with easy grace. Yes, she played; her patience with her guitar.

Yet for each and all the Prince had a graceful charity.

BESIE LOUECHER.

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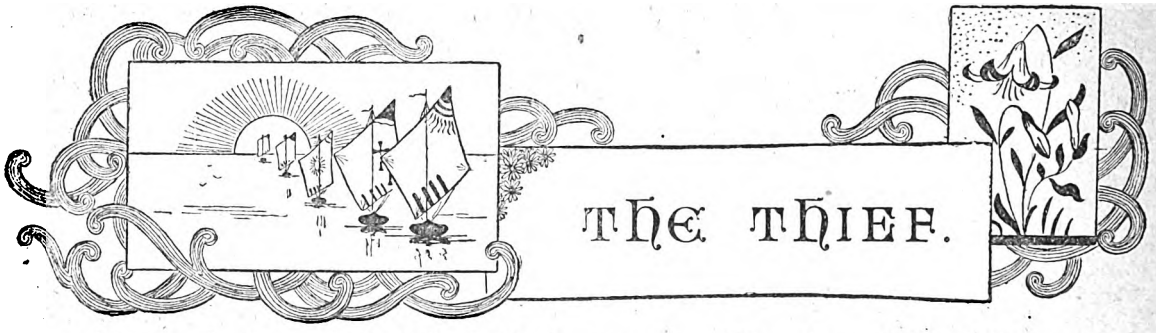

THE THIEF.

It was Saturday evening, and a few intimate friends had just had their cup of tea in the pretty little apartment of Madame Gilbert in the Rue de Rennes.

Two years had already passed since the death of Colonel Gilbert. His widow lived modestly and quietly, concentrating all the affection of her romantic soul upon her son André. He was scarcely eighteen, of a delicate constitution, somewhat weakened by too rapid growth, and had not yet ceased to show towards his mother the most demonstrative affection and an almost timid respect.

He was a fresh-faced boy, whose blushes came quite charmingly in the society of ladies. This evening the gathering was a little more numerous than on most Saturdays, but still entirely informal, and Madame Gilbert's tiny parlour looked especially dainty and attractive. Madame, herself, was quietly and gracefully attentive to the unexpressed wants of her guests, and moved among them, a charming presence, in the rich, perfected beauty of her thirty-five years.

Suddenly a friend of André, who had been seated on a cushioned seat by the window, bent forward to listen to some sound outside. The strident voice of a newspaper vendor could be heard in the street intoning——

"Here y'are! Just out! Full account of the horrible murder of a ra-r-r-r-ra!"

The end of the sentence was lost in the roar of a passing omnibus. A moment later the same voice repeated its doleful chant.

In the parlour all listened, and each tried to be the one to distinguish the end of the phrase. After several ineffectual attempts the auditors smiled at one another, shook their heads, and gave it up, and the conversation was resumed, while the clamour gradually died away in the distance.

"It is the same story every day," said some one. "A new murder, a new victim. I should like to add a new prisoner; but that would not be true, under the present conditions of impunity in crime."

The man who had just spoken immediately obliterated his face behind his large cup, below which appeared his short, black beard, streaked with grey. He was a former prefect of the Empire, and was well known by most present to have been an admirer of Madame Gilbert before her marriage—and after it, some said. However, he had disappeared for some time, and this was the first evening he had joined the little circle to offer salutations to his former friend. He had been received in the presence of all graciously, without surprise or effusion, or apparent resentment.

A member of the Institute replied to him:

"I do not know if the Government is really responsible in these matters. At all events, it is discouraging to consider that in spite of the most perfect laws, and in spite of whatever personal precautions we may adopt, our very existence is constantly at the mercy of an violent scoundrel we may meet."

"Yes," said Madame Gilbert, "we have all our plans for the future. We guard our health and our resources; it sometimes seems as if we might spare ourselves the trouble."

"A madman passes," suggested a red-ribboned violinist, "and a vagabond bullet from the revolver he is wildly brandishing lands in my head!"

"Or else," adds the large and comfortable wife of the academician, "a discharged cook revenges herself by a last seasoning to our salad."

Madame Gilbert enumerated still other general cases.

"Sometimes it is a beggar who kills you without any special animosity, and sometimes, on the other hand, it is a wretch who has no other excuse but his hatred——"

"Or his love," concluded the ex-prefect, with a vague, sad smile.

Then it was who could relate the most anecdotes founded upon experience, upon reading, or upon the tales of some absent friend. Murders were recalled which had been committed in railway-carriages, in boxes at the theatre, in private rooms at restaurants. Night attacks were recounted—servants who had choked their masters, in flagrant violation of the best recommendations; finally, a miscellaneous assortment of parricides, fratricides, and infanticides.

Insensibly the gathering had become tragic. The newsboy's voice, as he repassed across the street, startled them again. The guests had by this time risen to go, and as they said good-night some of them told of the particular terrors which had always haunted them. A lady, who had a pretty talent for painting on porcelain, confessed frankly:

"Nothing frightens me like the thought of those frightful wretches who slip into your room with a false key, or by forcing the door. I am hardly in bed before this terror seizes me. I try to sleep, but my fear is too strong. Oh! Heavens! if my door should slowly and mysteriously open! And if a face should appear, as pale as my own, but set, fierce and determined! My mind sees this face clearly. Every night its features appear before me. Ah! if it should become a reality to-night, to-morrow night, what should I do? What should I say? What would become of me?"

The two blonde daughters of this lady surrounded her with a charming expression of saucy courage.

"Yes, yes, darlings," sighed their mother. "We three wouldn't amount to much if a thief got among us."

"I know what I should do," said the elder. "If that happened, I should just pretend I was asleep, so there!"

"For me," said the younger, "I should be afraid of betraying myself, if only from curiosity. Oh! I am sure

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I should risk at least one eye. Then I should say very quietly: 'Mr. Thief, take all you want to from here. I shall not stir; I shall make no outcry, if only you don't touch me!'"

"This kind of apprehension," said Madame Gilbert, "has never troubled me. For one thing, I have faith in my safety-locks, and then I know thieves are such cowards that that makes me brave. Still, Madame, I have, like you, the uneasy loneliness of a widow."

"But," interrupted the other, "you are not alone. Your son's room is within the sound of your voice."

"My son! Do you suppose, then, I would call that poor child to help me? To see him massacred?"

With his sententious authority the academician interposed:

"Rest assured, Madame Gilbert, that a son can be massacred no more easily than a husband."

At first this judicious remark silenced for a moment the mistress of the house, but then she answered with a little grimace. And this little grimace expressed a preference so decided for one of the two species of love which divide a woman's heart, this little grimace was so defiant of polite hypocrisies and unfriendly comment that everyone laughed uproariously, as all in a group they said good-night, protesting that they had stayed much later than they meant to, although it was then only half-past ten.

Only one person, the ex-prefect, lingered a little in the hall, with intentional awkwardness getting entangled in his overcoat.

From the back of the parlour, Madame Gilbert, sure that all were gone, scolded. "Come, André, get to bed at once. You are entirely too tired. Didn't you notice how badly you were looking to-night?"

(Every evening she asked him the same question with the same solicitude. "Not at all, mamma," her big boy would say, shrugging his shoulders. And this perfunctory reply was all that was necessary to reassure, until the next evening, this mother, like many another in her daily and unnecessary alarm.)

"André went to find a cigar for me," murmured a voice, whose familiar, though half-forgotten, vibrations made her quiver from head to foot.

And the speaker, returning towards her, with hurried step, said humbly, but passionately:

"Ah! If you would let me explain, defend myself. Yes, I was very wrong to let anything come between us! But I have repented, I do repent, and I love you more than ever! Jeannette! Jeannette!" he cried, in a suppressed voice.

She clasped her hands, and her face was marked by so many conflicting emotions, that one would have found it hard to tell whether this superb woman crushed between her white hands her anger or her grief.

"Do you dare?" she faltered at last. "I never can—silence. Here is my son!"

When, under her supervision, the maid had put in something like order Madame Gilbert's little parlour, and she had herself, according to her invariable custom, examined the locks of the doors leading to the great stairway and that of the servants, she shut herself into her own room. Once there, an unusual languor depressed her nerves. Instead of being in bed in less than a quarter of an hour, as was her usual habit, she forgot herself for double that time, dreaming in the depths of an armchair.

Across the corridor she heard André undressing, going back and forth; after a little, silence fell all around her. Her fingers, which were mechanically taking down her hair, became clumsy and were entangled in its meshes. Her mind was very busy.

"What did this return signify? What was the explanation he spoke of? What had come between them? It was all a mystery. But why had he said anything, unless he wanted to marry her now that her mourning was over?"

She rose, and going to her dressing-room, stared long and earnestly into the full-length mirror. A little later when she put out the lamp, lit the tiny nightlight, and went to bed, it was twenty-five minutes to twelve.

"Oh!" she thought, "was I sufficiently reserved?"

Instead of the sleep she hoped for she could get only a dizzying succession of broken naps and confusing dreams.

"No, no, in the future she owed herself without reserve to the adoration of her son. All the flame of her ardent soul should burn henceforth for that sole object. Ah, maternal affection was the only affection that was not deceptive and disappointing."

For some minutes she slumbered. But the rattle of a carriage woke her suddenly; a confused terror mingled with her vague remembrance of the recent conversation. Without knowing why, she listened to the last faint echo of the rolling wheels. And after it had died away the keen tension of her ears perceived in the neighbouring corridor a faint creaking.

"How silly I am!" she thought. "Even if it should be anyone, couldn't I reach the window at one bound? Then to smash out a pane and scream for help would be easy. What burglar would not fly before this unexpected energy and the certain response to the noise I would make? A man is only a man, after all."

And with this wise reflection, hearing no further noise, she buried her head in her pillow, determined to go to sleep at last. Nevertheless the thought of *him* took hold of her again. What audacity of him to come to her reception! After his base desertion which had forced her into a distasteful marriage! She remembered with remorse how little she had given to her husband, and her remorse turned to anger as she remembered how he, on his part, had neglected her. Again the widow's eyelids opened nervously.

Suddenly the blood in her veins seemed to congeal with supernatural horror.

There—just at the foot of the bed—the curtain was moving. And on its silken folds appeared a large hand, a scarlet hand. Madame Gilbert, terrified, incapable of articulating a sound, hoped at first that she was mistaken. Still she dared not move, not even an eyelash, as she lay still; sunk deeply into her soft pillow and far back in the curtained darkness of her bed. The absolute stillness was weird and alarming.

But presently the clock began to strike midnight. Every stroke seemed to Jeannette to prick into her like needles. By almost imperceptible degrees the *portière* was gradually raised.

As the clock was on the stroke a monster appeared!

It was a scarlet face, frightfully cut in two by a green moustache, beneath a nose of the most fiery red, which looked like a beak. Between two red horns was a mass of shaggy green hair. This frightful head peered into her recess, leaning upon the scarlet hand a chin from which hung a long green beard. The gaze of the apparition, fixed beneath its green eyelashes, sought the terrified gaze of Jeannette, shrinking in her dark corner. She felt herself carried far beyond the limits of what she had supposed a bearable terror. For she recognised them well, those eyes which sought her own

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with such sombre fierceness. They were surely, surely the eyes of her dead husband come to life again. Yes, she recognised them, without the relief of the slightest hesitation. And she recognised, too, that fierce moustache, and long beard, so diabolically coloured by those horrible vapours!

But what did he want, this returning spirit, who had never returned before? Why did he come this very night? And just after *him!* What fatal precision!

After a few torturing moments the fantastic being showed his full figure. He was tall and thin, clothed in black, with a white cravat, and held stiffly his bony arms, terminating, the left, in a green hand, and the right in a scarlet one. His long, narrow feet were covered with varnished boots ending in an incredible point. He advanced upon the carpet one step, then another. Then he glided forward in spectral fashion for several steps, and paused, wavering lightly on his toes.

The lips of the widow were incapable of forming a prayer. Her flesh crept at the sight of this phantom. Still gliding nearer to the alcove, the tall figure of the demon at last stood between the curtains. The shadowy light of the nightlamp illuminated the weird colour of this face, transformed and yet too familiar, alas!

By a last gleam of determination Jeanette lay still, with her eyes closed. No sound in the room, no sound in the street, no sound in the world!

The burning breath of a mouth close to her face seemed to scorch her. Pierced to the marrow by the intolerable breath, she felt her eyelids tremble and her skin shrivel. A nervous twitching in every joint seemed to seize her, and made it almost impossible to lie still beneath her covering. As soon as the flaming breath on her face seemed extinguished, an intense desire to see took possession of her. With the most minute care she slightly opened her eyes.

Oh! horror, the apparition was still there. But now its back was turned, its shoulders showing angular through its coat, like the fleshless bones of a skeleton. The green and the scarlet hand, working together with satanic skill, had opened wide without a sound the great glass doors of the wardrobe, whose hinges usually creaked so noisily.

Jeannette Gilbert had recovered her calmness sufficiently to seek the protection of God. She was about to make the sign of the cross, when the green and red devil as if he had divined this Christian impulse, turned suddenly towards her. His excited eyes flashed towards her a gleam whose power, more and more recognisable, she had often experienced.

She could see that his green hand was fumbling among a heap of rich laces, one of the few remnants of her wedding trousseau, and that the scarlet hand was plunged into a jewel casket, where the widow had herself recently put away her wedding ring. In her corner she could hear only a slight rustling as he moved the things. The silence and the supernatural mystery of all his movements stupefied her.

The strange visitor appeared about to close the door of the wardrobe when his hand fell upon an atomizer. With solemn gravity he sprinkled the perfume liberally upon his hair, his beard, and his scarlet cheeks. That finished, with one turn he vanished behind the *portière*.

The heavy drapery shook after his sudden disappearance, and long after the widow watched with a fascinated apprehension the folds wavering. When at last the thick hangings were still again, by a mighty effort Jeannette sat up in bed. She pinched herself, even pulled out an eyelash, to make sure she was awake. She spoke aloud to herself, but doubted the sound of her own voice.

While she was lost in doubt, the outside world, whose existence had seemed to her interrupted, renewed its tranquil course. A heavy waggon rumbled along the street. Half-past twelve sounded. Outside some wayfarer passed, piercing the air with his cheerful whistling. This manifestation of accustomed realities soothed Jeannette's heart. Her lungs dilated as she drew a full breath of relief.

Hastily she threw on a dressing-wrapper, and impatient to assure herself that the Thing—whether phantom or nightmare—was quite gone, she passed on tiptoe out of her room.

The parlour was still in comparative disorder after the modest reception. The dining-room was deserted. In the kitchen, the hall, nothing was visible. Courage was returning to Madame Gilbert, but not calm. As she passed along the hall on which opened the two sleeping-rooms, a strong desire seized her to see her son, to look with mute admiration upon that dear head in its innocent sleep, which no phantom had the right to haunt. With tender timidity she opened the door softly and with careful precaution.

The room was empty. The faint light showed her that André's bedclothes had not been disturbed. With a despairing cry the wretched mother sprang forward. On the mantel she saw a taper, lately blown out, for a tiny spark still smoked on the wick. Across a chair the clothes André had worn that evening were thrown carelessly; on the table by the bed lay a comb and brush; a pair of boots stood in the corner.

The distracted mother rushed back and forth, seeking, fumbling here and there, and lamenting audibly. On the top of the half-open drawer of the bureau lay two new silk gloves. One was green, and one was scarlet. Below them white cravats, silk handkerchiefs, other gloves, a box of envelopes.

Boldly the poor mother flings out what yesterday she arranged so carefully. At the bottom of the drawer she finds a square card, engraved. She reads it eagerly.

"Madame la Comtesse Antonietta de Clem begs the pleasure of M. André Gilbert's company on the evening of the Mardi Gras. A cotillon will be danced. Guests are requested to appear in costume."

A sudden light dawned upon Madame Gilbert's bewilderment. She understood all! Hastening back to her room she went over the contents of her wardrobe. Yes, that was it. From the pocket-book hidden below the laces a hundred-franc bill had been taken. In the casket, where the widow's rings were with her gold-pieces, two louis, perhaps three, were missing. "My poor son!" groaned the mother. "My poor son!"

How easily now could she explain the most mysterious details. In her bitter reflections she could see her son's eyes, so changed by fear and deceit that their usual gentle expression was replaced, by some mysterious heredity, with the hard, threatening look of his father.

Before daylight Madame Gilbert, through her tears and prayers, heard the furtive steps of the prodigal son returning to his room. Cold shivers ran over her frame. But they were shivers of pity and of triumphant love. She was lost in tender pity for André, for herself—and for another!

And, prostrate before her ivory crucifix, she listened to the counsels of a mysterious voice murmuring in her heart that human happiness is constantly built up with the broken fragments of past joys!

Paul Hervieu.

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"THADDEUS," said Bessie to her husband as they sat at breakfast one morning, "did you hear anything strange in the house last night? Something like a footstep?"

"No," said Thaddeus. "I slept like a top last night. I didn't hear anything. Did you?"

"I thought so," said Bessie. "About two o'clock I awoke with a start, and while it may have been a sort of waking dream, I was almost certain I heard a rustling sound out in the hall, and, immediately after, a creaking on the stair, as though there was somebody there."

"Well, why on earth didn't you wake me up, Bess?" returned Thaddeus. "I could very easily have decided the matter by getting up and investigating."

"That was why I didn't wake you, Teddy. I'd a great deal rather lose the silver or anything else in the house a burglar might want than have you hit on the head with a club," said Bessie. "You men are too brave."

"Thank you," said Thaddeus, with a smile, as he thought of a certain discussion he had had not long before at the club, in which he and several other brave men had reached the unanimous conclusion that the best thing to do at dead of night, with burglars in the house, was to crawl down under the bedclothes and snore as loudly as possible. "Nevertheless, my dear, you should have told me."

"I will next time," said Bessie.

"Was anything in the house disturbed?" Thaddeus asked.

"No," said Bessie. "Not a thing, as far as I can find out. The maid says that everything was all right when she came down; the cook apparently found things straight, because she hasn't said anything."

So Thaddeus and Bessie made up their minds that the latter had been dreaming, and that nothing was wrong. Two or three days later, however, they changed their minds on the subject. There was something decidedly wrong, but what it was, they could not discover. They both were awakened by the rustling sound in the hallway, outside their room, and this time there was a creak on the stair that was unmistakable.

"Don't move, Thaddeus," said Bessie in a terrified whisper, as Thaddeus made a brave effort to get up and personally investigate. "I wouldn't have you hurt for all the world, and there isn't a thing downstairs that they can take that we can't afford to lose."

Thaddeus felt very much as Bessie did, and it would have pleased him much better to lie quietly where he was

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than run the risk of an encounter with thieves. He had been brave enough in the company of men to advocate cowardice in an emergency like this, but now that this same course was advocated by his wife he saw it in a different light. Prudence was possible; cowardice was not. He must get up, and get up he did; but before going out of his room he secured his revolver, which had lain untouched and unloaded in a drawer for two years, and then advanced cautiously to the head of the stairs and listened—Bessie meanwhile having buried her face in her pillow, as a possible means of assuaging her fears. It is singular what a soothing effect a soft feather pillow sometimes has upon the agitated nerves if the nose of the agitated person is thrust far enough into its yielding surface.

"Who is there?" cried Thaddeus, standing at the head of the stairs, his knees all of a shake, but whether from fear or from cold, as an admirer of Thaddeus, I prefer not to state.

Apparently the stage whisper in which this challenge to a possible burglar was uttered rendered it unavailing, for there was no reply; but that there was some one below who could reply Thaddeus was now convinced, for there were sounds in the library—sounds, however, suggestive of undue attention to domestic duties rather than of that which fate has mapped out for house-breakers. The library floor was apparently being swept.

"That's the biggest idiot of a burglar I've ever heard of," said Thaddeus, returning to his room.

"Wha—wha—what, d—dud—dear?" mumbled Bessie, burying her ear in the pillow for comfort now that she was compelled to take her nose away, so that she might talk intelligibly.

"I say that burglar must be an idiot," repeated Thaddeus. "What do you suppose he is doing now?"

"Wha—wha—what, d—dear?" asked Bessie, apparently unable to think of any other formula than this in speaking, since this was the second time she had used it.

"He is sweeping the library."

"Then you must *not* go down!" cried Bessie, sitting up, and losing her fear for a moment in her anxiety for her husband's safety. "A burglar you might manage, but a maniac——"

"I must go, Bess," said Thaddeus firmly.

"Then I'm going with you," said Bessie with equal firmness.

"Now, Bess, don't be foolish," returned Thaddeus, his face assuming a graver expression than Bessie had ever seen there. "This is my work, and it is none of yours. I positively forbid you to stir out of this room. I shall be very careful, and you need have no concern for me. I shall go down the back stairs and round by the porch, and peep in through the library window first. The moonlight will be sufficient to enable me to see all that is necessary."

"Very well," acquiesced Bessie. "Only *do* be careful."

Thaddeus donned his long bath robe, put on his slippers, and started to descend. The stairs were so dark that he could with difficulty proceed—and perhaps it was just as well for Thaddeus that they were. If there had been light enough for him to see two great, glaring eyes, that stared at him through that darkness out from the passage-way at the foot of the stairs upon which he turned his back when he went out into the porch, it is not unlikely that a very serious climax to his strange experience would have been reached then and there. As it was he saw nothing, but kept straight ahead, stepped noiselessly out upon the verandah, crept stealthily along in the soft light of the moon, until he reached the library window. There he stopped and listened. All was still within—so still that the beating of his heart seemed like the hammering of a sledge upon an anvil by contrast. Then, raising himself cautiously upon his toes, he peered through the window into the room, the greater part of which was made visible by the wealth of the moon's light streaming into it.

"Humph!" said Thaddeus, after he had directed his searching gaze into every corner. "There isn't anybody there at all. Most incomprehensible thing I ever heard of."

Rising, he walked back to the verandah door, and went thence boldly into the library and lit the gas His

Crept stealthily along.

verandah observations were then verified, for the room was devoid of life, save for Thaddeus's own presence; but upon the floor, before the hearth, was a broom, and there were evidences also that the sweeping sounds he had heard had been caused by no less an instrument than this, for in the corner of the fireplace was a small heap of dust, cigar ashes, and scraps of paper, which Thaddeus remembered had been upon the floor in greater or less quantity when he had turned out the gas to retire for the night.

"This is a serious matter," he said to himself. "Something is wrong, and I doubt if there have been burglars in the house—but I can ascertain that without trouble. If the doors and windows are all secure, the trouble is internal."

Every accessible door and window on the basement and first floors was examined, and with the exception of the verandah door, which Thaddeus remembered to have unlocked himself a few minutes before, every

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lock was fastened. The disturbances had come from within.

"And Bess must never know it," said he. "It would worry her to death," and then there came a thought to Thaddeus's mind that almost stopped the beating of his heart.

"Unless she has discovered it in my absence," he gasped. In an instant he was mounting the stairs to hasten to Bessie's side, as though some terrible thing were pursuing him.

"Well, what is it, Ted?" queried Bessie, as he entered the room.

Thank Heaven, she was safe!

"Nothing much," said Thaddeus, in a moment. "There is no one below,"

"But what could it have been?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Thaddeus. "unless it was a stray cat in the house. The sweeping sound may have been caused by a cat scratching its collar—or purring—or—or something. At any rate, things appear to be all right, my dear, so let's go to sleep."

Thaddeus's assumed confidence in the rightness of everything, rather than his explanations, was convincing to Bessie, and she in a very short while was sleeping the sleep of the just and serene; but to Thaddeus's eyes there was no more sleep that night, and when morning came he rose unrefreshed. There were two problems confronting him. The first was to solve the mystery of the swept library floor; the second was to do this without arousing his wife's suspicions that anything was wrong. To do this first he deemed it necessary to remain at home that day, which was easy, but how to do so without explaining why, was the point that bothered him. He solved it to his satisfaction very shortly, however. He summoned a messenger, and sent by him a note to one of his neighbours, requesting him to send a fictitious telegram telling him that his presence in town that day would not be required. This, he judged, would come to him at the breakfast table, and could be turned off as a pleasant surprise both for himself and Bessie.

It worked as Thaddeus had intended.

"Isn't it nice that it happened this morning?" she said. "You will be able to make up for your loss of sleep last night."

"Yes," said Thaddeus. "It's great."

Breakfast passed off pleasantly, in spite of a great drawback: the steak was burned almost to a crisp, and the fried potatoes were like chips of wood.

"Margaret seems to be unfamiliar with the art of cooking this morning," said Thaddeus.

"So it would seem," said Bessie. "This steak is horrible."

"The worst part of it," said Thaddeus, "she has erred on the wrong side. If the steak were underdone it wouldn't be so bad. Isn't it a pity some one can't invent a machine to rarefy an overdone steak?"

The morning was spent by Thaddeus in the "noble pastime of snooping," as he called it. The house was searched by him in a casual sort of way from top to bottom for a clue to the mystery, but without avail. Several times he went below to the cellar, ostensibly to inspect his coal supply—really to observe the demeanour of Margaret, the cook. Barring an unusual pallor upon her cheek, she appeared to be as she always had been; but with the housemaid it was different. Mary was evidently excited over something, but over what Thaddeus could not, of course, determine at that time. Later in the day, however, the cause of her perturbation came out, and Thaddeus's effort to keep Bessie from anxiety over the occurrence of the night before was rendered unavailing. It was at luncheon. The table was set in a most peculiar fashion. The only china upon it was from an old set which had been discarded a year previous to the time of the story, and Bessie naturally wanted to know why, and the housemaid broke down.

"It's—it's all we have, ma'am," she said, her eyes filling with tears.

"All we have?" echoed Bessie, in surprise. "Why, what do you mean? Where is the other set?"

"I don't know," protested the housemaid.

"You don't know?" said Thaddeus, taking the matter in hand. "Why don't you know? Isn't the china a part of your care?"

"Yes, sir," replied the maid; "but it's gone, sir, and I don't know where."

"When did you miss it?" asked Thaddeus.

"Not until I came to set the table for lunch."

"Was it in its proper place at breakfast time?"

"I didn't notice, sir. The breakfast dishes were all there, but I don't remember seeing the other plates. I didn't think to look."

"Then it wasn't a cat," said Bessie, sinking back into her chair; "we have been robbed."

"Well, it's the first time on record that thieves have ever robbed a man of his china," said Thaddeus calmly. "Have you looked for the plates?" he added, addressing the housemaid.

"No, sir," she replied simply. "Where could I look?"

"That's so—where?" said Bessie. "There isn't much use looking for dishes when they disappear like that. They aren't like brooms or buttonhooks, to be mislaid easily. We have been robbed, that's all there is about that."

"Oh, well," said Thaddeus, "let's eat lunch, and see about it afterwards."

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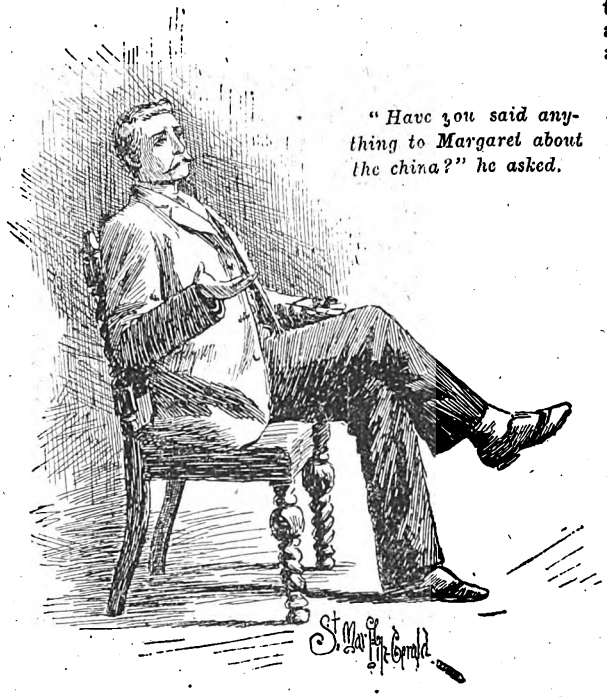

"Have you said anything to Margaret about the china?" he asked.

This was quite easy to say, but to eat under the circumstances was too much for either of the young householders. The luncheon left the table untouched; and when it was over, Thaddeus, calling his man into the house, wrote a note to the police station asking for an officer in plain clothes at once, and dispatched it by him with the injunction to let very little grass grow under his feet on the way down to headquarters. He then summoned the housemaid into the library.

"Have you said anything to Margaret about the china?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"What did you say?"

"I told her as how wasn't it funny the way it had went, sir."

"And what did she say?"

"Nothing, sir. Only she seemed to think it was funny, because she laughed."

"And what did you say then?"

"Nothing, sir. Margaret and me have very little conversation, because she don't fancy me, and prefers talkin' to herself like."

"H'm!" said Thaddeus. "Talks to herself, does she?"

"All the time, sir," returned the housemaid, "and she seems very fond of it, sir. She laughs and says things and then laughs again. She does it by the hour."

"How long has this been going on?"

"About a week, sir. I noticed it first last time I had my day out. I didn't get in until eleven o'clock, and I found her sitting at the table havin' a supper and talkin' and laughin' like as though there was folks around."

"She was entirely alone, was she?" asked Thaddeus.

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do when you came in?"

"I said good-evening to her and sat down opposite to her at the table, where there was a place set, and I told her I was glad she had something to eat and had a place set for me, because I hadn't had any supper and I was hungry, sir."

"Did she make any reply?"

"No, sir. She looked at me kind of indignant and turned out the gas and went up to bed, leavin' me in the dark."

Thaddeus's brow grew thoughtful again. It wrinkled into a half-dozen lines as he asked:

"Why didn't you speak of this before?"

"It ain't for me to be tellin' tales, sir," she said. "All cooks as I've lived with is queer like, and I didn't think any more about it."

"All right," said Thaddeus. "You may go. Only, Mary, don't speak of the plates again to Margaret. Say as little to her as you can, in fact, about anything. If you notice anything queer report to me at once."

The housemaid left the room, and Thaddeus turned to his desk. It was plain from his appearance that light was beginning to be let in on places that up to this point had been more or less dark to him, although, as a matter of fact, he could not in any way account for the mystery of the vanished plates any more than he could for the sweeping of the library in the still hours of the night. He had an idea as to who the culprit was, and what that idea was is plain enough to us, but the question of motive was the great puzzle to him now.

"If she did take them, why should she?" was the problem he was trying to solve; and then, as if his trials were not already great enough for one day, Bessie broke excitedly into the room.

"Thaddeus," she cried, "there's something wrong in this house. My best table-cloth is missing, our dessert spoons are gone, and what do you suppose has happened?"

"I don't know; a volcano has developed in the cellar, I suppose," said Thaddeus.

"No," said Bessie. "It isn't as bad as that—but the milkman has called to know whether we want the cream for dinner or for eleven o'clock, according to the order as he understands it."

"Well," said Thaddeus, "I don't see anything very unusual in a man's needing to be told three or four times what is expected of him."

"But I never ordered any cream at all," said Bessie.

"Ah!" said Thaddeus. "That's different. Did you tell Partinelli so?"

"I did, and he said he was sure he wasn't mistaken, because he had taken the order himself."

"From you?"

"No, from Margaret."

"Then it's all right," said Thaddeus. "It's a clue that fits very nicely into my theory of our recent household disturbances. If you will wait I think things will begin to develop very shortly, and then we shall be able to dismiss this indictment against the cat we thought we heard last night."

"Do you think Margaret is dishonest?"

"I don't know," said Thaddeus. "I shouldn't be surprised if she had friends with taking ways. In other words, my dear, I suspect that Margaret is in league with people outside this house, who profit by her mistaken notions as to how to be generous, but I can't prove it yet."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Set a watch. I have sent for a detective," said Thaddeus.

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This was too much for Bessie. She was simply overcome, and she sat squarely down upon the arm-chair, which fortunately was immediately behind her. I think that if it had not been she would have plumped down upon the floor.

"Detective!" she gasped.

"Exactly," said Thaddeus; "and here he comes," he added, as a carriage was driven up to the door, and one of the plain clothes police descended therefrom.

"You would better leave us to talk over this matter together," said Thaddeus, as he hastened to the door. "We shall be able to manage it entirely, and the details might make you nervous."

"I couldn't be more nervous than I am," said Bessie, "but I'll leave you just the same."

Whereupon she went to her room, and Thaddeus for an hour was closeted with the detective, to whom he detailed the whole story.

"It's one of the two," said the latter, when Thaddeus had finished, "and I agree with you it is more likely to be the cook than the housemaid. If it was the housemaid, she couldn't have stood your examination as well as you say she did. Perhaps I'd better see her, though, and talk to her myself."

"No, I shouldn't," said Thaddeus; "we'll pass you off as a business acquaintance of mine up from town, and you can stay all night and watch developments."

So it was arranged. The detective was introduced into the family as a correspondent of Thaddeus's firm, and he settled down to watch the household. Afternoon and evening went by, but without developments, and at eleven o'clock every light in the house was extinguished, and the whole family, from the head of the house to the cook, had apparently retired.

At half-past eleven, however, there were decided signs of life within the walls of Thaddeus's home. The clue was working satisfactorily, and the complete revelation of the mystery was close at hand.

"She disappeared just like that."

The remainder of the narrative can best be told in the words of the detective.

"When Mr. Perkins sent for me," he said, "and told me all that had happened, I made up my mind that he had a servant in his house for whom the police had been on the look-out for some time. I thought she was a certain Ellen Malony, *alias* Bridget O'Shaughnessy, *alias* many other names, who was nothing more nor less than the agent of a clever band of thieves who had lifted thousands of pounds of swag in the line of household silver, valuable books, diamonds, and other things from private houses, where she has been employed in various capacities. I couldn't understand why she should have made way with the dishes and Mrs. Perkins's table-cloth, but there's no accounting for the tastes of people in that line of business, so I didn't bother much trying to reason that matter out.

"After we'd had dinner and spent the evening in Mr. Perkins's library, the family went to bed, and I pretended to do the same. Instead of really going to bed I waited my chance and slipped down the stairs into the dining-room and got under the table. At eleven o'clock the maidservants went up to their rooms, and at a quarter-past there wasn't a light burning in the house. I sat there in the dining-room waiting, and just as the clock struck half-past eleven I heard a noise out on the stairs, and in less than half a minute a sulphur match was struck almost over my head under the table, and there stood the cook, her face livid as that of a dead person, and in her hand she held a candle, which she lit with the match. From where I was I could see everything she did, which was not much. She simply gathered up all the table fixings she could, and started downstairs into the kitchen with them. Then I went up to Mr. Perkins's room and called him. He put on his clothes and got out his revolver in less than two minutes, when we stole downstairs together, leaving Mrs. Perkins with her boy's nurse and the maid.

"In a second we were in the laundry, which was as dark as the ace of spades, except when the light from four gas jets in the kitchen streamed through the half-open door. Mr. Perkins was for pouncing in on the cook at once, but I was after the rest of the gang as much as I was the cook, and I persuaded him to wait; and, by thunder, we were paid for waiting. It was the queerest case I ever had.

"That woman—looking for all the world like a creature from some other part of the universe than this earth, her eyes burning like two huge coals, her cheeks as yellow and clear as so much wax, and her lips blue-white, with a great flaming red tongue sort of laid between them—worked like a slave cleaning the floor, polishing the grate, and scrubbing the table. Then she dusted all the chairs, and producing the missing table-cloth, she laid it, snow-white, upon the table. In two minutes more, the lost china was brought to light out of the flour-barrel, polished up, and set upon the table, enough for twenty people. The dining-room things I had seen her take, she arranged as tastefully as anyone could want, and then the finest lay-out in the way of salads, cakes, fruits, and other good things I ever saw was brought in from the cellar. To do all this took a marvellously short time. It was five minutes to midnight when she got through, and then she devoted three minutes to looking after herself. She whisked out a small hand-glass, and touched up her hair a bit. Then she washed her hands, and pinned some roses in her dress, smiled a smile I can never forget in my life, and opened the kitchen door and went out.

"'She's going to give a supper!' whispered Mr. Perkins.

"'It looks like it,' said I. 'And a mighty fine one at that.'

"In a minute she came back with a pail in which were four bottles of champagne, in her hand. This she took into the cellar, returning to the kitchen as the clock struck twelve.

"Then the queerest part began," said the detective

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"for ten minutes by the clock people were apparently arriving, though, as far as Mr. Perkins or I could see, there wasn't a soul in the kitchen besides Margaret. She was talking away like one possessed. Every once in a while she'd stop in the middle of a sentence and rush to the door and shake hands with some, to us, invisible arrival. Then she'd walk in with them, chatting and laughing. Several times she went through the motion of taking people's hats, and finally, if we could judge from her actions, she had them all seated at the table. She passed salads all round, helping each guest herself. She sent them fruit and cakes; and then she brought out the wine, which she distributed in the same fashion. She also apologised because some cream she had ordered hadn't come.

"When the invisible guests appeared to have had all they could eat she began the chatty part again, and never seemed to be disturbed but once, when she requested someone not to sing so loudly for fear of disturbing the family.

"Altogether it was the weirdest and rummest thing I'd ever seen in my life. We watched it for one full hour, and then we left because she did. At one o'clock she apparently bade her guests good-night, after which she gathered up and put away all the eatables there were left—and, of course, everything but what she'd eaten herself still remained—cleaned all the dishes, restored them to their proper places in the dining-room pantry, and went back upstairs to her room.

"Mr. Perkins and I didn't know what to make of it. There wasn't a thing stolen, and it was quite clear to my mind that I'd done the woman an injustice in connecting her with thieves. She was honest, except in so far that she had ordered all those salads and creams and things from time to time on Mr. Perkins' account, which was easy enough for her to do, since Mrs. Perkins let her do the ordering. There was only one explanation of the matter. She was a victim of hallucinations, and I said so.

"'I fancy you are right,' said Mr. Perkins. 'We'll have to send her to an asylum!'

"'That's the thing,' said I, 'and we'd better do it the first thing in the morning. I wouldn't tackle her to-night, because she's probably excited, and like as not would make a great deal of trouble.'

"And that," said the detective, "was where Mr. Perkins and I made our mistake. Next morning she wasn't to be found, and to this day I haven't heard a word of her. She disappeared just like that," he said, snapping his fingers. "Of course, I don't mean to say that anything supernatural occurred. She simply must have slipped down and out while we were asleep. The front door was wide open in the morning, and a woman answering to her description was seen to leave the Park station, five miles from the Perkins' house, in the 6.30 train that morning."

"And you have no idea where she is now?" I asked of the detective when he had finished.

"No," he answered, "not the slightest. For all I know she may be cooking for you at this very minute."

With which comforting remark he left me.

For my part I hope the detective was wrong. If I thought there was a possibility of Margaret's ever being queen of my culinary department, I should either give up housekeeping at once and join some simple community where every man is his own *chef*, or dine for ever more on tinned meats.

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The Editorial Mind.

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THE THREE LOVERS.

In one of the private parlours of the best hotel in the small town of X—— three young men were sitting in deep meditation around a table, sulkily smoking their cigars, and taking at intervals a sip of beer from the large glasses which they had in front of them.

Neither uttered a word. The prolonged silence commenced to become uncomfortable and oppressive, when Robert, the chemist, jumped up, and, striking the table energetically with his fist, exclaimed: "For heaven's sake, say something! We have been now sitting here a full hour, and do nothing but mope! It is enough to drive a man mad!"

"You are right. It is enough to drive a man mad!" remarked William, the cashier of the only bank the town could boast of, and with a melancholy smile he passed his hand through his glossy black hair.

"The old man is crazy!" now roared the third one of the company. "Totally crazy! I really believe his passion for gymnastics is so strong that he would force his daughters to marry circus clowns or acrobats instead of giving them to ordinary but highly respectable business men! But before I permit that my darling Ida be led to the altar by such a madman, then we both would rather"——the rest was lost in a few unintelligible words, seemingly containing some fearful threat.

"Not so loud, dear John!" the more thoughtful William tried to calm him. "Not so loud. There are people in the adjoining rooms who might overhear us, and if Mr. Grothe should find out that we speak of him in such a disrespectful manner, he would for ever exclude us from his family circle. Rather let us put our wits together and see if we cannot discover some means by which we may make the old gentleman change his views!"

"Make him change his views?" sneered the thoroughly provoked John. "That simply shows that you do not know old man Grothe! He is the most stubborn man I ever saw, and whatever he puts into his thick head he will carry through, and no arguments will make him alter his ideas! Just ask your Fanny. I know it from Ida."

"Yes, my darling Rose often complained to me about his obstinacy," chimed in Robert, with a sigh. "One can feel sorry for the poor girls."

"And still more for ourselves," grumbled John, running excitedly up and down the room.

"Sit down!" begged William, taking the resisting John by the arm and forcing him down on a chair, "so, and now let us once more talk the matter over quietly and come to some conclusion."

The friends moved closer together and, for the hundredth time, began to form plans for getting out of the perplexing situation in which they found themselves. All three were young men between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, and up to the time of our narrative had little cause to find fault with their fate. Healthy, fairly good-looking, holding good social positions, and having ample fortunes, they seemed to have a natural right to their desire—to marry the girls of their choice; and the three beautiful daughters of the wealthy, retired baker, and now omnipotent Mayor Grothe, were by no means opposed to becoming the wives of Robert, William, and John.

They were deeply in love with each other, and yet there was an insurmountable obstacle which prevented the attainment of their wishes. The old gentleman, whom our three friends were so anxious to have for their father-in-law, had one great passion, and to gratify the same he seemed willing to sacrifice the happiness of his children. Grothe, from his boyhood on, was an enthusiastic athlete, and when young ran away several times to join a wandering circus.

His father had great trouble to suppress this passion of the youngster, but finally succeeded, and made him adopt the baker's trade, a calling which he and his ancestors had followed. After his father's death, young Grothe continued the already flourishing bakery business, and carried it on so successfully that now he had retired with a large fortune, and shortly before the time of which our story speaks, his fellow citizens gave him a high proof of their confidence in his abilities by electing him Mayor of the town.

Throughout his long career, however, and notwithstanding his business and increasing family demanded most of his time, Grothe remained true to the passion of his youth. Whenever a travelling circus appeared in town he witnessed every performance, and his judgment on the quality of the same, and especially the gymnastic turns, was never questioned, and considered that of an expert. He received the *Bee*, a newspaper published in the capital, regularly every day, and always made the amusement notices his particular study, with the view of discovering new specialities. He was the first one to learn of any improvement introduced by an athletic club, no matter in what part of the globe, and it was this, his passion or fad, which gave to his native town one of the best athletic clubs in the country.

Grothe was founder, president, and general manager of this club; his whole being was wrapped up in it, and he paraded the twenty-five members in public as often as there was an opportunity for doing so. He presented the club with an enormous silk banner, and whenever the Grothe Athletic Club accepted a challenge from some other association to compete for a prize, it marched out with the banner carried at its head, and almost invariably was led to victory by it.

Grothe was proud of his club, which gained a far-reaching reputation for its excellence, and as the members of it belonged to the best families, it was only natural that the whole social life was guided by it, and, of course, the president and his handsome daughters were the centre of this small world.

The fresh beauty of the girls had brought many suitors for their hands to the house of papa Grothe, but they had never shown any preference for anybody. However, this state of affairs had changed since the last summer night's festival of the club.

On that occasion, there were three young men who paid considerable attention to the girls, and it was soon apparent that they had found favour in the eyes of the latter. All three were friends, and having been brought up in the capital, were perfect strangers to the good people of X—— until a short time ago, when they settled in the place, but through their open ways had already gained everybody's goodwill. Robert had established a new chemist's shop, William had accepted the

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position of bank cashier, and John was sent there by the railway company as stationmaster.

Unfortunately, all three were very poor athletes, and though they joined the club, they principally did so to please their prospective father-in-law. They rarely participated in the gymnastic exercises taking place in the club hall every evening, and the feats which they performed on the horizontal bars, etc., were such that President Grothe disgustingly remarked they were the worst attempts ever made in his club. He assured them that he would never allow his daughters to marry men whose physical developments made them unfit for good husbands and fathers, and he made a vow that he would only accept such sons-in-law who could prove their superiority in all-round athletic sports, and offer a fair guarantee to surround him with a lot of healthy grandchildren.

In vain did his daughters try to overcome his opposition; in vain did the three lovers try to convince him that he was making a fool of himself and his children unhappy; Grothe remained firm. They conspired, they used stratagem, all without success, and every new conference which they had on the subject gave no other result than to strengthen their opinion that the old man was crazy.

This was also the outcome of to-day's session, and after three hours of animated discussion, they had again found no way out of their difficulties.

Finally the chemist rose. "I am obliged to leave you now; it is late, and I am going to take the early morning train for the capital; there are some drugs which I have to purchase, so I have decided to go there myself. I will be back in a day or two. Good-night!"

"If you would find there a remedy for our cases, it would be preferable, and do us more good than your poisonous drugs!" called John, the stationmaster, after him, and then, accompanied by William, he left the room.

Late the next afternoon the chemist was standing in one of the prominent streets of the capital, looking with curiosity at some bill-posters, which announced in glowing terms and colours the different entertainments taking place in the theatre, etc. Suddenly he received a tap on the shoulder. He turned round, and was agreeably surprised to find himself face to face with his cousin, the editor of the leading newspaper of the capital.

In a few words Robert told him for what purpose he had come to the capital, and that, having finished his business, he was going to spend the evening at some theatre, mainly to get rid of a bad attack of the blues. The journalist looked at him searchingly, took out his watch, and, finding that it was only six o'clock, said: "This suits me admirably. Your train does not leave before midnight, and, as I have nothing better to do, I trust you will permit me to remain in your company. We will, first of all, have a good dinner; there is nothing better to drive away the blues; then you shall tell me what is troubling you, and we will afterwards go to the Concordia Theatre, where we will enjoy a splendid variety performance. Do not shake your head so gloomily. I have made up my mind to restore your good humour, and I'll do it."

The two cousins soon entered a prominent restaurant, ordered a choice meal and a bottle of wine, and then settled down to a pleasant chat.

It was long before the dinner was finished that Robert had made a clean breast of his and his friends' troubles, and the editor, who listened attentively to his tale of woe, showed his sympathy by calling old man Grothe by the hardest names he could think of.

With contracted brows he silently sat for a few minutes, as if absorbed in deep thought, touching neither food nor drink, when all at once his face cleared up, and, giving his cousin a hearty slap on the shoulder, he joyfully exclaimed: "Why, dear boy, I have a great idea. I'll get you all out of your difficulties in spite of Papa Grothe. In eight weeks, at the latest, you will be engaged to the girls you love, and the tyrant himself will have to join your hands, and, what is more, will glory in having you for his sons-in-law. I am willing to put up a year's salary as a guarantee that what I say will come true. But now let us go. It is high time. Later on I will tell you all."

Fifteen minutes later both were seated in one of the boxes of the Concordia Theatre and enjoying the performance of a number of variety artists. The programme was a lengthy one, and just before the last number was reached, the journalist whispered to his cousin: "Now, Robert, look out; here comes the promised remedy for your case!"

The curtain rose. The stage showed a few trapezes hanging down from the flies, and two horizontal bars. The orchestra began to play some lively air, and, rushing up to the footlights, came three clowns, who bowed to the audience smilingly, though on account of their grotesquely painted faces it looked more like a grin, and, tumbling over each other, they swung themselves upon the trapeze and bars as agile as little monkeys.

In quick order they now executed such marvellous gymnastic feats that the whole audience sat spellbound, and hardly dared to breathe. It was just that their names appeared in extra large type on the programme, and they fully deserved the title which accompanied the same: "Bob, Billy and Johnny, the Three Kings of the Trapeze."

When their turn was finished, the applause which followed was deafening. Again and again they had to come out and acknowledge their thanks, and it took some time before they were allowed to retire and the audience showed itself willing to leave the theatre.

Our two cousins found an exit which led direct to a side street, thus avoiding the rush of outpouring people, and here the journalist addressed his companion as follows: "Pay close attention, now. I will explain my idea so that you three lovesick fellows may gain the consent of the old man Grothe to marry his daughters. By-the-bye, I suppose you and your friends will not mind spending a few hundred marks for that purpose? No? All right! Besides, Bob, Bill, and Johnny are friends of mine. I have brought them out, puffed them up in my paper to their hearts' content, and never charged them a pfennig for doing so. They are, therefore, under obligations to me, and will do just what I want. We are going to meet them in ten minutes in the *café* adjoining the theatre, when I will introduce you to them and give you the necessary instructions. It will be a capital joke on your future father-in-law and you will benefit by its outcome."

* * * * *

During the following few weeks the society of the good old town of X—— was in a flutter of excitement. The ladies held mysterious conferences with their dressmakers, wardrobes were emptied of their contents, old dresses were ripped apart, and, after being trimmed with all kinds of glittering ornaments, tinsels, etc., made up into gorgeous-looking costumes. The most intimate friends, who never kept a secret from each

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other, now observed deep silence about their doings and all that, because within a short time the event of the year was going to take place—the great masquerade ball, which the Grothe Athletic Club gave annually at its hall.

Rumour had it that this ball would outshine all its predecessors, and that there was especially one feature among the many surprises which the members of the club had prepared that promised to create a sensation, for it had leaked out that the three youngest members would give a performance on the horizontal bars and trapeze such as had never been witnessed before. It was known that the three young men had practised for weeks behind closed doors, and that the president had granted the use of the club hall for that purpose, but as they otherwise kept the utmost secrecy about the affair, everybody looked with real impatience to the coming event.

It was also given out that the great editor of the influential daily paper would come from the capital to be present at the festival, and that he would afterwards write one of his brilliant reports about the same, which, printed in his paper, would be read by half the people throughout the country. President Grothe, in consequence, was in the best of humour. He had a pleasant word for everybody, and told his daughters not to spare any money for their ball toilets, as he wanted them to appear worthy of his dignified and exalted position.

Finally the so ardently longed-for evening arrived. The large club hall was crowded with masqueraders, and though the disguises were in many instances so slight that friends easily recognised each other, everybody had the good sense to keep up the deception, not to spoil his neighbour's pleasure.

Among the many peasants, gypsies, monks, nuns, flower-girls, soldiers, etc., etc., there were three grotesque clowns, whose droll capers were noticed by everybody. They called themselves Bob, Bill, and Johnny, and were billed on the programme for a special performance, which was to take place on a stage erected on one side of the hall. Of course, everybody knew that behind those masks were the suitors of Grothe's daughters, and, in fact, the chemist, bank-cashier, and stationmaster did not deny their identity.

The merry clowns were observed to be in constant attendance on three masks, dressed alike, representing water-nymphs, and it was not difficult to recognise hidden under reed-grass and water lilies, the beautiful daughters of the president. About half-an-hour before midnight a tall gentleman of distinguished bearing, attired in a black domino and wearing a black silk mask appeared among the dancers. He approached the clowns, whispered a few words to them, and then all four left the hall to reach the stage from the rear entrance.

There everybody had previously been prepared for the performance of the clowns, and trapeze as well as horizontal bars were in their right positions. The black domino, after satisfying himself that they were unobserved, opened a small side door and admitted three more men, who after throwing off their long ulsters, showed that they were wearing the same clown costumes as our three friends. They were the genuine Bob, Bill, and Johnny, from the Concordia Theatre.

For one moment the six clowns looked at each other in silence and then broke out in a hearty laugh, until the black domino hurried the three false acrobats out through the side door and locked it. He now gave the sign for the performance to begin. The orchestra stationed in front of the stage played a lively polka, the curtain rose, and Bob, Bill, and Johnny rushed out on the stage, bowed to the audience and, leaping up to the trapeze and horizontal bars, commenced their astonishing gymnastics.

Everybody was completely taken by surprise, and most of all, President Grothe. What he now saw was beyond his comprehension, and that three young men, whom he always considered worthless fellows, could perform such feats, was almost too much for him.

But it was reality. There were the three clowns, who only a few minutes before had danced with his daughters, executing with ease, before his very eyes, the most difficult turns, such as the best member of his club would have been unable to imitate; and as the gymnasts now left the stage, ending their performance with a double somersault, he gave the signal for applause, which made the walls rattle. Bob, Bill, and Johnny, in the meantime, hurriedly left the stage through the side door, and made room for their counterparts, who now appeared behind the footlights, bowing with the same grin on their faces, an acknowledgment for the generous applause. At this moment the clock struck twelve.

President Grothe rose ceremoniously from his chair, and commanded in a loud voice "Masks off." The three clowns followed everybody's example and took off their gaudily painted gauze masks, and, behold! there was no further doubt possible, the bold performers had been the chemist, bank cashier, and stationmaster.

Shortly afterwards the artistes appeared in the hall, and with them the strange gentleman in the black domino. He was the great journalist from the capital, and our friends immediately introduced him to the President, who received him with great respect, and at the supper, which now followed, assigned him to the place of honour at his right. Opposite them sat the clowns with the three water-nymphs.

After the roast had been served, President Grothe rose to deliver a speech on his favourite subject, "Athletic training," and in the course of his remarks he called the attention of the assemblage to the performance which they had just witnessed, and asked them to fill their glasses and drink to the health of the three great gymnasts, whom he now proudly introduced as his future sons-in-law. Three cheers were given with a will, and everybody hastened to congratulate the happy couples.

Then the editor addressed the company. In well-chosen words he cited many cases from ancient and modern history to prove what a powerful factor love always had been and still was. In the present case it had made out of simple business men acrobats who would be a credit to the best circus, but—and here he faced the president: "Our friends have a worthier calling. Once, under the *régime* of Prince Carnival, they have condescended to give their gymnastic productions, and we all have seen that these were of the highest order; but let this proof of their love and devotion suffice; they have now the good fortune to enter the inner circle of a highly respected family; let them henceforth devote all their time to make their wives and Papa Grothe happy!"

Everybody applauded. The president, with tears of joy in his eyes, embraced the speaker and assured him of his regret that he did not possess a fourth daughter; a man like him he would accept as son-in-law, though he had no athletic accomplishments whatsoever.

ERICH FLIESS.

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My Financial Career.

When I go into a bank I get nervous. The clerks make me nervous; the wickets make me nervous; the sight of the money makes me nervous. The moment I cross the threshold of a bank, I am a hesitating jay. If I attempt to transact business there, I become an irresponsible idiot. I knew this beforehand, but my salary has been raised to £22 a month, and I felt that the bank was the only place for it. So I shambled in and looked timidly round at the clerks. I had an idea that a person about to open an account must needs consult the manager. I went up to a wicket marked "Cashier." The cashier was a tall, cool fellow. The very sight of him unnerved me. My voice was sepulchral.

"Can I see the manager?" I said, and added solemnly, "alone." I don't know why I said "alone."

"Certainly," said the cashier, and fetched him. The manager was a grave, calm man. I held my £22 clutched in a crumpled ball in my pocket.

"Are you the manager?" I said. Heaven knows I didn't doubt it.

"Yes," he said.

"Can I see you?" I asked, "alone?" I didn't want to say "alone" again, but without it the thing seemed self-evident. The manager looked at me in some alarm. He felt that I had an awful secret to reveal.

"Come in here," he said, and led the way to a private room. He turned the key in the lock.

"We are safe from interruption here," he said; "sit down." We both sat down and looked at one another. I found no voice to speak.

"You are the detective, I presume," he said. He had gathered from my mysterious manner that I was a detective. I knew what he was thinking, and it made me worse.

"No," I said. "To tell the truth," I went on, as if I had been prompted to lie about it, "I'm not a detective at all. I've come to open an account. I intend to keep all my money in this bank." The manager looked relieved, but still serious; he concluded now that I was a son of Baron Rothschild, or a young Gould.

"A large account, I suppose," he said.

"Fairly large," I whispered. "I propose to deposit £22 now and £10 a month regularly." The manager got up and opened the door. He called to the cashier.

"Mr. Montgomery," he said unkindly, "this gentleman is opening an account; he will deposit £22. Good-morning." I rose. A big iron door stood open at the side of the room.

"Good-morning," I said, and stepped into the safe.

"Come out," said the manager coldly, and showed me the other way. I went up to the cashier's wicket and poked the ball of money at him with a quick, convulsive movement, as if I were doing a conjuring trick. My face was ghastly pale.

"Here," I said, "deposit it." The tone of the words seemed to mean, "let us do this painful thing while the fit is on us." He took the money and gave it to another clerk. He made me write the sum on a slip of paper and sign my name in a book. I no longer knew what I was doing. The bank swam before my eyes.

"Is it deposited?" I asked in a hollow, vibrating voice.

"It is," said the cashier.

"Then I want to draw a cheque."

My idea was to draw out £2 of it for present use. Some one gave me a cheque book through a wicket, and some one else began telling me how to write it out. The people in the bank had the impression that I was an invalid millionaire. I wrote something on the cheque and thrust it in at the clerk. He looked at it.

"What! are you drawing it all out again?" he asked in surprise. Then I realised that I had written £22 instead of £2. I was too far gone to reason now. I had a feeling that it was impossible to explain the thing. All the clerks had stopped writing to look at me. Reckless with misery, I made a plunge.

"Yes, the whole thing."

"You withdraw your money from the bank?"

"Every penny of it."

"Are you not going to deposit any more?" said the clerk, astonished.

"Never." An idiotic hope struck me that they might think something had insulted me while I was writing the cheque and that I had changed my mind. I made a wretched attempt to look like a man with a fearfully quick temper. The clerk prepared to pay the money.

"How will you have it?"

"What?"

"How will you have it?"

"Oh." I caught his meaning and answered, without even trying to think, "In twenties." He gave me a twenty-pound note.

"And the two?" he asked drily.

"In twos," I said. He gave it to me and I rushed out. As the big doors swung behind me I caught the echo of a roar of laughter that went up to the ceiling of the bank. Since then I bank no more. I keep my money in cash in my trousers pocket and my savings in gold in a sock.

E. A. Nash.

RESULT OF

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 11.

More than one competitor succeeded in correctly putting together this story, and the prizes have therefore gone to those whose attempts first reached this office. £5 has been sent to Mr. Wm. Millard, The Schools, Ascot, Berks; and £1 each to Miss B. Mellin, 35, Onslow Road, Fairfield, Liverpool; Mr. Wm. Boyle, Harbour Office, Swansea; Miss M. Mellin, 8, Swiss Road, Fairfield, Liverpool; Mr. P. A. Kay, Sandhurst, Swiss Road, Fairfield, Liverpool; Mr. L. Cundell, 144, High Street, Southampton

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THE EMPTY BOAT.

It was in December, about two o'clock in the morning. Baron Louis Monnier was returning from his club to his apartments in Grenelle Street, finishing his cigar. The clearness of the winter's night inspired him to walk. He turned up his large fur collar, put his hands in his pockets and started across the Pont Royal.

The Seine was not yet frozen, and the Baron, reaching the middle of the bridge, stopped to admire the fairy-like picture the city presented, with the deep shadows of Notre Dame and the Palace of Justice brought out by the blue light of the moon, while upon the dark water of the river the reflection of the lights quivered and lengthened.

"My! It's cold," said he, buttoning the last button of his coat.

He had just started again, when his attention was drawn to a dark object which was turning around and around in the middle of the Seine. As the object grew more distinct, the Baron recognised a boat adrift. No one was in it, as the two oars were lying uselessly across it. In the solitude of the night this empty boat slowly moving by itself was appalling.

Louis Monnier foresaw immediately some tragic scene, accident, or crime of which the shores and the stars had been the only witnesses. He no longer felt the cold, but remained standing on the parapet, viewing the boat, its clumsy seats, its tarred boards, and its heavy oars, used so lately by an unknown hand.

The waif was very near the bridge, when the Baron was drawn from his reverie by the approach of an individual who ran up, and stopping near him leant upon the parapet and contemplated the boat with an air of frenzy.

Louis Monnier noticed the figure of this man, his black beard, his white face, his ulster of large plaid (which was prominent under the gaslight). He saw him bend over a moment when the boat reached the arch, then crossed the bridge in order to see it again as it came out. A minute later, the unknown walked away rapidly, taking the left bank.

The Baron, slightly puzzled, followed him with his eyes, and saw that he ran along the quay, in the direction of the Pont de la Concorde. Finally the man took the pavement in front of the houses; stopped a second to shake hands with a wine merchant, who was closing the front of his shop, then began to run. He reached the Pont de la Concorde and leant again over the parapet to watch the boat pass under.

Monsieur hesitated a moment whether to follow him, then thinking it was the affair of some lunatic or drunken man, he turned into the Rue du Bac, and lighting another cigar, in order to dissipate the dismal impression which the little boat had made, went home.

The Baron soon lost all thought of this adventure. Eight days after he was quietly drinking his absinthe at a little table on the Boulevard about six o'clock.

The temperature was mild, the Boulevard gay and animated. After taking a sip, the Baron began to read a paper. He looked over the various items, when suddenly, while reading a long article, he began to tremble, and returning to the first line he read each word carefully.

The article concluded with the words:

"A crime was committed on Monday last, at a place up the river called Joinville-le-Pont, under mysterious circumstances. A woman named Louise Sauvêtre, who ran the ferry, and lived alone in an isolated house on the border of the Marne, had suddenly disappeared. The day before yesterday morning her body was found, caught by some willows, a hundred yards below that place. A wound in the neck made by a knife proved that the unfortunate was the victim of an assassin. Suspicion rested upon a countryman of twenty years, who lived on the opposite shore. This individual emphatically denied all knowledge of the crime, but circumstantial evidence pointed towards him, as a knife, probably like the one used, was found in his house. He was arrested. The boat used as a ferry has disappeared.

"It is supposed that the affair took place in the following fashion: About eight or nine o'clock in the evening the young man hailed the woman Sauvêtre, and crossed the river with her. After cutting her throat and throwing her into the water, he returned to the right bank and pushed away the boat, whose presence on that side would awaken suspicion.

"The little old house of the victim was entirely stripped. It is true, only insignificant sums were found at the presumed assassin's house, but it is supposed he cautiously buried somewhere the two or three thousand francs which the ferrywoman had saved. This young man, Thomasseau by name, had served two sentences for poaching. He tried to evade the law now by affirming that on the night of the crime he saw an individual approach the river and call the ferrywoman. But as no other neighbour knew of this incident, it was deemed improbable. We will keep our readers informed concerning this dramatic affair."

After reading the article two or three times, Baron Monnier placed the paper on a chair, and crossing his hands upon his stick, he began to reflect profoundly.

That drifting boat which the article mentioned, was it

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the one he had seen whirling down the Seine to the Pont Royal? The date coincided—it was, indeed, Monday of the week preceding. Supposing the crime had been committed about eight o'clock, it would certainly take five or six hours for the boat, slowly borne by the current, to reach the centre of Paris. It was probably on that night that it had drifted seven or eight leagues without being perceived or stopped by anyone. Perhaps, it was only a coincidence after all; with the enormous number of boats on the Seine, two could easily become loose at the same time.

Monsieur Monnier tried to distract his thoughts, but he could think of nothing else. The strange individual, who had watched the boat pass under the bridge; the anxious desire of this man to follow the wreck puzzled the Baron the more he reflected upon it. Hypothesis followed hypothesis, until he became convinced that this stranger possessed alone, perhaps, the secret of the drama which was enacted on the Marne eight days ago.

What ought he to do? His conscience told him to go to the Prefecture of Police, who were still engaged in the inquiry; but indolence, *ennui*, the necessity of testifying in the courts kept him back. He thought to himself that his deposition was very unimportant, that perhaps it would be laughed at, and after all the law was able to unravel it alone.

However, if the inquest should be wrong, if the man arrested should be innocent? The charges brought against him were indeed serious!

At all events Baron Monnier put the matter by until the next day in order to see what turn the affair took; then, as it was time to dine, he arose, and following the Boulevard des Capucines, went to his club.

The next day, after a sleepless night, during which he recognised the duty imposed upon him, the Baron entered the Prefecture of Police about three o'clock. At the sight of his card, which bore one of the most conspicuous names in all Paris, he was received in the private office of the chief, without waiting.

He excused himself first for bringing evidence which doubtless would have no interest; then in a few words, he related what he had seen on that Monday night, the empty boat, and the individual who persisted in following it the length of the quay.

When he finished he renewed his excuses smilingly, but the chief interrupted him: "Your deposition," said he, "on the contrary, is of extreme importance; the description of your individual corresponds exactly to that of the man whom Thomasseau has described. Would you repeat it?"

"Certainly. Medium height, slight, very black beard, in double points; an ulster——"

"With large plaids? That is well. As to the hat, Thomasseau said a soft felt—but returning to Paris, the assassin, if he is the assassin, would change all that. Now, could you put us on the track of this man?"

"I saw him stop a second to shake hands with a wine merchant."

"The address?"

"The first shop upon the quay on the left bank, going from the Pont Royal to the Pont de la Concorde."

"Very well. Evidently this man is a regular customer. Now, one minute, and I am at your service; will you please be seated, Monsieur le Baron?"

The chief approached the telephone, called the bureau of police near the Pont Royal, and gave a description of the individual, with the order to go to the wine merchant's for information.

"It is strange," said the chief, seating himself again at his large desk, opposite Monsieur Monnier, "that chance serves us better than logic to find a criminal! Sometimes all indications are gathered, all the acquaintances of the victim are sounded, and when everything is settled, some unexpected revelation abruptly illuminates the affair. It is most often a detail of apparent insignificance."

"Then you believe that the assassin——"

"Is the man whom you met Monday night. If I dared, I would say already that I am sure of it."

"But you have no proof, and only a slight similarity in the description which you already possess."

"Well, but the presence of this individual upon the bridge. His delirious obstinacy in following the boat, which, perhaps, he had expected there for some time. His action, or the place, or the object haunted him. Ah! Here is the response!"

The electric bell of the criminal rang. The chief received the message and returned to his place.

"The individual is captured," said he. "They found him at the tavern. He will be here in five minutes. Then we shall know!"

Soon the agents entered with the man. He was livid, his face was distorted. The chief made him sit down, and brusquely demanded:

"How long have you known the woman Sauvêtre?"

"I? But——"

He hesitated, fearing to compromise himself even by denying the acquaintance.

"Reply."

"I knew her very little. I saw her once last year, crossing the Marne."

"Well, that is enough. Now, what were you doing upon the Pont Royal on Monday of last week, at two o'clock in the morning?"

"At two o'clock, upon the Pont Royal?"

"Yes. This gentleman saw you."

The man lost his head, finding the interrogator so well informed, and at once fell into the trap which had been laid for him.

"And what were you doing about eight o'clock in the evening, the same day, in front of the house of this woman Sauvêtre?"

"I—I returned to Joinville to take the train."

"That is sufficient. We know the rest. For what motive did you assassinate this poor woman?"

"I assassinate her? I?"

"Do not try to deny it. We know all!"

After some more hesitation, the criminal ended by confessing, uttering a cry of despair. Later, he told the manner in which the crime came to him. He was left without money or resources, and knowing the woman Sauvêtre had saved up some money, he planned a most mysterious crime. After it, he returned to Paris, but the haunting of the crime began to beset him. After running from *café* to *café* the shock increased, as he found himself alone. Then the thought of the boat drifting alone came to him. He had waited for it to pass forty or fifty minutes, at the Pont Neuf, crazed by this expectation.

After his recitation he was seized by a nervous spasm, and it took the two agents' strength to prevent him from smashing his head against the wall. The chief thanked Monsieur Monnier warmly for bringing a telephone to justice.

"Oh," said the Baron, "I am happy to rescue from your hands the poor, innocent fellow Thomasseau."

Parry Shute.

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A Comedy off the Stage.

By G. Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER XXV.

Before the Dawn of Day.

Allan Murray was not the only one to whom temptation came that night, when four women suffered agony such as they had never known before.

Neither of them closed her eyes in restful sleep, but sat communing with self as the hours slowly crept along.

Olive, in spite of effort and persuasion on the part of her father, passed the night on the landing by the drawing-room door, taking mechanically such refreshment as Emsworth brought her from time to time, but never stirring from her jealously-guarded post. Lucy kept her long watch between tending her suffering aunt, who would not even take to the couch, declaring that if she did she should die before the surgeon could come again, and insisting upon sitting uneasily in the chair.

From time to time, though, the girl stole out to the foot of the stairs to wait till she saw Emsworth doze off in the seat he had taken upon the landing by the flowers, and then she crept up step by step in the dark till she could see the top of the drawing-room door, within which lay all she loved on earth. Then, not content, she crept higher, step by step, till she could see Olive seated with her head resting on her hands.

Strange thoughts passed through the girl's breast as, keeping in the darkness, she watched that bended form with a deadly hatred, growing more and more powerful, till it seemed to carry all before it like a flood.

Why had she not killed her before? Then this woman who had come between them would not have kept her from Braetoun's side. It would have been so easy—so very easy, but never one half so easy as it would be now. She could have forgiven her if she had kept away; but for her to come at a time like this, strong in her position, and force her to take a place like a servant in her own house, where all had been so happy only a few hours before! While now she had to creep and steal up just to watch the door, when she would have given the world to have crept to Braetoun's side, just to touch his hand—to wait till he grew well, for she felt that if she could do that it would be impossible for him to die.

And this woman who called herself his wife, and was always trying to steal away his love from her who had won it first, was the cause of all her misery—for the doctor's orders had no place in her mind just then.

The night wore on, and poor Aunt Duncan moaned and bewailed her fate, till again and again Lucy stole out to rest, and crept out to watch the panels of the door whenever Emsworth dropped asleep, and each time that deadly, desperate thought kept on growing till it was like a black cloud, and overshadowed the whole place.

"It would be so easy," she kept on thinking; and as the day approached the idea grew simpler still of execution. There was a tea-cup on a bracket close to Olive's hand, taken with loving care by Emsworth. Olive must have something of the kind to keep her there alive; she did not want to spoil her beauty now, and make Braetoun hate her. That would be useless. Roderick would be ill for weeks, perhaps, and this woman, his wife, would stay, and she, the woman who loved him with all the strength of her untutored nature, would be forced to keep away and suffer. Olive would suffer, too, in her way, and people would say afterwards that she died broken-hearted of grief, and how

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easy it would be for her to die broken-hearted of grief. A few drops of some subtle fluid poured in the cup that was always going up and down, and she would be there no more, and she who loved him so would be at peace, and always at his side.

Temptations were strong that night in the little bijou residence the house agent extolled and its mistress loved to deck with flowers, for the other sleepless woman, Mary Jennett, the favourite nurse whom Murray trusted, and had sent to many cases, had her strange thoughts, engendered by a wild idea that more than once the great doctor had looked upon her with pleasant eyes—with looks which might mean a great future to her. These thoughts she had fostered till Braetoun's last bad illness, when something she had seen had changed her feelings to those of hate.

For she had divined the truth, and henceforth Murray had occupied a different position in her eyes, while Olive would not be safe with her, she told herself, if some day she were called in as her nurse.

She was very sleepless, for a strange suspicion had taken possession of her soul, and she too watched through the long hours of that fateful night—watching the patient carefully—the doctor more.

For from time to time Murray did things she had never before seen in her experience; and to her distorted vision they could mean only one thing—fatality to one possibly on the brink of death, and who, left alone, might live.

And she said to herself ought she not to interfere and try to save him, when it was to her evidently all with the intent of getting the patient out of the way, for reasons she knew well. But why should she interfere when revenge was ready to her hand, and she would have the great doctor who had slighted her well under her thumb? Revenge, perhaps love; who knew what else beside? The patient was nothing to her—a poor weak creature, with a life not worth saving, so she moved in and out with the keen eyes of some nocturnal creature, noting every action as she busied herself softly in the room, and watching as keenly through the narrow opening of the folding doors, when, at a whisper from Murray she had to go there to wait.

And the night glided slowly on, the only one apparently at peace being Roderick Braetoun, as he lay back there in the shadow that seemed to grow blacker as the day approached.

"Would they call it murder if they knew all?" said Nurse Jennett to herself, as she stood close to the narrow crack, where one fold nearly touched the other, and saw that Murray was on one knee, bending over Braetoun; and she drew her breath through her teeth with a faint, sibilant sound.

Then all at once she drew back, still watching, for Murray rose slowly, and stood gazing down at the motionless figure on the mattress; and he was still standing there watching, when a faint light behind the blind threw off his figure as a tall, black silhouette.

For the day was beginning to dawn.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Aunt Duncan Clears a Block.

"Curious problem, the human being, sir," said the surgeon that same morning. "When I left you last night I never expected to see him alive again. Slept well, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Murray quietly, as the surgeon bent over and examined Braetoun, and then proceeded to dress and re-bandage the injury to his head.

"Well, it is wonderful—quite a lesson to one never to be in a hurry to give up. At the same time one must not be too sanguine, or I could readily say he may pull round after all."

"I think he will now," said Murray gravely. "Of course, his condition is still extremely critical."

"Of course, of course: but he is a different man this morning."

The surgeon finished his task, and then attended Aunt Duncan, who insisted upon being taken home.

"I should never get better here," she said irritably.

"Better wait a few days, madame," said the surgeon.

"No, not an hour," she said. "If I'm to get better I can't do it with that young man dying upstairs all night and all day long. I want to go home."

The result was that after the surgeon had gone, refusing to undertake the responsibility, Aunt Duncan sent the maid to summon Murray, who came down and found her in a high state of excitement, protesting to her niece that she was quite well enough to go, while Lucy vainly strove to calm her.

The sight of the irritable old woman and the pale-faced, red-eyed niece brought up a fresh train of thought to Murray's mind, and after a short examination of the Aunt's condition, he answered her appeal at once.

"Yes," he said; "I think you might be moved, and that you would feel more at rest and better at home."

"There, my dear," she cried triumphantly, "that other doctor don't know his business. I can feel I shall be much better at home. So you order a fly—I won't have a squeezy cab—and take me back home at once."

"No, Auntie," said Lucy coldly. "You know I can't leave: you must stay, and let me nurse you here."

"Now, don't you turn neglectful to your poor old Aunt when she's bad, and throw me over like that, my dear. You don't want to kill me, do you?"

"No, Aunt; you know I don't."

"But how am I to know if you talk like that? It will kill me if I stop here. All night through have I been in agonies of pain and listening to the steps overhead, sounding like the undertaker's men busy with a coffin, and I can't bear it, my dear. It's killing me; and if you don't want to see me a cold corpse at your feet take me away at once."

"Auntie!" cried Lucy with a shiver, "you must be patient. I can't leave home now; do, do pray be patient."

"I can't, Baby; I won't; it's impossible. How can I get better with that poor young man dying all over the place upstairs? It's harrowing up my feelings so that I've felt all night as if I should have a fit. I can't bear it, Baby Lucy. You worried me into coming, and it's brought me to this state, and you must take me home. I declare, ever since they brought me back here I've had Brompton Cemetery on the brain."

"No, no, no, Auntie," cried Lucy caressingly, as she hung over the old woman. "Do, do please be patient. I can make you so much more comfortable here, and I'll nurse you and do everything for you myself."

"I want to go home," said the old woman stubbornly. "If I've got to die I'll die in my own bed, and I've left my keys at home, and there's boxes and cupboards as nobody shan't touch but me."

"But, Auntie, dearest, do, do be reasonable."

"I am quite reasonable. I won't stop here with a death in the house. I've got lots to do before I die."

"But think, dear, of what trouble I'm in myself. I can't go away and leave him now."

"He left you, and he'll leave you again."

"Auntie!"

"If he lives, so I don't see why you should be so particular about going away from him. You take me home at once and nurse me there."

"Auntie! I can't—I can't."

"There! And after all I've done for you, Baby. Oh, the ingratitude of this world! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! But I might have known—I might have known. Oh!—oh!"

The first "Oh" was for mental pain, the second louder, and for bodily. She had tried to throw out her arms, with the result that a sharp pang shot through her shoulder from the bandaged limb, and Murray, who had been patiently waiting and listening, relieved to find the way in

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which matters were working for Olive's benefit, stepped to the chair.

"Pray sit still, madame," he said gently, as he carefully arranged a cushion under the broken arm, and then touched her dank forehead with some eau-de-Cologne from the table, for she had turned faint with agony, and Lucy flung herself upon her knees at her feet.

But Aunt Duncan did not quite lose her senses, and, as she recovered a little, she repulsed her niece, who sank in a heap on the floor, sobbing.

"Don't—don't, please, Doctor," she whimpered. "It's very good of you, but never mind me. You go up and see to that poor fellow upstairs. He's young. I'm only a worn-out old woman, and good for nothing but putting in the ground out of the way."

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie!"

"Ah, yes; been like a mother to you, I have, Baby, and loved you more. And now I'm getting old, and you've broke me, and I'm no more use; let me die out of the way. There, I don't bear no malice. I saved everything for you, take it and spend it, and I hope you'll be happy."

"Auntie, dear!"

"Yes, very dear, of course. Only don't let me be dear when I'm dead. Don't spend much. A common ellum coffin and black handles 'll do, and if that costs too much let the parish do it, and don't go to the expense of a stone."

"Oh, you cruel, cruel old Auntie, when I'm nearly heart-broken, and in such distress and pain that you can't understand a bit."

"No, no, no! I'm only a silly old thing, and no use. Never mind me. Doctor, I'll stay. Serve me right for being such an old fool. What did I want on a box seat? There, I'll stay."

"You will, Auntie?" cried Lucy eagerly; but she turned ghastly, and shuddered almost as she spoke.

"Yes, I'll stay and die here. Don't let the doctors bother and hurt me no more. I know the pain ain't so bad, and I know what it means. My arm's a-mortifying and going to drop off."

"No, no, no!" said Murray, smiling in spite of himself, and he softly pressed the old lady's head back upon a pillow.

"Thank you, my dear; you're very good and kind. Thank you, but don't do it no more; let me die out of the way. Lucy!"

"Yes, Aunt, dear."

"Put your hand right down into my pocket, not the outside one, the inside, and get out my puss."

"No, no, Auntie, it would hurt you to move you."

"And what of that? I want my puss."

"What for, Auntie? I've got some money."

"Then you keep it. I want the doctor to have his fee paid him at once, and I'll see it done."

"No, no, Auntie; be quiet. There is no need now."

"You get out my puss, miss, at once," cried the old woman angrily, "or I'll do it myself with my broken arm."

"Oblige me by lying back quite still," said Murray, taking her hand. "Miss Lee, it would be far better for your aunt to be carefully taken to her own home."

"God bless you, my dear," said the old woman, with a sob, and she squeezed the hand she held.

"But it is impossible," said Lucy wildly.

"No; it would be very easy. An ambulance could be brought, and she could be lifted in."

"And took to the 'orspittle!" cried Aunt Duncan excitedly. "Not me. I'd sooner stay here."

"No, no, no," said Murray with all a woman's tenderness. "You are feverish, and ready to let fancies get into your head. You shall be taken home, and lie for a few days in your own bed, with your niece to attend you. There you will be quiet and feel at rest, and soon be up and about again. I'll come and see you there."

"God bless you, my dear!" she said thankfully. "I was afraid you were going to pack me off to the 'orspittle."

"Because I mentioned an ambulance carriage? Oh, no; that was so that you should not suffer from being moved. I will send a telegram for one directly. It will be much better, Miss Lee, and give her what she requires—peace of mind."

"Well, I do believe in you, my dear. You seem to understand me down to the ground. Shall I get better if I go away?"

"I guarantee that you will," said Murray soothingly "Your niece will soon nurse you back to health."

"Hear that, Lucy?"

"Yes, Auntie, you shall be moved then; but I cannot leave here. I must stay."

"No, you mustn't. You must come with me, and don't stand staring at me in that gashly way. What are you thinking about?"

The girl, whose face was white and drawn, started violently and shuddered.

"And don't shiver like that. He says I shan't die."

"No, Aunt, you will not die. You must have a good nurse. I cannot leave here now."

"And I say you shall, miss. I won't have you ungrateful, so there. You are not wanted here. I know my lord's wife's come, and the sooner you go the better. It ain't proper for you to be here, and you've got to come home with me."

Lucy's little lips tightened together, her brows contracted, and she stood there without speaking.

"Oughtn't she to come, Doctor?" cried the old woman.

"Yes," said Murray firmly, "and I'm sure that Miss Lee will see that this is the only way out of this terribly painful position."

"I cannot go—I will not go," said the girl through her set teeth.

"You must go," said Murray sternly but kindly. "Please think I wish to spare your feelings, but Lord Braetoun cannot be moved for weeks."

"Then he will live?" cried Lucy, with a wild cry of excitement.

"I believe so—I hope so now. Lady Braetoun's place is at his side."

Lucy uttered a low, painful sobbing breath.

"And you must see that it will be horrible for you both. You must go."

"No, no, no," cried the girl piteously. "Don't, don't, Doctor. I must stay. It's my house, and I will."

"You cannot," he said firmly. "You cannot command yourself. You do not even know yourself what you might do."

She drew slowly back from him, with her lips apart and her eyes staring with horror and amaze, and he took advantage of the impression he saw that his words had made, and continued:

"There, you see. Now, be advised, for your aunt's sake, for your own. Take my advice, and go at once."

She turned slowly from him, shivering, and walked to the window, to stand gazing out for a few moments.

"And if——" she faltered at last without turning.

"I have told you the simple truth," continued Murray "Last night I could not have said this; to-day I can. I believe, with constant care and nursing, we can bring him round. You will not stand in the way of his being brought back to life?"

She faced round angrily.

"I'd die to save him," she cried.

Murray looked at her for a few moments, and her eyes met his unflinchingly.

"I believe you," he said at last, "and you believe in me?"

"Yes," she cried quickly.

"Help me, then, to save him," he said quietly.

"I want to stay and help you," she said with a low wail.

"Your stay would hinder and do harm—on my word, as a man. Will you insist in staying now?"

She shivered again and covered her face with her hands.

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Then, with a weary sigh, she turned slowly to her aunt, bent down and kissed her, ending by resting her forehead on the old woman's shoulder.

"Yes, Doctor," she said softly, "for his sake I'll go."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Dead Beat.

"Why don't you speak to me?" said Lady Braetoun appealingly, and she caught the nurse's arm as she was passing down the stairs. "Tell me how my husband is?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders slightly, as she replied respectfully, but with a hard look in her eyes:

"I didn't think your ladyship wished me to speak. The patient seems to be sleeping more easily now. I beg pardon, my lady; Doctor Murray has sent me to get a little more brandy."

"Yes, yes, quick! Go at once," cried Olive hastily, and, with a curious smile of contempt and dislike upon her lips, the woman went down; while Olive, feeling herself alone, sank upon her knees by the door to pray that the sufferer might live.

She did not hear the approach of steps ascending the stairs, and sprang up with a faint cry of horror when a hand was tenderly laid upon her head.

"Don't, don't, my darling. There, let me take you downstairs now."

"Downstairs?"

"Yes; they've gone."

"They've gone?"

"Yes; that girl and her aunt."

"Gone?"

"Yes; I don't know how Murray managed it. He was down there with them when you were so angry about his neglecting Braetoun, and somehow he managed to talk her round. I didn't say anything to you before, because I was afraid of there being some failure just at the last, but Murray set me to see to the arrangements, and she has gone off in an ambulance carriage with the aunt, and is not coming back while you are here."

"Oh!" ejaculated Olive, with a deep sigh of relief, and she closed her eyes and rested her forehead on her father's shoulder for a while.

"You and I don't half know Allan Murray, my dear," said the old man softly. "We can never thank him enough for what he has done for us."

"Never, father, never," she said softly.

"But I always thought I was right about him from the first time we met. I wish there were more like him in the world."

"Hush!" whispered Olive, and she laid her hand on her father's lips as a low moan came to them from within. "The nurse has gone down for brandy. He must be worse."

"Don't, don't get excited, dear. It may mean that he is better."

"But the anxiety seems more than I can bear, father. If I could but be there! This ignorance is terrible. Ah! quick, nurse, quick!"

"I am being as quick as I can, my lady," said the woman as she ascended the stairs and entered the room and closed the door after her, as if glad of the opportunity of excluding the wife from the husband's room.

"Not a very nice woman, my dear," said Emsworth slowly. "But there, she must be a very clever nurse, I suppose, or Murray would not have chosen her. Now, my darling, I want you to come down."

The door opened again, and Murray came out.

"Worse?" cried Olive wildly.

He looked at her with a peculiar quivering about his eyelids as he hastened to set her mind at ease.

"No; calmer and more restful," he replied, as he gave Emsworth a questioning look, to which the other replied with an emphatic nod.

"Now, Lady Braetoun," he continued, "the house has been set at liberty. I must ask you to go down from here now, and take a few hours' rest in one of the rooms below."

"No, no; impossible."

Murray shook his head with a sad smile.

"No," he said; "it is impossible for you to live without rest and sleep. You must take some repose."

"I cannot leave here," said Olive.

"Half hysterical already," said Murray. "Please, be advised. There is no need for you to sit here longer."

"No need?" she cried wildly.

"None; and if you do persist, you will be unfit to come and watch and nurse the patient when I give you leave to enter his room."

"Ah! You will do that soon?"

"Yes: I can venture to do that soon," he replied, with his face twitching slightly. "I expect Sir Grange in shortly, and we shall have another consultation. If he agrees, then you can take your place by Lord Braetoun's side."

"Ah!" ejaculated Olive excitedly. "You hear, father?"

"Yes, my dear; I hear," said Emsworth coldly.

"But only if you do first what I ask," said Murray.

"What is that?" said Olive excitedly.

"Go and lie down first for a while."

Olive held out her hand to the speaker, and he took it and held it between the trembling palms, gazing down into the eyes which looked in his with a look full of reverence and love.

"Yes," she said, "you are right, Doctor. God bless you for all you have done for us. I cannot say much now of my gratitude—I will show it by my obedience to all you say; for if ever father had true, earnest friend, if ever woman had faithful, helpful brother in their sore distress, my father and I are those two."

"Amen," said Emsworth, in a choking voice; and with her lips quivering now, she clasped her father's arm, and let him lead her down to the little parlour, where she sank helpless on the couch, and fell at once into a deep sleep that was, in its utter insensibility almost a swoon.

(*To be continued.*)

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

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The London guinea goes this week to Miss Ethel Puniell, 42, Ainger Road, Primrose Hill, N.W., and the provincial to J. Smart, Shenstone, near Lichfield, Staffordshire.

The word was "self-immolation"—value, 126.

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Somewhere on pages 440 to 444 two words are transposed. The first is taken from its correct position on the page and put somewhere else, and the vacancy filled up by the displaced word. For example, in the following conditions the words "distance" and "guinea" are transposed. A guinea is offered to the first reader living within 100 miles of London, who first points these words out, and another *distance* for the reader whose attempt bears the post-mark of a place a greater *guinea* from this office. *Post-cards only, please.*

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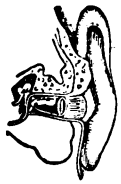

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"Up to April of last year," writes a correspondent, "I never had a day's illness. At that time, however, I caught a severe cold, which took all the life and energy out of me. I felt tired, heavy, and weary. My appetite left me, and what food I ate gave me much pain and distress in the pit of the stomach, and in the chest. Only a short time elapsed before a nasty cough fixed upon me, which made my chest and sides sore, and on two occasions I spat up blood. As you may imagine, this gave me considerable anxiety, for it looked as though my lungs might be affected.

"Next my heart began to trouble me. It often throbbed and fluttered until I thought it would jump out of its place."

[Lest we forget it, we would better say at this place that the disordered heart action, of which our friend speaks, is apt to alarm not only the patient, but skilled physicians, and lead to a line of treatment which does no good and involves the loss of precious time. It is one of many symptoms that misleads the observer, and illustrates the deceptive character of the real disease.]

"When I was at work," continues the writer, "I was often taken with dizzy spells, sometimes in the street. Everything around me seemed in a whirl, and I had to resist the tendency to fall to the ground.

"My nights were simply awful. I got no proper sleep or rest at all on account of bad dreams and the twisting pains and trembling of the stomach. With all this you will understand I was never easy night or day. The prospect was very dark ahead of me, and I felt miserable and wretched, not knowing what would be the end of it.

"Month after month I remained in this condition. The doctor whom I consulted examined me, and advised me to be extremely careful of myself."

[Good advice. But how is a man in such a situation going to be more "careful" than he already is? Being careful presupposes knowledge of what to do, and what not to do, the exact points upon which the sufferer had not a ray of light or information. It is like telling a man who is lost in the woods to be careful to keep in the right path.]

"The doctor's medicine," concludes the letter, "gave me a little relief temporarily, but I was soon bad as ever. One day in July (1894) I read in a little pamphlet about cases similar to my own having been cured by Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. As a sort of forlorn hope I got a bottle from Mr Simpson, chemist, Well Street, Hackney. It relieved me in two days. I was able to relish some simple food, and it agreed with me. Keeping on with the Syrup the heart trouble and other pains soon abated, and after taking three bottles I was completely cured, *and have never had an ache or a pain since. I can do any kind of work and am strong as ever.* (Signed) Marcus Rickwood, 13, Lauriston Road, South Hackney, London, January 9th, 1895."

You, the reader, will draw the inference. We are all soldiers in the great Army of Humanity, fighting side by side against the same enemies, for the same cause. But, alas! how many are disabled by disease. Look about you and count them. They are more than you can number. And the chief disease—the one that cripples most—is that from which Mr Rickwood suffered—indigestion and dyspepsia. Send for the book he mentions and study the subject. Then, when needful, use the remedy that enabled him once more to report for duty.

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 406. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 10TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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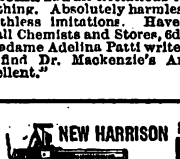

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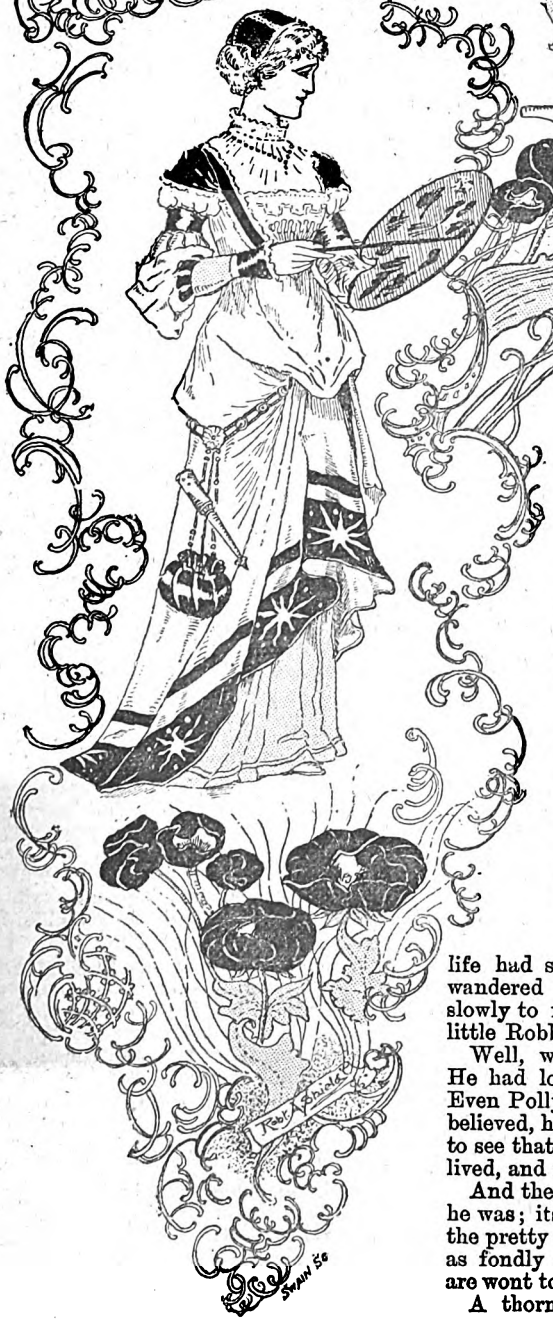
Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 406.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending October 10th, 1896.



SANDY.

A CHEERLESS night out on the desolate Canadian marsh, whose inky pools had a scum of glistening ice upon them, whose unwholesome tufts of damp grass had stiffened in the fierce wind. Not a sound of beast or bird broke the ceaseless monotony of the whistling blast. A treacherous surface-hardening of the spongy ground had come with the frosty night, but woe to the wayfarer who trusted it.

Yet in the half-glimmer of the cloud-darkened moon a figure could have been seen, if you or I had been so unfortunate as to have been there, slowly staggering, ploughing through the slough, breaking through the thin crust of ice, sinking knee-deep in the slime, drawing himself slowly and painfully out, struggling on, falling, lying prone and helpless for a while, then trying again, with the persistency of a drunken man, to make for the lights of the town.

For the man had been drunk, to begin with. But so many immersions in ice-cold water and the struggle for life had sobered him again. He swore at himself for having wandered off the road in such an imbecile way. Then he began slowly to remember what had gone before. His child was dead—little Robbie—and he had shown his grief by getting dead drunk.

Well, what else was there for him—what cheer? what hope? He had loved the little fellow. No one could contradict that. Even Polly, who sneered at him and rated him, and, he verily believed, hated him, would not deny that fact. It was something to see that little golden head lighting up the dingy room where they lived, and now never again.

And the baby loved him, too, the miserable, drunken wretch that he was; its heavenly blue eyes lit up when they rested on him, and the pretty rosebud mouth had learned to form the word "papa," as fondly as if he had sheltered the little treasure as other fathers are wont to do.

A thorn pierced the wretched man's heart with this thought,

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and he stumbled blindly forward. Covered with slime, which dripped from his rags, with wild, haggard face and unkempt hair, he stood at last, faint and worn, by the last wretched house of the town, and stared up at the dim light from one window, which told that the watcher was there.

"I can't face Polly," he muttered, slinking away again, but still lingering about, till a kindly neighbour who had been sitting with his wife, offering those consolations which the poor offer to the poor, came down and saw him.

"Go up, Sandy," she exclaimed, in a half commiserating, half-angry tone. "Go up and comfort your poor wife in this 'ere trying time. I've been a-coaxin' her to take a cup of tea, but not bite or sup has passed her lips this day; and you off carousin'! Shame on you! Have you no heart at all?"

* * * * *

The last brands of a poor fire were burning away on the hearth, and by them sat a woman, slowly rocking herself to and fro in a dull monotony of motion that was half unconscious.

She was wretchedly clad, but her dress was clean and neat. Her dark, handsome face was turned to the fire, and in spite of her grief you could see that her eyes were fine, though they were fixed in a stony stare, that her hair was silken and purplish black, though it was dragged carelessly back from her forehead. She never looked up nor spoke when the door opened and shut. She felt who had come in, and that his great wistful eyes, like those of a beaten hound, were seeking her face anxiously.

And what an object he was for that room, poor as it was! It had been made as clean as its wretchedness would allow, fit for the presence of the Angel of Death. Sandy, looking about helplessly, saw this, and how the muddy water was running down and making dirty puddles on the floor; but he had no other clothes to put on, so he crept nearer to the fire, humbly too, as one who had no right.

At last he could bear the silence no longer, there seemed such a deathly hush in the room, the very hush of death.

"I say, Polly, won't you have a cup of tea now? Mrs. Simmons has left the teapot here I see. I'll take some with you, for I'm soaked through and all of a shiver."

Still no answer.

"Are you hard on me for going off, Polly?" he went on. "I'm a wretched fellow, weak, weak as water. I couldn't stand it, I couldn't, I loved him."

"Yet you murdered him." She was roused now, and turned her flaming eyes upon her husband. "It's too late now to talk, or to cry maudlin' tears over him. His death is on you."

"As how?" faltered Sandy, shivering as with a more deadly chill than the soaking slime could give. "Polly, you're excited, and don't know what you're saying, or you wouldn't be so hard on a cove now."

"Now is the time," the woman went on—"now, when my child lies there dead—dead of want, of cold, of hunger, while you have loitered away your time with your pals and we have starved on the pittance I have earned. Oh, my darling! oh, my Robbie!"

"Not—not starved, Polly," muttered Sandy, his lips quivering. "Don't say starved; you never were without bread."

"Bread! My child needed other things—jellies, beef-tea, chicken, they would have raised him up. Insufficient nourishment, the doctor said."

Sandy groaned.

"Don't pretend that you were ignorant of it," she went on; "I told you weeks ago."

"So you did, Polly, so you did. Oh, what a miserable wretch I am."

The woman turned to the fire again, and began rocking.

"I'll turn over a new leaf now, Polly," the man began looking at her eagerly; "I will, so help me Heaven. I've been thinking it over as I came through the marsh."

She made no sign.

"I'll—I'll kneel down by—by the darling's bed, if you like, and take an oath, that never—never——"

"No, you need not. It makes no difference."

"No difference?"

"No, not to me. I shall not be here to see the reformation. If you stand or fall, it is for yourself now."

"What—what—what can you mean, Polly?" Sandy faltered, turning paler, and shivering more and more.

For the fire had nearly gone out now, and its fitful light fell faintly on the two faces.

"I mean that when my darling is laid in the ground I am going away. I mean that I never wish to see your face again."

Sandy recoiled as if he had been struck a great blow. He gasped a moment, but could not speak.

"Did you think this could go on for ever?" she said more fiercely. "Did you believe that I would let you drag me down lower and lower into the mire, because I was mad and blind enough to think I loved you once? Can you not see that you have killed my love and now you have killed the child?"

"Oh, don't say such cruel words, Polly!" faltered Sandy. "I've—never—never used you bad, have I? Never! I have been weak. I can't stand the temptation of a friendly glass. I've been unlucky, but cruel, never! Why, I never have lifted a hand against you, even when I was dead-drunk. I've loved you always, Polly. I know you're too good for a miserable wretch like me, but if you'll only forgive me this once——"

"I'll never forgive you—never!" she interrupted, the fitful flash of the fire illuminating her handsome face and shining eyes as she spoke. "If you lay dying before me, if it was your last prayer, I would not forgive you."

Sandy then shrank into silence. Big, burly giant that he was, the spirit and fire of the slender little woman had always cowed him. He had no more to say; the unforgiving wrath of Polly's last words could not be answered. He saw that no pleading could avail. No friendly hand would be stretched out to keep him from going to the dogs. In a half-troubled doze he sat there, starting up now and then to see his wife sitting near, motionless, with wide, staring eyes, which burned on tearlessly. And near them lay, in the everlasting peace of death, the little child who belonged to both—the bond that had held together these dissonant souls. How far he was removed from the storms that compassed them, lifted straight out of the dingy room into the sunshine of God's smile into the city of the golden streets and gates of pearl! Ah, it was well with the child; it was well!

Something like these thoughts swept with others through the brain of the dry-eyed woman who kept that dreary vigil. She thought, too, of her own past, of the time when she had invested the wretched object before her, who had sunk into the dead sleep of exhaustion, with ideal charms. His handsome, blonde, innocent face, his

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kindly blue eyes, had won her, spite of the rumours of his habits. She had scorned all warning; she had chosen for herself, and had reaped a harvest of wretchedness ever since.

But the end had come. Thank God! the end had come! She felt no remorse as she thought of it, no sudden tenderness, no faintest remnant of her old love. Her heart was dead. Sometimes her thoughts, as the hours went on, projected themselves into the future. She had some dreams for that, stricken and wretched as she was. She knew that she possessed a voice of purest tone and quality. She would go on the stage; she could make a living that way, once free from the horrible clog that had dragged her down. She would rise; socially and by her education she had always been above him. People had wondered at her choice. Bitterly she wondered at it herself now, as she sat by the fireless hearth.

Poor Sandy woke, shivering still, yet feverishly hot at times, from the heavy sleep into which he had fallen. For day had dawned—a bleak day, with a clouded sun and a breath of frost in it. Some neighbours began to come in. They had collected money among themselves for the poor pine coffin, and one had borrowed a black dress for the mother; but no one troubled himself about Sandy and his rags. They were dry now, and the mud stiffened upon them, as he sat there listening, with half-dazed face, to the minister reading over Robbie, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Better, better for him," thought the wretched man. "If he had lived, he might have got far enough off that place—as far as I am."

But when he heard the coffin-lid screwed on, he could bear it no longer, but slunk away out of the room, out into the desolate country, where he stayed all day.

And the child was laid in its last resting-place. The sky looked leaden above, and the ground frost-blackened below, when the broken blossom was laid there; and the wretched mother did not look beyond, did not remember that the flower was but transplanted to the garden of the Lord.

She turned away hurriedly at last, and, with feverish haste, reached the room that she had called home. She declined all kindly invitations from pitying neighbours. She was going away for a while—to friends, she said with a faint and bitter smile.

The poor bundle of clothes was soon made up, the black dress returned to its owner, and the woman looked about the wretched room, and bade it farewell for ever. That part of her life was finished, and the "amen" said. She would forget that she had ever married. Ah, could she forget Robbie? She found a broken plaything that had belonged to him, and kissed it passionately. Then she saw his little, worn shoes. Oh, worn and poor they were, for he had never had but that pair, and her tears burst forth! But she took no memento of him but the little golden curl she had cut from his dead brow, and so she went out beneath the sunless sky, and into the frosty air.

Three years had passed, and brought the same season again; this time a white earth, robed as in costly ermine, decked with diamond coronets, lay beneath a sky of cloudless blue. Through the white streets of the city sleighs of all forms and colours flew like birds, and the bells rang a ceaseless chime. The urchins who had no sleds watched the others with hungry eyes. Some, with artistic longings, were devouring the bills at the door of a concert-room.

"Stunnin' singer, you bet, Joe," said one. "A lady as mother washes for guv her a ticket, and she hain't time to go, and I'm goin' instead. My eyes, won't it be a lark, for I've twopence halfpenny for oranges, too!"

"Ho!" returned one cynically, who had no chance of admission to this paradise, and so naturally derided it, "kin she sing, 'Carry the news to Mary,' or 'The Prairie Flower,' ekil to that gal in Slimmin's Saloon? Wot's her name, now? Jest spell it out, if ye kin. Ought to be boiled, it's so tough."

But the other read it, with a feeling of great educational superiority, "Madame Pauline Montmorency. First appearance in M——. The great cantatrice."

"Stop," interrupted the other. "Wot's that, now?"

The reader was "stumped," as they say in college.

"I've seen," said the questioner thoughtfully, "something like that word. Won't swear 'twas the werry same, but it meant some wenomous reptile. Do you think she brings it with her?"

"Oh, cork up, youngster!" cried the other boy; "she's a singer. That 'ere word means a singer."

While this discussion took place, a sleigh like a sea-shell, pale green with crimson lining, glided by, but the boys who stared at it had no idea that it contained the great singer herself. Yes, wrapped in sable and velvet, with handsome tiger-skin over her knees, came Madame Pauline Montmorency herself, looking keenly about her yet with little human interest in her eyes, on the town she had left on foot three years ago.

The gorgeous splendour of this diamond day, and the cold wan dreariness of that, were as much in contrast as her life.

With a sigh, which was for the little grave which she knew was piled high with snow-drifts now, Polly dismounted at the door of the hotel where she was to stay, and walked up to its best rooms, which had been assigned her.

They were very pleasant, too, Pauline thought, as she looked into the pretty parlour, with its velvet carpets and lace curtains, and the beautiful flowers that filled the vases. People had already sent bouquets to greet her.

She sat down in the great arm-chair before the blazing fire with a sense of comfort stealing over her. She had accepted the invitation from M—— with some hesitation. It stirred up the ghosts of the past unpleasantly. Not that she ever forgot. Oh, no! in her greatest triumphs she never had been able to forget. In the glow of lights, with musical laughter about her, how often, as at a wizard's touch, all had floated away, and instead arose a vision of that bare and wretched room with Sandy's weak handsome face and her dear boy! Or, more wretched still, the tiny grave in the frost-blackened earth.

She had come partly to put a gravestone to that little, neglected grave, and to engage someone to keep it neatly—to plant flowers on it when the time came. As for Sandy, he had drunk himself to death long ago. There was no doubt of that. And she grew impatient that her thoughts would linger unpleasantly about that imaginary death-bed with no friend near; or was it a death-bed at all, and not a more wretched death upon a desolate marsh, frozen by insensible degrees, or some blind fall, that had dashed life out of him? Ah, she was glad she had been spared that sight. She would hear something, probably, before she left M——.

She started uneasily, though, and began to lay out her dress for the evening. It was the softest tulle—like a summer cloud with endless flutterings. She wore it

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with coral of the palest rose tint, and she knew she was beautiful in it. No one would recognise in her the worn and haggard woman who had gone away in a faded print dress. Of course, no one had known her then. Now all delighted to do her honour.

Of course, Sandy would have known her, if he had been living. She had quite decided that he was dead. In any guise he must have known her, but——

Well, who could be knocking now? The manager, perhaps, or someone from him. The trim servant-maid opens the parlour door, and Pauline goes in expectantly.

"A gentle—a—a—man," she murmured, hesitating about the term.

And Pauline, looking at her wonderingly, sees behind her the face of Sandy!

Well, it was not so very wonderful that she should see it here. She might have expected it. Yet she started back as if she had seen a ghost, for she had so resolutely believed him dead. He, meanwhile, stood dazzled at her splendour, at her rich dress with its costly lace, at the banded satin-smooth braids of her splendid hair, at her glowing beauty, that outshone all. Very, very humbly, he stood there, not offering to come forward, not expecting any greeting, only devoured with a great longing to see her once more. He had put on his best, too—a homely suit, but not ragged. His face, paler and thinner, was handsome still, but the old dissipation told on his trembling lips and nervous hands, the results of the past.

"Why—why, Polly!" he ejaculated.

"What brought you here?" she asked sharply. "How did you find me out?"

"I watched for you," he answered simply. "I found out long ago that you were my Polly and I've been reading papers and hearing of you. When I knew you were coming I hung about and learned all I could. You might have seen me at the door of the hotel when you came up, if you had looked."

"And what was your object in watching for me?" she inquired, in a cold, indifferent voice.

"Object? Well"—the pale face flushed—"I reckon it is to see you again—just to see you again. You won't understand that, Polly?"

"No, I do not understand it," she answered, with decision. "As I had left you for ever—as I never wished to see your face again—I cannot understand it."

Sandy stood still just where he was when he entered the room—he made no further advance into it, but looked at his wife with a silent wondering gaze. Was this the fond young girl he had married—who had defied her friends for him? or was it all a dream? It seemed so now. He rubbed his eyes and looked at her, half-buried in the crimson velvet depths of the arm-chair, with one white hand, sparkling with rings, resting on the arm of it, and her cold, shining eyes fixed on his face.

"Well," he hesitated, "I had one more object in coming. I thought you might care to hear it—that it might make a difference. I have not tasted a drop of liquor since little Robbie was buried."

"Ah! I am glad for your sake to hear it."

But the face did not change beneath Sandy's eager look.

"Only for my sake, Polly?" he asked.

"Only for your sake," she echoed. "It can make no difference to me—none."

Sandy's face fell. He looked at the floor. His hopes were so utterly dashed. He had lived all these years with the fond belief that his struggle and victory would be rewarded one day. It had been hard, too—a hand-to-hand fight with the powers of darkness—and he had been proud of his success. Now it proved all in vain. The pretty little home he had imagined—the handsome face he had pictured at his hearth, all vanished, leaving not a vestige. A whirling chaos swallowed up all, and Sandy's brain seemed whirling away, too.

He snatched at the nearest chair to steady himself, for the solid earth beneath seemed heaving under his feet.

"I was mortal sick after you left me, Polly—at death's door, with a long fever. The neighbours were good, too; but I had many a lonely, weary hour, that put me back a long time; but when I was well I got work. I am not very gifted, Polly; but now that I am steady I make enough. You should never suffer again. I know a nice little cottage—white, Polly, with roses over it in the summer. If you could overlook the past. I've never ceased to love you—never."

It was a long speech made with much hesitation, and Sandy seemed to hear his heart beat like a muffled drum while he was speaking. He knew that the law gave him the right to compel this beautiful woman to go with him, but he never thought of compulsion. If she would not go of her own free will, why, then, he must go on his way alone.

He saw his answer in her face before she spoke.

"If you offered me a palace instead of the white cottage," she answered, looking calmly at him, "it would be all the same. You can never be anything to me again. I told you that dreadful night that you had killed my love. There is no resurrection for a dead love; do you know that?"

"I—I think I understand you, Polly," answered the poor fellow. "You were always cleverer than me, and grander in your language; but I gather your meaning, although there is such a buzzing in my head. Don't be afraid. I'll go away quietly, now I've got my answer. No one knows that you're my wife, and I'll not make them any wiser. Good-bye."

"I'm glad you take so rational a view of things," Pauline answered. "Good-bye."

And the slow, heavy step echoed along the hall, showing in its sound a heavy heart.

And Polly turned back to the pretty white dress, with its vaporous folds, with a shiver, as if her coldness had made the very air chilly. The dress looked like a shroud.

But that night, in the lighted hall, the glow had come back again. Her cheeks and lips were like her coral ornaments. Her voice soared up clear and sweet as a bird's; flowers fell around her, cheers rang about her, and the triumph seemed to sweep away every vestige of the dull pain which had been gnawing at her heart.

To go back to that poor, dull life, it would have been madness. To put aside the full, sparkling draught of flattery, which had become the wine of life to her, for the common drink of water. No; even if Sandy did all he promised, she could not be content. And then he was so weak—who knew that he would not fall again?

Yet, somehow, when the songs were over, and the surging crowd had poured out into the street, and she was wrapping the furs about her in her sleigh, the plaintive voice and simple words echoed on in her brain, instead of the cheers of the crowd. She had just seated herself, and the driver was helping to tuck in the warm robes, when some street boys, who had waited to see the last of the songstress, set up some unearthly yells, meant

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for cheers. The horses did not so understand them, but started at once, frantically, and dashed off with Pauline, alone.

For a moment she did not comprehend, and then she saw the danger. The reins were dragging on the ground; she could not reach them. Madly they flew by the houses, over the white, shining streets, on, on, while Pauline, with white lips, murmured a prayer. She did not dare to jump. She sat still, trembling convulsively, for she felt that she was dashing straight on to her death.

The town had grown since she had left it, and improvements were being made all the time. The frightened horses were making straight for an embankment now, and one plunge there would be fatal. Pauline did not know how near death was to her, but her frantic shrieks had brought many out, who tried to stop the horses in vain.

At last, almost on the dizzy verge of the embankment, one man, plunging through the snow, caught the reins, and hung on them. He was dragged a few paces. He fell on his knees, but still he held on.

The sleigh was stopped. Kind-hearted ones pressed around. There were a hundred helpers now.

Pauline stepped out, dizzy and faint.

"Where is he?" she asked. "The man who saved me."

"Oh, he is all right," answered a gallant gentleman. "You must think of yourself now, madame, after such a shock to your nerves."

"No. I cannot go home without thanking my deliverer. I think he is not all right. I believe he was hurt."

Some inquiry was made in the crowd. Yes, the man had been hurt a bit. Tim Sanders had helped him into the store yonder.

So Pauline made her way into the "store yonder." She looked around as she entered, for some men stood there talking, and she saw no one else. She was recognised, however, and her object divined.

"He's in a room within," said the proprietor. "I've had him made comfortable, and sent for the doctor, but I fear he's mortal bad hurt."

Pauline went through the open door, feeling sick and faint. Someone hurt in saving her! Oh, how terrible! —with wife and children, perhaps, to be left alone in desolation. Ah, her life was not worth so much—she who had no one to leave. But she must see the poor man, and do what she could.

The room was neat and comfortable, a white bed stood in the corner, and on a table near a light threw a ray upon that bed and its occupant. A woman stood near, bending over him. She looked up as Pauline entered, with a surprised air.

"I am the lady whose life he saved," she said simply.

Then, with a glance at the injured man's ghastly face, with the pain convulsing it, she shrieked, ran forward, and knelt beside the bed.

"Oh, Sandy," she cried, "did you do it for me? Oh, I have not deserved it—I have not deserved it."

"Polly, I am glad," he said, a smile chasing away the pain in his face, and a look of content shining in his childish blue eyes—"I am glad God let me do some good thing before I died—glad that He let me do it for you. You'll forgive me now, Polly, all the evil things I ever did before—won't you, Polly?"

"Oh, Sandy, forgive me. I am the one who needs it I have been so cold and hard."

"You know you said, Polly"—he spoke slowly and with effort—"you said that night, 'I'll never forgive you, if it was your last prayer, if you lay dying before me, I would not do it!' These words have haunted me, Polly; and now——"

"Impious wretch that I was to speak them," Pauline cried, seizing the hand of Sandy, and covering it with kisses and tears. "Only get well, dear, and we will have that white cottage and the roses, and forget all the bitterness of the past."

"Ah!"—what a look of such longing came over the still handsome face!—"it can't be. Maybe, it would not last if it could come. You know me of old, Polly; you could never trust me. God is doing the best for us both to take me away now, before I have broken my vow, and fallen away from His Grace."

Silence for a moment, while Pauline hid her face in her hands.

"How did you come to be there, Sandy?" she said at last.

"Well," answered Sandy slowly, as if to recollect was an effort, "I went in to hear you sing. Yes, I saw you, Polly, beautiful as an angel in that white dress, and your voice—well, I'd heard it often before, when you sung little Robbie to sleep, but never like to-night. It stung me to the heart, it was so beautiful, and I could not bear the great pain of it, and so went out and wandered about the streets in a sort of aimless way, till I heard a great hue and cry, and saw you, my Polly—I knew the sleigh I had watched bringing you to the hotel —dashing by at that mad pace; and my heart gave a great leap, for I knew the embankment was so near. I think God led me to that very spot. I think He meant me to save you, dear."

"And the hurt, Sandy? Oh! why doesn't the doctor come?"

"Ah!"—in pain; the words came slowly—"the horse kicked me in the breast. I can scarcely breathe now. Do not worry for the doctor. He can do no good."

Pauline sat there a moment, thinking of the man's true heart and constant love. He had counted for so little in the times past. He seemed so great now. How coldly, a few hours ago, had she cast them away, trampling on her vows before God and man at the same time! For had she not vowed to cleave unto him, "for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer, till death us do part?" Ah, the memory of that broken vow would haunt her for ever. She had cast him away, and he had laid down his life for her.

"Sandy," she whispered, for his eyes were closed, "it has all been wrong. I should have stayed with you, and tried to help you to do right. I hope God will forgive me. I think I can never forgive myself."

"Never mind, Polly," murmured the dying man. "He has made it all right now. I was a miserable wretch. I'm glad He gave me grace to do better, and He did not let me fall. What, is that Robbie? Why he's dressed in white, Polly, as you were dressed to-night—all in white——"

And with his vision of beauty, poor Sandy's eyes closed on every earthly sight for ever.

ARNOLD WEEVIL.

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A CREATION OF SOCIETY.

Only the dull glow from the night lamp and a flickering fire lighted the room; grotesque little shadows played about the big chair pulled close to the hearth, and on the motionless figure of a woman, half sitting, half lying in it. She had been in bed, evidently, for a higher flame lighted a corner of the room for an instant and gleamed on a brass bed, the dented pillows and tossed coverings. The increased light roused her; she thrust out one foot in its furred shoe towards the flames and clasped her hands at the back of her head.

Her thoughts were following each other rapidly. If only she could sleep; she was exhausted enough, too, heaven knew, but in bed her brain worked so she could not keep still. How she had danced to-night. Her popularity did not decrease, men wanted her dances as much as—more than—when she made her *début* five years ago. One learned a deal in that time and changed—for the better. How stupid of Chester to go away; she missed him, had grown to depend upon him—one could do that; he was honest to a fault.

He was not particularly brilliant, epigram and repartee were not within his possibilities, but he inspired a sense of security one had not with any other man. Almost six months since he went away; surely he might come back. She might not want to marry him, but neither did she wish to lose him. Ah, she would ask him to come to the house-party in Scotland at Christmas; why had she not thought of that before? She wanted to see him; perhaps things would be different now.

She sprang out of the chair, and making a light at the desk, wrote rapidly:

Chester, dear man, come up to the North and spend Christmas with us, won't you? We shall open the place for a week and take some people with us; it is so long since we saw you—come! We were all at a dance to-night, at the Brayleighs', and every one spoke of you. Some think you are dead, but I said you were only in Paris; you must come to verify me! Don't fail when I want you, will you? Georgine.

She sealed and directed the envelope, and sat a moment thinking again. Was she doing right? She should be sorry to hurt him, but there was no harm in asking him; possibly he would not come, yet in her innermost consciousness she knew he would. The clock chimed 4.30, and impatiently she turned off the light and crept into bed.

* * * * *

High on the hill, now in sight and again hidden by great hemlock trees, was the house to which he had been bidden—bidden indeed, the man thought, in her pretty, impulsive fashion. Was he a fool to come, he wondered? How little or how much had the invitation meant? He wished she had come to meet him, but instead there had been sent a message! She had had a bad headache all day, but would be downstairs when he came. There would be a lot of other people, too, he supposed; he wanted only her!

The dog-cart stopped and simultaneously the door opened, letting out a flood of light, and Miss Cranston crossed the threshold.

"Is it you, Chester?" she called.

The man sprang up the steps and clasped her hand in his.

"Georgine!"

"Did you think we were unkind not to meet you? Everyone else is off skating, and I have not been well. John found your luggage? Well, and how are you; it is so good to see you again!"

"Really, dear?"

"Really, Chester. You are most welcome. Come to the fire and get warm, your hands are cold and your face glows so!"

Two terriers were playing on the hearth in an abandonment of puppy joy, but the man saw only the woman beside him and felt the warmth of his welcome more than that of the fire. Was it real? Not one of those creations of his brain that had deluded him before. But the hands he held were firm and warm, and Miss Cranston's voice as she spoke again had the *timbre* that haunted him always.

"There, are you getting warm?" she asked. "It is a long drive from the station and dull, too, alone. I will go with you when you leave. But we won't speak of that now, shall we? I want you to stay."

"My staying is in your hands," he said seriously.

She spread out her hands and looked at them critically.

"Not large, are they, but the matter is: I cannot grapple with it!"

"Yes, there is more power in your two little fingers than any other woman's ten!"

"Do not let us talk figuratively"—Miss Cranston rose from the settee she had occupied—"one is so apt to mix metaphors and become ridiculous." She touched a bell. "Prentiss will show you your room. We dine at 7.30, but come down early. I am so very, very glad you have come, Chester!"

Miss Cranston's guests became much interested in her personal affairs—rather, affair! That she was the absorbing interest in Guthrie's life they knew, but not why she did not marry him—though that was no fault of theirs. But Miss Cranston had no dear friend with whom she shared her innermost being, and when questioned had a way of looking uncomprehending a moment and then of turning the conversation, that effectually baffled the most energetic seeker for knowledge.

Whether she meant now to marry Guthrie was uncertain; it was said she was likely to do a thing because it was the unexpected, and so consistent was her inconsistency that for the same reason she might do the ordinarily expected.

After dinner the night before Christmas, as they were leaving for a supper at an inn among the hills, Miss Cranston took one of the ladies aside a moment.

"I want you to start without me, Jane, for I have been detained. I shall keep Chester with me and join you in an hour. Please go, and before you miss us we shall be with you, shall we not, Chester?" she said, turning to the man who had come over to them.

"Whenever you like," he said gravely.

"You don't mind not being with them?" the woman asked, as they watched the departing vehicles. "I am going first with some presents for a little child. Her father has worked on the place for years, and she is my namesake—a dear little thing! I tried to go to-day, but was prevented, and to-morrow would not be Christmas for her without a full stocking. Here is Jane now with the parcels, and John will bring the trap round at once; we shall not be far behind the others."

"You know I would rather be with you, Georgine; what are the others to me?"

"They are clever, charming people, Chester."

"Your friends would be, dear, but they are not you."

"No, I am—I, worse luck! Are the parcels well stowed in, John? Then we are ready."

The man stood back, and the horses started at a sharp trot that took all Guthrie's attention for a few minutes. The road wound through the woods, but showed clearly in the bright moonlight that filtered through the trees.

"Georgine."

"Yes!"

"I must go back the day after to-morrow!"

"Oh, I wish you would not! Must you, Chester?"

"That is for you to decide, dear."

The snow creaked beneath the horse's hoofs, and the vehicle sped smoothly along for an indefinite time, it seemed to Guthrie, before Miss Cranston spoke:

"I understand, of course, but—I—I cannot, Chester."

"Is it impossible, dear?"

"I have tried so hard to make it possible; you do not know! I care for you so, dear, but not that way!"

"How is it?"

"I love you dearly, Chester, and I respect you—that sounds odd, does it not, 'respect'?" She gave a hard little laugh; "the word is nearly obselete; *fin de siècle* has taken its place!"

"Georgine!"

"Have I shocked you? Forgive me. But you do not begin to know me, Chester. There is a part of my nature that is never called out with you. You are honest and good, my dear; cynicism and scepticism have no part in your being, and, except the influence you have over me, I am nothing else!"

"Admitting that to be true, dear, which I do not, you might change if you would let me help you."

"I am afraid to. Your standards and ideals are too high, Chester; they are beyond me, and I am——"

"The best woman on earth!"

"That is just it!" she exclaimed. "You have idealised me. It is what you think I am that you love, not what I know myself to be. I am not speaking lightly, Chester; there is no one in the world that knows herself better than I."

"How can you, Georgine? It is awful to hear a woman talk so!"

"I suppose it does sound terrible; that is why we keep our thoughts to ourselves!"

The man leant down and kissed her gently.

"You have just proved yourself honest and good, dear; it is your surroundings that are not healthy. Get away from them!"

Miss Cranston laughed drearily.

"I have lived so long in them that I could not exist in any other. The atmosphere is a subtle poison that stimulates, and as it does, one drinks in larger quantities. I wish I were a weepy woman, Chester; I should love to cry now, but somehow I never can! I am glad my last evening alone with you is so beautiful. You will go away the day after to-morrow, and the next time we meet everything will be different. Next spring I shall drive through here with someone not at all like you, Chester. Other men seem to have unbounded belief in their own cleverness, and our conversation will undoubtedly be repartee, which sounds well and means nothing. It will enervate one's mind as the spring weather does one's muscles. I—I believe there are tears in my eyes, Chester. Fancy! One might think I had a heart instead of only an organ that pumps blood! Tears make one's eyes red, don't they? It is so long since I cried that really I have forgotten! Don't use the horses with the whip, dear; they will not stand it! I wish I did not care so much for you, Chester; why did you make me honour and respect you? Perhaps I might have loved you otherwise—as other women love!"

"I do not want love without honour and respect," the man said sternly.

"No, I know you do not; that is why I give them. That is arguing in a circle, is it not? Perhaps some time I shall love some man without those; women can do strange things. I believe I shall try! It would be novel and interesting, perhaps, and so few things are that. I tried smoking, but it left such a rank odour in one's hair and clothes; and I went to a gay supper once where the women drank quantities of champagne, and I poured mine on the floor. *Chester!*"

The whip had fallen with a stinging lash across the horses' backs, and with a bound that nearly tore the reins from the man's hands they sprang forward beyond control.

The woman spoke again quietly as though nothing unusual was happening:

"The road is on a cliff, Chester, and just above it turns sharply. We shall probably go over there; it is rocky below!"

But the man's strength was concentrated in an effort to pull in the animals, and he made no answer.

"If only we can be killed and not horribly injured! There—there is the turn!" Miss Cranston said, still with the same manner.

"Jump!" the man said. "It is death to go over!" He dropped the reins and tore back the rug from her knees to leave her free, but she only looked at him and smiled, though her pallor was ghastly.

"Perhaps not," she whispered. "And what does it matter?"

With a plunge the horses went over, dragging the trap with them.

The searching party found them the next morning. The woman was huddled face down. Her neck was broken, they said afterwards. The man's left arm was about her waist and the other was stretched out as though to ward off a blow. His face was drawn and strained, but hers was perfectly serene.

Death is sometimes easier than life. B. S. R.

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The Mines of Mars.

LUCIEN was hungry. He looked with sick-hearted envy at the crowd of comfortably dressed people turning the corner of the Strand and Trafalgar Square, and wondered if any individual there had ever known, or would ever sink, to his level of destitution. Two months before he too, well dressed and indifferent to misery as any of them, had turned here nightly on his way home. Two months! It seemed more like two centuries since he had known the taste of food.

He walked on for a short distance in an aimless way, stopping now and then to hug a lamp-post in front of a restaurant and eye, with wolfish desire, the contents of the window, the sight of the viands almost maddening him. He decided that he must beg or die.

Driven by that terrible gnawing pain within him, he made two or three unheeded efforts to induce someone to take pity on him. Then he backed into a narrow doorway, and watched for some face which looked benevolent enough to encourage an application to its owner.

"I shall be found here in the morning, dead," he murmured.

Something over his head creaked as if in answer to his words. Looking up he saw a sign, suspended over the door, bearing two words: "Harold, Clairvoyant."

"Clairvoyant," muttered the beggar. "They make money—they find food and a bed by clairvoyance. I have always had that gift, and have amused many a room-full of people with it. It was not respectable in my eyes to use it for money though," he added bitterly. "I would try it gladly now in exchange for a crust."

A hand fell on his shoulder.

"I have heard what you have spoken," said a voice in English but with a strong foreign accent. "If it is true that you have clairvoyant powers and are starving, it is well for me. I need you."

Lucien's heart gave a bound. Whoever needed him would feed him. He looked eagerly at the speaker.

He was a tall, thin man, dressed in black. He had a pale, severe face, and light, hard eyes. His moustache and hair were black as ink, and his expression was resolute and cold.

"The service must be done fasting," continued the stranger. "But do not look so cast down. It will be brief, and you will feel nothing while you are engaged upon it. Meat, wine, and clothing for an hour's use of your clairvoyant faculty, and beyond that money to start you in a way to live. Come or stay."

The stranger started to go. The desperate man in the doorway made an effort to follow.

"Not so fast!" he cried, and the stranger paused, and gave him his arm.

"You seem to be very weak," remarked the latter, with an appearance of satisfaction.

"Weak! What day is this?" asked Lucien.

"Saturday."

"Well, since Wednesday I have not eaten, and then only——"

"Good! No meat then, I hope?"

"No. Only a roll and some tea."

"Better! When did you last eat meat?"

"I cannot remember."

"Best of all."

In a few minutes the two entered a tram-car. Lucien did not know the locality in which they alighted. The stranger led him a short distance and halted before a dark, tall building at a corner, entered a narrow door by means of a key, and proceeded to ascend the stairs. Lucien followed him, more than once compelled by weakness to sit down for rest, while his companion waited impatiently. The place appeared deserted save for themselves, silent but for the sound of their footsteps, and it was so dark they had to feel their way. They reached the top floor at last, and the stranger led his companion into a room dimly lighted with gas, and shut the door.

The room faced the east and had on that side an unsashed window reaching from the floor to the middle of the ceiling, commanding the heavens from horizon to zenith. In front of this window was mounted a small telescope, which was converted into a peculiar instrument by a globe a foot in diameter attached to its eye-piece. This globe was apparently of copper, covered with glass. An electrical apparatus occupied a shelf on the right of the window, and seven wires extending from this pierced in a semi-circle the upper side of the globe.

The arrangement of the wires in the interior was, of course, invisible, but a thick wire emerged from an aperture in the lower side of the globe, extended a

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few inches in a straight line, and was then unravelled. Its seven strands were each about six inches in length, and were arranged in a sort of claw-shaped cluster, the tips pointing downwards and each encased in a reddish opaque bulb.

The stranger removed the globe, carefully adjusted the telescope to bear upon some celestial object, and set in motion a mechanical contrivance intended to maintain, by a clockwork movement, the focus of the instrument. Then, after replacing the globe, he manipulated for an instant the electrical apparatus, and by a series of springs closed the window aperture with outside shutters of wood that were so constructed as to leave a slit for the path of the telescope. Then he turned out the gas.

For a moment the room was entirely dark. Then about the claw of wire appeared a light, so dim as to be scarcely visible. Slowly, very slowly, this brightened. Seven red points were seen glimmering like stars of the 13th magnitude, gradually expanding till they resembled those of the first. Brighter and brighter became the light. The points glowed like spots of fire.

"That light is the light of Mars," said the stranger. "Now, it is not my intention to enter into long explanations, which circumstances do not require. It will suffice if I say that it is my conviction that light is a fluid which contains the essences of those things that have been steeped in it. Investigation has taught me that just as the primitive rays of light differ in their degrees of luminosity and their temperature, so they do in their power of absorbing the principles of those things which do not absorb them. The red ray possesses this quality in the highest degree. The great preponderance of this ray in the light of Mars directed me to the clairvoyant study of that planet. I have managed to isolate the red ray in his light, and also to concentrate it to such a degree that it is to a clairvoyant of any power an open book.

"Certain things have been revealed to me by the aura of the planet, but it is my wish to verify my observations. In my clairvoyance, the perceptive faculties alone are emancipated from bodily thrall; but I should be a poor psychometrist if I did not recognise in you one whose entire intelligent self can be projected to any distance. Will, reason, conscience, and perception are all exercised. For years I have sought a helper like you—one both highly gifted and desperate. I know you are in acute distress, and will spare you further talk; we shall proceed at once to business. What I wish you to do is to place yourself in this chair, and travel in spirit those light beams—to go to Mars, and to remember what you see there."

"I hunger," murmured Lucien. "Bread!"

"If you were to eat now your usefulness might be destroyed. The animal forces which have to be overcome in an experiment of this kind are in you extremely enfeebled by starvation. Do you not know why the prophets of old time fasted before they attempted to commune with superior powers?"

Lucien yielded. He dragged himself to a chair, so placed that when he was seated in it the circle of lights was before and slightly above his eyes. The light of Mars streamed over the emaciated face of the beggar. The grim stranger stood with his hand stretched out towards Lucien and waited.

As easily as we step from one room to another, swiftly as the soul passes from time to eternity, the intelligent part of Lucien passed over a scarlet path to a new land—a land with vegetation of soft rosy colour, and skies of pale gold and emerald. A land where the pyramid seemed to be nature's ideal of form, all vegetation striving to reach it, from the seeds on the moss-like grass to trees of wondrous stature. The clairvoyant perceived that even roots took this form. He saw no animals. He travelled inconceivable distances in a second of time, and observed, with the perspicuity of the bodiless, many mysterious things. He saw great cities in which there were moving objects that looked like people walking. He found it impossible to approach these places, for some invisible cause prevented, and he could make no more progress against it than an insect can against a gale of wind.

Finally, after many of these failures, he saw in the distance a place where building seemed to be going on and a host of shining creatures moved busily about. Lucien endeavoured to draw near, and succeeded. In fact, the force that had before impeded, now gently impelled him forward.

A cluster of enormous buildings lay in the centre of a plain. The body of each house resembled a great cylinder lying upon the ground. Graceful projections and airy ornaments gave many of them the appearance of stupendously large brilliant insects. Others were of cylinders so combined as to present geometrical figures, the triangle being especially prominent. The buildings were all of a luminous rock, thickly studded with glittering points of light. Lucien was dazzled by their magnificence and their harmonious but mighty proportions. The plain was bordered on two sides by wide streams of opalescent liquid, flowing in straight lines parallel to each other, towards regions unexplored by Lucien.

In one spot many beings were busy with the erection of a building that promised to be grander than any of the others. Lucien was amazed to see that the inhabitants were much like men in form, but finer. The difference consisted in a superior delicacy and symmetry of form, an increase in the size of the head and of the brightness of the eyes. They had no hair, but their heads were enveloped in a soft yellow radiance like the halos of saints. Every form was enrobed in a network of cobweb-like threads of fiery brightness, which proceeded from the radiant head-covering, and was the only raiment. Lucien could not tell whether this was an emanation or an overshadowing light, but it awed him so that he felt great fear when one of the beings, who appeared to be the director of the work at the building, approached him.

"Be not afraid," said this person, in a sweet voice. Lucien felt his fear dispelled, and his amazement was increased.

"Do you speak Earth's language here?" he asked.

"I am of the seventh order," replied the Martian, "and your method of communicating with others must be known to me. Welcome, man! You are the only visitor your planet has sent us in 5,000 of its years. The last from there spake in this tongue."

He repeated some words unintelligible to Lucien, although the latter knew Sanskrit, Hebrew, ancient Greek, and many modern languages.

"I was governor here then, but was only of the sixth order. The visitor, who was of the ninth, left an inscription here which I hope to comprehend after my next promotion. He passed on to one of the outer stars."

The Martian led Lucien to a spot where the wall of one of the buildings was smooth, and showed him two

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words written there with grey pigment. Lucien could not read the words, but he remembered that he had once seen writing like it on a tablet supposed to be of antediluvian date.

His awe returned. "Who could the writer have been?" he said to himself, "and what place is this?"

The last question was instantly answered by his companion. "This is the Hall of Beginning," said he. "Those enrolled here are of the first, or birth, order."

"It seems, then, that there are births here, though not deaths," soliloquised Lucien.

The Martian smiled. For the first time it was borne in upon Lucien's mind that between his conductor and the busy creatures about him was a vast difference. He was grander than they, and the halo about his head burnt with a white lustre.

The Martain did not interrupt these thoughts. Lucien noticed that from time to time his companion turned his face towards some portion of the group of workers, and the radiance over his head deepened, while a sort of flash passed over the delicate covering of his body. This was always followed by the manifestation of new activity by those builders towards whom the attention of the director had been turned. This indicated to Lucien that spoken language was not used for the communication of thought. Other observations convinced him that most of the faculties indispensable to man were superseded by higher powers known to the Martians.

The work in progress was most interesting to Lucien. Some of the workmen were moulding transparent cement into great blocks that looked like concave-convex lenses. Others covered the surface of these blocks with shining dust. Still others dug great gleaming pebbles out of the ground, which were quickly polished and set in the blocks in patterns. The speedy drying of the cement held them firmly in place.

"What are those beautiful bright stones?" asked the visitor.

"In your world they are called diamonds," answered the Martian.

This reply so excited the man, that he lost his self-control. The shining landscape seemed to recede, and he himself to slip down an inclined plane of light to an incredible depth.

"Gently, gently!" said a cold voice in his ear. "Do not struggle so. Now sit up and tell what you have seen."

The clairvoyant stared wildly. With the return of bodily consciousness came pain and weakness like that of the approach of death. The inexorable face of the strange man was close to his own, and its expression destroyed all hope that his misery would be relieved till after the last command was obeyed, and Lucien complied.

"The stones are there, then?" exclaimed the stranger. "It was no mere dream of mine."

He paced the floor with an appearance of great excitement—the first that he had shown. The other man, crouched beside the chair, looked at his employer and trembled. Suppose the man should not keep his word, but should turn him out in the night to die? His head swam and the floor seemed to undulate before his eyes at this thought.

"My friend," said the stranger, stopping suddenly, "your work is but half done. You must return again to Mars."

"Not now," said the other, trembling still more violently. "To-morrow—any time you choose, but not to-night. I could not live to return. If you are a man with a soul, give me food and let me rest."

The voice of the clairvoyant had sunk to a feeble whisper. For a moment the stranger seemed to hesitate, and he regarded Lucien with a gaze in which anxiety mingled with annoyance. But this indecision soon passed.

"There is no time like the present," he said resolutely. "Go again to the master of the Hall of Beginning. Beseech him to enable you, by means of this superhuman power, to bring a handful of those shining stones to the earth for the use of one in need of means for a holy purpose. Go!"

Once more Lucien obeyed. It was harder than before to bring his faculties into obedience, and when started upon that road of light, passage was more difficult. But at last he reached the building beside the diamond mine. The builders were at rest under a pyramidical tree. They looked like green flies upon the red turf. The master stood by the old, old inscription written by the man from the earth, and seemed to study it.

He smiled upon Lucien. "So you have come to put on the vestments cast off by him who has just been promoted. Welcome!"

He pointed to what would be called on earth the corpse of a man. It was lying cold and white upon the ground. Its halo was gone and its golden garment.

Lucien understood. His unhampered intelligence had learned far, far more about that world than has ever been told. The opportunity opened before him, like the door of a refuge from want and care. It offered not death, but life in a land where selfish labour was ignoble, where all toiled for the good of all.

"Gladly, oh, master, will I come!" murmured Lucien.

All the sorrows he had endured were forgotten, the hardness born of his trials passed away, his heart was soft, even towards the unfeeling man who waited for him afar off.

"There is one who sent me here for a purpose," he said to the Martian.

"It is known to me," replied the latter. "His wish is not altogether selfish. Let him have his desire."

* * * * *

The strange, dark man waited impatiently for the return of his messenger. Long, long he waited. Once the emaciated form in the chair stirred slightly, but settled again, immediately, into a stillness like that of death.

"Suppose he should be dead, poor wretch," said the man to himself, his face blanching.

The thought returned again and again. Fear grew upon the man. Hastily disconnecting his apparatus, he opened the window, admitting the light of the rising moon, and the bracing night air, turned the face of the clairvoyant towards it, and put milk mingled with wine to the pallid lips. Lucien moved no more.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the man. "He is dead!"

It was even so. The body was already growing cold.

For a moment the stranger trembled. Then his habitual nerve seemed to return. He moved the corpse in order to arrange it decently, and as he did this, some objects fell from its hands to the floor. The rays of the moon streaming in fell upon seven great white pebbles, and were reflected with indescribable splendour.

SHENLEY PARR.

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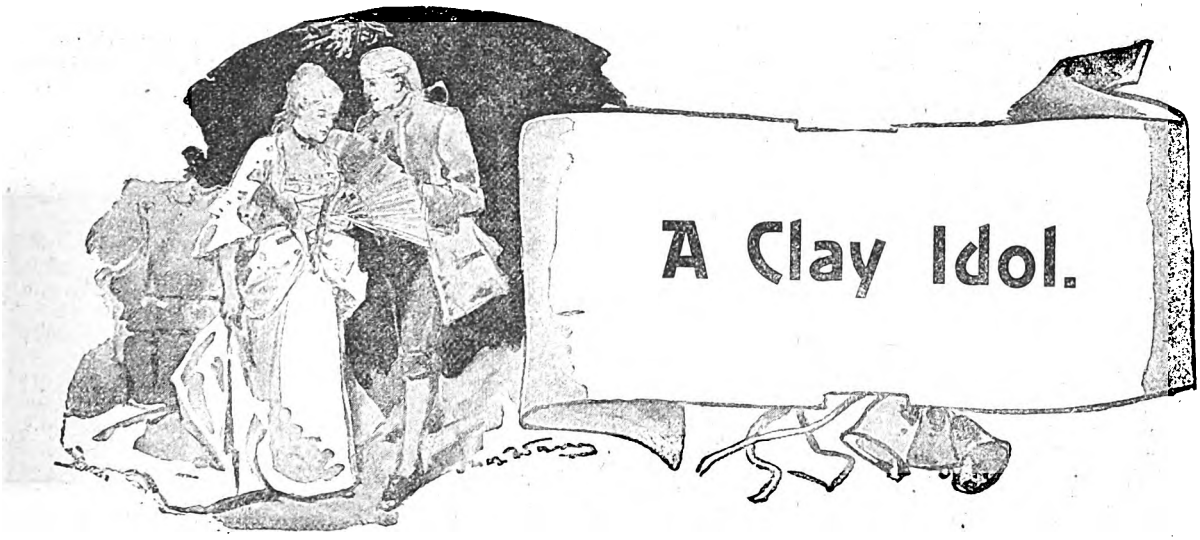

A Clay Idol.

It was universally conceded that Bill Kingerty was the toughest character in Lone Rock. The stage-driver told me as much before we had gone three miles from the station on our fifty mile drive to camp.

"Tough?" he said. "I should say yes. Always plays in great luck, drinks lots of whisky, spends a bushel of money, and is mighty handy with his gun. Whatever you do, tenderfoot, don't run up against Bill Kingerty."

I told him I didn't intend to run up against anyone, least of all a man who was "handy" with his gun.

We arrived at Lone Rock the next morning, and I must confess the town did not make a very favourable impression on my English sensibilities.

The largest building in town was the Inter-Ocean Saloon, a long low building of rough boards, thrown together in true frontier style. The camp had grown up in a day, as it were, when the placer fields were discovered, a mile or so up the cañon. The floating population of the whole territory had flocked hither, and what a month before was as lonely a gulch as could be found in the Rockies, was now a flourishing "city" of several hundred.

As I wandered into the Inter-Ocean that evening, the stage-driver, who was standing near the door, recognised me, and drawing closer, whispered:

"There's Bill Kingerty over yonder at the farther table. Remember, stranger, and don't run up against him."

I looked in the direction indicated, and saw a large-boned, roughly-dressed man of perhaps fifty, seated at a parlour table, playing cards. His wide slouch hat was pulled down over his eyes, so that only the lower part of his face was visible. His chin was covered with a grizzly growth of reddish-grey hair. There was a goodly stock of gold at his elbow, to which he added now and then as the game went on. It was evident that the stage-driver was right about Bill Kingerty's luck.

The scene before me was new and strange. From a secluded place in a dark corner of the room I watched the motley crowd singing, drinking, and gambling. Now and then some especially lucky player would cash in, and, advancing to the rough board counter answering for a bar, call up the crowd and set up the liquor. I had not been noticed in my dark corner until later in the evening a tall, sinewy cowboy scooped a great pile of gold into his pockets, and advancing to the bar, threw down a handful and called up everybody.

Glancing about the room, with a glass of the reddest of red liquor in his hand, he spied me.

"Hey, there, tenderfoot," he shouted, "what are you skulking in that corner for? Come up here and have something."

I advanced meekly into the light, and hardly knowing what I said or did, replied: "If you will excuse me, I will take a cigar instead."

"Cigar," he roared, and pouring out a brimming glass of whisky, handed it to me with the words, "take that and drink it, quick."

"Really," I said in my fright, "I don't care for this. Pray excuse me and I'll smoke a cigar instead."

"Cigar be hanged," he sneered, "drink that liquor," and, pulling a six-shooter from his belt, he pointed it at my head.

I looked at the gleaming muzzle in terror. The mouth of the barrel looked to my frightened senses as large as a drain-pipe. The drawn, hardened face of the man behind it looked fiendish.

"Really——" I stammered. "Drink," he shouted. I raised the glass to my lips and gulped down a mouthful. The fiery stuff choked me, and, throwing it up, I went into a paroxysm of coughing.

The crowd surged about me, laughing and shrieking, when the cowman waved his weapon over his head, fired a couple of shots through the roof, and, pointing it at me again, shouted: "Drink it down, tenderfoot, drink it down or I'll finish you."

As I raised the glass again, Bill Kingerty stepped forward and walked up to my assailant with the words: "That's enough of that, stranger. Put up that gun, and let the boy alone."

The cow-puncher didn't know Kingerty, and, besides, he was half drunk. Without a reply he turned suddenly, and, pointing his revolver at Kingerty's breast, fired.

I don't know to this day how it was. I was never brave or heroic. In fact, I am a beastly coward, but, nevertheless, as the cowboy fired, I leapt forward, and, striking the gun, threw up the barrel. His bullet sped harmlessly over Kingerty's head.

I didn't realise that there was but one shot; but when the smoke cleared away the cowboy lay dead

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upon the floor, and the smoke was still floating from Bill Kingerty's gun. The cowboy's partner came forward and took charge of the body, but did not speak to Kingerty.

As I started to leave the place, Kingerty laid his hand on my arm, and drew me to the door and down the street to the shanty where he lived. He opened the rickety door, and, entering, lighted a candle, placed it on a box, and, pushing me a stool, bade me be seated.

"Stranger," he began, after clearing his throat, "what are you doing out here? You've no business in this country. Why, sonny, you're the biggest tenderfoot I've ever seen."

I threw off all restraint—for there was a kindly light in his rugged face—and told him my story. How I had just left college, and, lacking the necessary money to pursue the study of medicine as I wished, had come West to make my fortune, hoping to go back in a few years and take up my chosen profession.

Kingerty was silent after I had told my story, and, by the flashing light of the candle, I could see he was in deep meditation.

"So you come from England," he at length began, "and to make your fortune." He turned uneasily in his chair, and, looking me full in the face, continued: "My boy, go home; you're not fitted for this life out here. If you stay here you'll either get tough or get shot, or both. If you're tough you won't save any money. If you're dead the cash won't do you much good. I knew a boy who came West, the same as you, only a few years ago. He came from London, too. This chap had finished school, and, carried away with the stories of the wealth to be gained in the West, packed up his things and came out here.

"He was ambitious to be rich and honoured, and so left his own country with its limited chances and long, uphill pull, to make his fortune in the western goldfields. Neither his aged parents nor his sweetheart were able to dissuade him from this foolhardy step. He told his little flaxen-haired sweetheart that last night at home that he would soon return with wealth and power, and pictured how happy they would be in the home he would be able to furnish for her. And he went away."

As he finished these words his voice was low and husky, and I could see in the dim light that he was looking far beyond me, through the open door and out towards the mountains, towering dim and majestic in the eastern sky, his face was wonderfully softened, and I could hardly realise in the man that now stood before me the murderer of an hour before.

"I knew the boy well," he continued, "perhaps better than his own parents. Well he came West and for a few months kept up and saved money. The frequent letters from home and the little souvenir his sweetheart had given him seemed to keep him from the temptation which surrounded him. Then came the long winter when we were snowed in and for months received no mail. The absence of word from home and loved ones seemed to press heavily upon him. He became sullen and morose—then came cards, and whisky, and perdition. When the snow melted and the delayed stage arrived, he, fallen to a common roustabout at the saloons, read that his sweetheart had died during the long winter—died in his mother's arms, and in the wild delirium of brain fever had begged him not to go—oh, not to go away.

"Thus was broken what seemed the only chain that bound him to decency.

"Then he drifted with the wild, turbulent current of western life through this camp, and that, a drunkard, a murderer, and a gambler."

We sat in silence. Kingerty's sad dreamy eyes were fixed on space, and it seemed I could see a teardrop glistening on his rugged cheek. He turned to me, and laying a hand on my shoulder as a father might, continued: "Boy, go home. Work at anything if needs be to gain your end, only don't sever yourself from good influences, from an early training, from a Christian home."

I rose and grasped his hand, too much overcome by my emotions for words. As I started for the door he said:

"No, my boy, don't go up to the hotel. It might not be safe. Bunk in here with me."

I lay awake far into the night. Suddenly riches seemed to me of little value now, when associated with constant temptation. I had just money enough to get back. I would go on the morrow.

I must have been asleep several hours when I was awakened by a shot. I leapt from my bunk. The sun was just peeping over the mountains. A cowboy stood a few rods from the door, a smoking Winchester in his hands. Bill Kingerty lay across the doorstep, dead.

I laid him out myself for a decent burial. Suspended from his neck by a slight golden chain was a locket. The bullet that had pierced his breast had broke it open. Inside, clotted with Bill Kingerty's lifeblood, was a lock of flaxen hair.

P. McArthur.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 15.

On pages 470-71 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort*.

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday*,
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY*.
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *October 12th*, and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the reader living in Ireland, who, in the event of a tie, succeeds in forwarding the correct solution before other competitors posting attempts from Ireland.

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY No. 12.

ACCEPTED.

See Page 480.

22 There were many men besides Jack Foster
89 keenly anxious to have their pictures taken that
33 year; maybe there were many better pictures than
81 his, but no one had a more beautiful woman to
3 paint. His bride of less than a year made him the
11 most perfect Hero that ever watched for Leander.
10 With hair half unbound she stood, a dark, proud
44 goddess, watching, with an unfathomable look of
106 longing in her glorious eyes, that try as he would
67 Foster could never quite transfer to canvas.
48 "Sweetheart, you are not so well to-day," he said
84 tenderly, a few days before his picture was finished,
86 as he stopped suddenly in his work. "You must
62 see a doctor."
97 "Not yet, Jack," she pleaded. "It is only a little
73 cold, and if he were to forbid my posing! What
118 should we do then? This picture is to make your
75 name and lead to endless commissions and bring
113 you ever so much money, isn't it?"
101 The man crossed over and kissed her softly, and
42 the girl went on:
114 "When you have sent it in, dear, then I will see a
74 doctor. Go on painting, I am quite rested. Is my
51 hand right? I am afraid I turned my head."
16 The Artist put the girl into position again and
55 for the first time noticed how fragile she had grown,
18 and an almost too ethereal beauty in her eyes.
52 The picture was finished and sent in before she
104 consented to see a doctor. And when he shook his
105 head and talked gravely of Davos Platz she laughed
96 gaily.
70 "This feverishness is only anxiety to know the
61 fate of our picture," she said afterwards, in reply to
40 her husband's anxious look.
112 "Sir James Parker saw it one day and offered
121 me a hundred guineas for it if it is hung."
93 "Then if it's accepted that means it is sold as
108 well. Oh, Jack, if they only take it."
95 "Yes, darling, if they take it it means Davos
98 Platz for you and commissions innumerable for me;
13 for Parker does not do things by halves."
109 The days passed with no news from Burlington
82 House, but Dr. Clayton came again and again, and
30 at each visit was more importunate that his patient
72 should go to a dryer climate. "London was too
31 relaxing—most important if organic mischief were
78 to be prevented. Delay now might result in
6 hæmorrhage and actual disease."
14 So Foster did what he had sworn he would never
85 do; he wrote to Evelyn's father and told him how
83 much depended on money now. The letter came
38 back unopened, and then Foster went to a friend
2 and borrowed. It was only a small sum, for the
71 man was poor—probably if he had been rich he
20 would not have lent him anything. But it saw
120 them safely settled at Davos Platz, and Jack
58 watched the colour come back to Evelyn's cheeks,
46 and her old buoyancy return, and the far away
90 look died out of her eyes. Now if only his picture
53 were taken all might be well, and he watched for
115 the posts eagerly.

He had gone into a shop to buy her some roses, 1
and until a shrill cry made him look round he 49
thought she was by his side. Then he saw a run- 29
away horse dashing madly down the street, and 110
directly in its way a tiny child—dirty and unkempt, 59
but still a child; while half-way across the 32
road, with arms outstretched to save it, was 80
Evelyn. 34
Before he could move the tragedy was over—the 43
child thrown out of harm's way; the fragile rescuer 8
senseless on the ground. [*Put as 96 in original story.* 69
An hour later the doctors had completed their 63
examination and given their verdict: "No possible 79
chance of life; a week, even longer perhaps—but 4
that is all." 99
Foster took the news as one stunned. The 116
surgeon rubbed his glasses and continued: 47
"I shall be here again later, but I am afraid there 19
is nothing to be done." 123
"Nothing to be done." Jack Foster sat motion- 68
less. 111
He was not allowed to go to his wife yet; 12
while he waited a maid brought in a letter. He 54
opened it mechanically, and read without under- 87
standing it, but the contents grew clear to him as 88
he stared at it: 56
"Accepted!" he cried; then his agony was sharp 35
enough. He realised everything. 21
"To lose her on the point of winning all. Oh, 122
God, it is too hard; I cannot bear it." 24
The days passed slowly and Jack Foster scarcely 57
left his wife's bedside. At the end came the return 17
of consciousness, and she smiled faintly at him as 66
he kissed the death damp from her brow. 15
"Your picture, Jack?" she breathed. 92
"It has been taken, little one." His voice was 77
husky, but well under control. 94
"I am so glad, darling. I did bring you luck 65
after all, you see," she whispered, and the smile on 39
her face deepened into absolute radiant content; 45
and at first Jack Foster did not realise that the 60
lips he pressed so tenderly heeded not his passionate 5
kisses. 76

* * * * * 26

"In this world," muttered Foster to himself the 27
day after the funeral, "things are horribly unequal 117
and unjust. When success means everything she 107
stays away. When I no longer need or welcome 23
her she comes." In the bitterness of his soul he 103
half crushed a letter that he held unopened in his 50
hand. 61
"How she would have rejoiced over my first 7
varnishing ticket; and the irony of it that it 28
should come now." 9
He opened the envelope carelessly and drew 37
out not the ticket but a request that he would 119
send for his picture "as the Committee regret to 102
find they have not space to hang it." 91
"Sometimes Fate's little jokes are not so unkind 41
after all," he murmured. 36

C. M. BRYANT. 124

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The Last King of Atlantis

OR,

The Romance of a Lost Continent.

By **Geo. C. Wallis**, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

SUMMARY.

ARNON's memory of his early days begins at a time when he finds himself abandoned on the seashore, whence he discovers the cave of a band of pirates by whom he is captured. Under the care of Didron the Chief he grows up as one of them, and on the death of the former he takes command. Viol is the daughter of Didron and in love with Arnon.

CHAPTER III.

THE SACRED SLEEPER.

IT is said by the wise men of the Temple of Truth, whose voices the people heed less than they heed the careless twittering of the forest birds, that idleness doth ever lead to evil, and that a mind untroubled with labour is ever distraught to seek out new pathways of vice. So it was with many of my men in those months of pleasure, but I was otherwise employed.

I loved, was married, and became a father before the time was gone, therefore my idle hours were few and far between. Moreover, I purposed that my next cruise should make us richer by far than the dreams of the wildest greed, and so was busy with the preparing of weapons and the instruction of our novices in the use of the double-thong sling, then a new implement of war to us, and in making a great quantity of poison wherewith to touch our arrows and swords when we came to close quarters with a foe. This latter was a work of patience and of time, since the fruit of the wild almond tree* (from which we distilled the deadly liquid) must be gathered before the full bloom of ripeness is upon it, so that the fleshy covering of the kernel be hard and juicy, and in that tropic isle, so many trees were blossoming, ripening, and seeding, side by side, that we must wait until enough for our purpose could be gathered as their time fell due.

But 'tis of thyself thou shouldst be telling; so straightway to it, Arnon the Wanderer!

There is a secluded spot on the western shore of our island, away from the din of the settlement and the eyes of the settlers, where it was Viol's wont to wander when the days were bright—which was nearly always—and where, also, I might often be found.

There the waves, that out to sea are glittering hillocks of sapphire, break in high columns of creamy foam on rocky, lovely inlets and promontories, thick grown with tangled bush and palm, growing so near the water that they and the fronds and cocoas are wet with the salt sea-spray as the liquid rollers curl and fall. Out into the water jut crags of limestone, hung over with boughs of light feathery foliage, contrasting sharply with the long thatch branches behind, with which are intermingled, but very sparsely, the green ebony and the wild liquorice, whose scarlet seeds with black tops dance in the gentle breeze with an eerie motion. Behind these, again, as the outposts of the forest, stand groves of palms with their spear-fringed branches, the yellow-blossomed aloes, the clinging convolvuli, the arrow-root, and the almond.

There the mavis sings, and the gaily-feathered tribe dart ever here and there in amazing numbers, and the bright banana-bird sails swiftly over the trees. There the air is ever rich with a thousand perfumes, sweeter by far than the costly essences of the merchants of Ind, and the ear is ever soothed by a thousand pleasant sounds. There it was I made my love to Viol when the two months' mourning

*It is a curious fact that the delicious peach, which grows upon our sunny garden walls, is botanically the same, developed by ages of selection to a harmless fruit.

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was past, and there she looked her love into my eyes for the last time.

It chanced one day, as we sat hand in hand upon one of the great stones that jut out of the shallow grit where the sand-crabs live, our senses drinking in the beauty and the sweetness of all things that surrounded us, the roar of the surf being stilled to a soothing murmur, that the Spirit of Love came into our hearts.

Before we knew it, without a word having passed between us, we were clasped in each other's arms, and our lips had met in a passionate kiss, and so, silent as we were, we continued for a time, finding no language for our thoughts, nor needing any. Then, putting me gently from her, Viol took my hands in her soft, warm palms, and asked me in tones that told me she knew what the answer would be:

"Shall that be our betrothal kiss, my Arnon?"

"Dear one," I answered, drawing her to me again and once more sealing the compact, "it was, and from now henceforth nothing shall come between us twain save the shadow of death."

"So be it," she answered softly.

It passes my comprehension, even now, how it came about that such a pure and lovely flower as my golden-haired Viol should have been born and grown to womanhood amid that rough and bloody band of pirates, untouched, unsullied by their wickedness, and withal, so innocent of evil word or deed. She seemed like a fair white lily, sprung up in the midst of noxious, miasmatic weeds and tangled thorns. But the ways of the Spirit of Life are past our finding out, and his purposes veiled from our eyes. Sometimes his acts seem evil and his deeds seem dark, but know we not, from the Sacred Book of the Soul, that this evil and this darkness is only the shadow of a greater light? And when his ways seem good to us, shall we not bask in the sunshine of his smile, asking no questions, wasting not our breath in needless amaze?

So I took Viol to be my wife, and three months after we had buried her father, my foster-parent, the old priest whom we had brought to live with us to be of service on such occasions, joined our hands in wedlock, in the name of the Three Spirits, which yet are one Spirit—the Spirits of Life, and Truth, and Love. And after him we repeated the bridal vow that has done duty at the union of man and maid for a thousand years or more. Thus it runs:

> By the loves we love who love us,
> By the Spirits throned above us,
> (By the Gods who never perish)
> By the things our fancies cherish,
> By the hopes our soul-self longs for,
> And the friends we sing our songs for,
> May we ever steadfast be:
> Mated for eternity.

In due time a child was born to us, a son whom we named Didron, after his mother's father, and because his features, even when so young, resembled the old sea-king's wonderfully. Then, having tired of the joys of idleness, I got ready to set forth on my cruise.

This time I was the chief, and the good old *Ravager*, upon whose deck I trod so proudly, was my own ship, manned and prepared as she had never been before. I had stored sufficient food to last us near a year, and besides our hundred slaves to row the ship, I had fifty as a reserve, and resolved to treat them better than usual, so that I might get more work out of their bones. Also, with the remnant of Sanaboul's crew and our young novices, I had more than two hundred and fifty strong and healthy men on board, sworn to my service through fire or water, even to the end of death itself.

The day of our departure came, and I sought out Viol to bid her good-bye. Finding her not in the house, nor the child either, I searched here, there, everywhere, in all the houses of the settlement, in the forest, and lastly—tardy fool!—bethought me of the trysting-place where we had joined our lips in betrothal. Tearing through copse and bush, o'erleaping many a purling rill, and threading my

"Shall that be our betrothal kiss?"

way between the giant trees, guided by the swiftly-increasing thunder of the surf upon the white rock shore, I hastened to that lovely spot. There she sat, the babe upon her knee, lulling it to sleep with the music of the waves, and the soft sighing of the sultry breeze.

"The men are waiting, Viol," I cried somewhat impatiently, for my hands longed to grasp the tiller again, "Knew you not that I was searching you?"

"Hush, husband!" she answered, gently, "or you will wake the child. Yes, I knew you would search me out to say farewell, and wished that we said it here, where our betrothal kiss was given. Mindst thou that day, my husband? nay, stay me not! I have a thought, I know not from which of the spirits, that this will be our last meeting this side of the shades, and I would like it to be here, where we have passed so many happy hours."

"A plague upon such silly, idle fancies!" I exclaimed angrily. "I will not say 'farewell.' It shall but be 'good-bye.'"

"Nay, be not angry, dear one," my wife replied, laying the child, still asleep, upon a mossy bed, and clasping my neck with her white arms, "but think of this if so it happens that you cannot come back to me, as I fear you will not, husband . . . . and so, farewell!"

I kissed her long and tenderly, softened somewhat by her words, then, stooping, touched the lips of the sleeping Didron, and in another moment, with a wave of my hand, I had broken away into the forest and was gone.

Thus in coldness, if not in wrath, I parted from Viol for the last time. From that day to this my eyes have never seen her again, and at times she has been blotted out of my thought, so mindless is the soul of a past or distant love.

We sailed the *Ravager* far and wide, taking many a heavy-laden ship from the shores of the land of the south, and from the city of Kronos, chasing many a pleasure vessel cruising round the coast, laying tribute heavily upon the sea-shore towns, and ever watchful for sight of a royal ship.

We had been five months out when a barque with wide-spreading sails, labouring deeply in the water because of her heavy cargo, hove in sight, and was running across our bows before her crew discovered the nature of our ship. There was a stiff gale blowing, so I thought to trap her easily, seeing she had few oars, but as well might the sloth seek to overtake the fleet-footed deer or the tortoise to outrun the squirrel, as the *Ravager* to come up with that flying craft. We chased her for an hour or more, but by then the sky had swallowed her up, and she was gone from our grasp.

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I fumed as I walked the deck in impotent rage, and resolved to take my revenge on Miropis, a wealthy town on the shore of Atlantis. Thither our prow was turned, the crew in high spirits thereat, smelling spoil and sport ahead.

As we neared the coast a dark bird flying past being the first sign of land, a storm arose, dreadful while it lasted (which, fortunately, was not long), delaying us for a day, and the loud creaking of the ship's timbers in the heavy sea was held by some of the older sailors to be an evil omen. Later, when we passed a great shoal of porpoises, rolling their shining backs in the flood of sunlight, and later still clouds of flying fishes that skim close to the water for full fifty paces, these also were interpreted as evil signs by the croakers. I laughed them to scorn, as I laughed at Viol, and bade them talk of omens when the hour of death was near, but not vex living men with their old wives' tales.

So we came to Miropis and cast anchor in its little bay, where the cowardly sharks that frighten timid swimmers are famous for their number. Right to the water's edge the land was thick with dense belts of logwood and mangrove, alternating with clumps of bamboo, and showing here and

My answer was short and sharp.

there, between the openings of the trees, about and beyond the town, long stretches of the juicy sugar-canes.

When our anchor dropped, and the few merchant ships that lay in the port had cut their cables and run out to sea (for the name of our ship was a terror), the shores were black with the people, shouting to ask us what we wished with them who were so poor. My answer was short and sharp to those liars.

"Unless you bring on board before sunset," I said, "all the costly jewels and silks that are in the great merchants' houses, and a thousand pieces of gold of the largest size, your town shall be destroyed, your wives and daughters captured, your wealth taken to the uttermost value, though we cast the excess into the sea, and such of your men as resist shall be slain."

It was not long before they accepted my terms. Before the sunset the vast treasure was safely stowed in the hold, my men being very jubilant, thinking me the best of chiefs. 'Tis true the merchants and all from whom the townsfolk took the spoil were highly incensed and even resisted, but the mad fury of a mob seeking its own safety took little account of *their* feelings, many of the robbers, I doubt not, robbing a trifle on their own account, for to some of the poorer class the visit of a pirate was a time for rejoicing rather than sorrowing.

Now it being night before the work was done, we rode at anchor in the bay till morning, when I wished to be going. But some of the men pleaded hard for a walk and a drink ashore, and being young and pliable, I foolishly consented, going with them myself and leaving but two score to guard the slaves and the treasure.

My object in landing, however, was not to drink and revel, but to visit the grotto where lay the famous Sleeper, sacred to the Spirit of Truth, whose priests had established a sanctuary on the spot where the wondrous body lay and had lain, some said, for a thousand years.

Taking only Sassani, a youth of near kin to my foster-father, with me, I left Miropis behind and set out for the famous grotto. Through vast fields of cane and past the cane-built houses of the workers on the farms, we tramped on, our ears filled with the songs of the birds and the low humming of a million insects, and our eyes gazing with delight upon the many gorgeous flowers and blossoms that bestrewed our path. Presently we came to the foot of a black conical rock, rising gaunt and grim out of the level plain, and girt around its base with a dense belt of forest, through which we passed. Then, threading our way with care through the sacred, mazy groves of the spiny cactus as through lines of armed sentinels, we came to the entrance of the sanctuary.

It was not large, and only by stooping low could we scramble in, but once within, we could walk upright again. I spoke to Sassani, but so loudly rang the echo of my voice around the dimly-lighted chamber, that he made no reply, and I forebore from further speech, using my eyes and ears only. This was the sight that we saw when we entered the huge grotto.

From right to left, below and above, the walls and roof and floor seemed to fade away, leaving us standing on the threshold of an awful nothingness. Then, as we got our second sight in the gloom, we perceived that the room was, in very truth, the whole of the huge black rock; that the rock, which outside seemed a solid hill, was but an empty shell, like the drinking-cup of a giant thrown down on the earth with the rim to the ground. And just at the top, at the apex of this hollow pyramid of stone, a little circular piercing let in a shaft of light, which now, it being near the hour of noon, poured almost vertically through the eerie darkness. Following its brilliant course, we saw that it stayed not at our level, but kept its way till lost in the gloom far beneath our feet, and that the cave was quite as large below as above.

For awhile we stood amazed, not knowing whether to stay or to scramble back through the narrow opening. I half turned, when a rope at my side rattled heavily on the wall, and the door closed, leaving us in darkness, save for the sunbeam piercing the gulf like a thin rod of iron heated to a glowing whiteness. Then, just as our hearts were turning to water, and our hands sought each other, not knowing what would happen next, these words fell upon our ears, spoken in a voice that seemed far away, mellowed as by coming through a vaulted space, yet with every syllable as clear as though it were uttered at our side:

"Enter and fear not, oh, Arnon! for the place where the Sleeper sleeps is holy ground!"

I started, for how could the speaker know my name? Still I answered, feeling awed by the mystery of the place:

"I would enter, but see no way, Priest of the Spirit of Truth," for I shrewdly guessed it was a priest who had spoken to us; and at that feeling my pirate blood rising again, I clutched my sword-hilt with new courage. The still, small voice again spoke:

"Take three paces to the right, you and your comrade, and the path shall be made plain before your feet."

We did as the voice requested, but now fearing nothing. As my foot touched the rocky platform on which we stood

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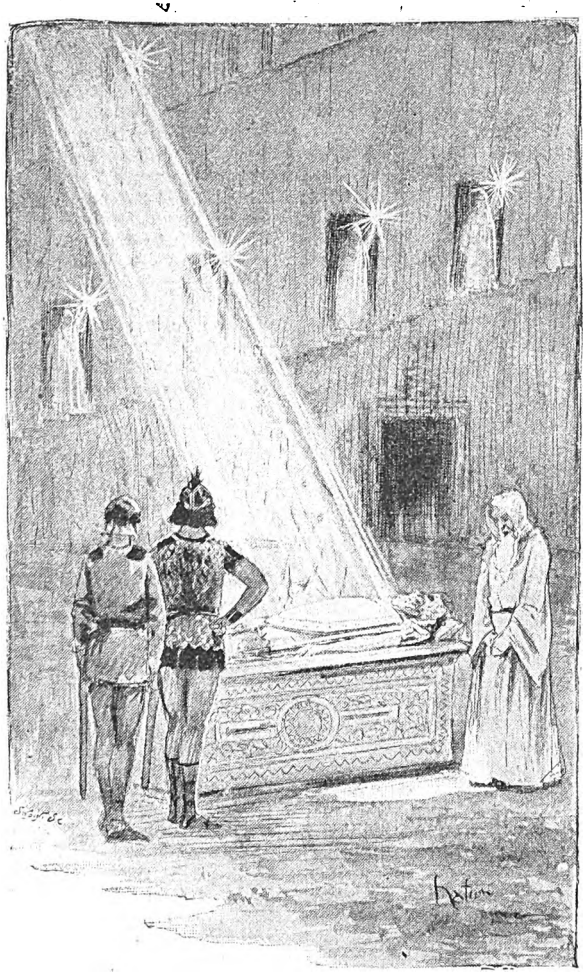
for the third time, a wonderful thing befel. From right and left, above, below, and around, as though a thousand windows had been opened in the stony walls, a thousand lights flashed and shone, revealing to us the secrets of the holy place. Then we perceived the true shape of the grotto, and saw that it was the work of man, of countless generations, each toiling a little in their day, each scooping a little out of the cave until it became as we saw it. It was quite as deep below as it towered above, and we stood at the widest part, on a little ledge of rock from whence a rocky staircase, cut with consummate skill, wound in a spiral curve to the bottom of the abyss. There, at the apex of the vast inverted cone, the ray of sunlight, still visible for all the glowing points of brilliancy around, fell full on a polished brazen shield which lay on the breast of a sleeping man.

This we saw, then slowly and laboriously climbed the winding stair adown until we stood at the side of the couch on which the figure lay. It was a couch of gold inlaid with ivory and precious gems and filagreed with delicate pearl and silver tracery, more costly, I should think, than all the treasure stored in that secret cave of ours. Yet, as we stood there looking upon it, but more upon the Sleeper and upon the two who stood near him—men clad simply in long, white garments, replenishing at intervals a lamp which flickered feebly at his head—not all that wealth roused once the pirate spirit, so deep was the silence and so great the awe of that Presence.

I asked of the two watchers, with bated breath: "What did they there?"

One answered simply, "Wait!" and the other, pointing upwards, "Look!"

Then there was silence again whilst we strained our eyes, peering into the vast vault above, all studded with its thousand lights, till, as though by one consent, a hundred doors opened in the rocky wall at regular distances on the spiral stair.



From these hundred doors came a hundred priests of Truth.

From these hundred doors came the hundred priests of Truth, each dressed as the two watchers, each carrying a lighted lamp, and all, in solemn file, marching down the steps till they reached us; then forming in a circle round us and the Sacred Sleeper, chanting a soft melodious hymn, which, before it ceased, rose into a mighty roar of rolling, echoing sound, soaring majestically to the pointed roof, falling thence again in rhythmic cadences adown the sloping sides, deflected thence from wall across to wall, and meeting in a clash of awful harmony directly overhead.

Osiris! That Sleeper must have slept sound as the dead amid that thunderous roar, nay, methinks it would have woke the very dead! Yet the figure on the golden couch moved not so much as an eyelid, lying there like a thing of stone. Then, wordless, hasteless, the hundred white-robed priests went back the way they came, the measured tread of their sandalled feet reverberating strangely in the cavernous depths.

Now the elder of the two watchers turned to me and spoke:

"It is well, my son, that thou hast come hither, for the Spirit hath told me much concerning thee, some of which thou must know. Thine is no common destiny, though so thou mayest think, for even now thy pirate life is at an end, and thou standeth on the threshold of a fresh career. Gainsay me not, my son, but listen, and time will tell thee whether a Priest of Truth can speak falsely. This is what I would say to thee, for more I dare not reveal.

"Within a year and a half from now, my son, thou wilt be a captive in a foreign land, and then a server of a foreign god, and when thy feet once more tread the shores of Atlantis, it shall be as a great man. Then shalt thou come here for counsel, my son, and once more after that, and for the last time, shalt thou visit the grotto of the Sleeper; but till thou hast been here a third time, fear not death. These are the words that the Spirit of Truth hath uttered by the mouth of Unim."

"A question I would ask you, Unim," I said. "Pray, how came you to know my name when I entered, and how my pirate life can end, seeing my ship yonder in the bay only waits my return to put forth to sea?"

"Verily, my son," answered the watcher, "thy faith in the Spirit is small and thou art young, else wouldst have seen that when the Spirit could tell thy future, he could tell thy name! Nay, more, I can tell thee thy age, though thou knowest it not thyself. 'Tis just twenty-and-three years this day since thou camest forth from the womb of her who bore thee, whose name thou knowest not."

"But what of my pirate life?" I asked, fearing deeply.

"I am coming to that, my son," said he slowly, tantalisingly; "but first, I must tell thee the tradition that has been handed down to us of the sleeper here: *It is foretold that whoso wakes the Sleeper shall bury him, dead truly, in this very spot, and whoso reigneth as King of Atlantis in the day that the Sleeper dies, shall be the last King that shall reign in this land, and the end of the land itself shall not be far away.* Already its doom is sealed and its destruction begun. As to thyself, Arnon, the foster son of Didron, thou wilt no more be a pirate from this day, for already the soldiers and the ships of the king are nigh upon thee, and before sunset thy band will be no more."

"Wretched old man!" I cried, in my ungovernable anger

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at the delay, as the thought of Viol, my wife, and Didron, my little one, whom I might never see again if the *Ravager* was lost, came into my mind, "why keep us here with thy foolish prophecies whilst time is passing that I might be out of reach of my enemies?"

"It matters not," said he calmly; "and I forgive thee thy blasphemy, knowing thy mind. But go now, and remember the words of Unim, the priest of Truth."

Whilst he was speaking the other priest had seized the rope that dangled on the wall, and re-opened the door above by pulling away the pivoted stone which had closed it. At the same time the thousand lights went out with startling suddenness, leaving only the thin white ray of sunlight piercing the profound gloom. Guided by the gleam from the open door, Sassani and I groped hurriedly up the tedious stair, gained the platform, and shouting back our curses at the watchers, fled out into the open air, glad to leave that awful place, with its ghastly vastness, far behind.

On we sped with flying feet, through the forest and the cane-breaks, startling the rustics, scaring the birds that built their nests in the shadow of the tall cacti, treading heedlessly down many a waterway wherewith the land was irrigated, and stopping not our headlong course until we reached the town, where, for prudence sake, we went gently till we saw how far our fears were just.

CHAPTER IV.

Briseis.

That the priest had spoken truly regarding the matter we soon discovered, for immediately we stepped into the street leading down to the water-side, we saw two warships standing into the mouth of the bay, and a third landing her five hundred fighting men on a spit of land just outside, with intent to cut off the retreat of the *Ravager's* crew. And also, from the east side of the town, came the shouting of men and the trumpeting of soldiers, and I knew that we were indeed in evil plight. Small mercy is shown to pirates caught in the act, so then and there we resolved to die fighting, rather than fall into the hands of the king's men.

But first we must seek out our men, or such of the besotted wretches as we could, and with the enemy's war-cry ringing in our ears, it was a hurried search. Up and down the streets we ran, in this house and that, hauling the drunken out of the drinking booths—which were many in that bibulous town—out of the acting fairs where painted beauty danced; and ever as we ran we kept up our battle-cry. "*The Arnon! The Arnon!*" Some of the townsfolk, indeed, tried to stop us at the street corners, but keen swords were ever good passports; and slaying or maiming them as we ran, they troubled us little.

At length, and all too soon, the soldiers were in the town, hard at our heels, and when we must turn at bay we gathered in a large house near the shore, and there prepared to die. After casting out the people of the house, I counted the band, and found that for all our speed and noise, there were only seventy, leaving twice as many more to be hunted out and killed like rats in their holes.

Soon the soldiers clustered round the house, assaulting it on both sides (for it stood midway between two narrow streets), but gained no foothold within for more than an hour, so desperately did we keep the doors. From the roof a dozen of my slingers wrought havoc in the narrow ways, till presently, having brought up the greater part of their force, the soldiers occupied the roofs of the houses around and poured such a storm of leaden bullets on our stronghold as struck down the dozen men and battered in the very roof itself.

The streets were full of the soldiers, they swarmed in thousands, and twice they gained the doors with fearful struggles, and twice, with the energy of demons, we wrested back those vantage-points, hurling out the bodies till round each exit was a writhing rampart of human flesh, all bristling with sharp and broken weapons.

Now the enemy paused in their attack and drew back a space, leaving us time to breathe, and numbering my men again, I found I had not two score wherewith to hold the place against the thousands that would soon be thrown upon it. And looking seaward I saw the *Ravager*, with the flag of Atlantis streaming in triumph from her mast, moving slowly out of the harbour. The iron went into my soul when I saw that sight.

Now the soldiers were upon us again, but the pirate's blood was roused and we wrought like fiends, cutting, carving, thrusting, slinging, hurling all the missiles we could lay hands on into the surging mass of men in the streets, tearing down even the stone idols and statuettes in our frenzy of rage and despair. And ever and anon, above the din of the conflict, a death-groan pierced the outer air, telling of the finding out of one of our companions in the town. Bah, the drunken wretches! They deserved their fate who were not with us in that final struggle.

At last the enemy fired the houses on either side our own from the landward street, throwing all their force upon us at the other entrance. Against this new foe neither valour nor strength nor skill availed us aught, so, thinned as we were, we gave back before the fierce rush of the grey-clad soldiers, who, pouring in, penned us in a room near the middle of the house only separated from the raging flames by a wooden wall. Already the boards began to bend and crack, the air was thick with smoke and strong with the reek of burning wood and smouldering cloth, so that we could scarce see one another, save as spectred giants battling in a murky cloud that parched our throats, and ringed our eyes with pain. Presently I paused in my smiting from sheer weariness of arm, and lo! I stood alone, facing a crowd of foes, even Sassani lying dead at my feet.

"Why strive further, Arnon?" asked the foremost foe, a tall and sinewy man whom the others obeyed as an officer, one Vichri by name. "All are dead save you, and 'twere a thousand pities that the flames should claim you for a victim, as they will when we have left you to their mercy. Yield, then, and I promise you a fair trial before the King."

"Never!" I cried. "By all the Gods, Arnon the son of Didron shall never yield whilst his hands are free. Take that, mocker!"

And I aimed a terrible blow at him with my hacked and blood-stained blade. He sprang back, and the stroke fell short, but, nevertheless, the point, still sharp for all the work it had done, sheared off his left ear as neatly as a surgeon's knife.

Just then the wooden wall gave way, and a great tongue of fire leapt across the room, shrivelling the hangings like tinder, and driving the grey-coats a dozen paces back. Then Unim's saying: "Fear not death," flashed suddenly into my mind, and, made mad with blood and despair, I sprang into the roaring furnace of flame and ran across the blazing room beyond, seeking in the waves of fire and smoke for the further door. I felt in that moment as though a myriad keen-jawed beasts had fixed their fangs into my already bruised and bleeding flesh, or as though I were bathing in a sea of the sharpest sword points, so fearful were the gusts of flame that swept around me.

Keeping my eyes closed, I know not how, I sought the door with my blade, found it, hurled myself fiercely upon it, and burst through into a room yet untouched by the fire, beyond which was the street from which the soldiers had withdrawn. Within this room, however, still remained four of the grey-coats, who started at my sudden entrance, all blackened and singed, as though they had seen one from the dead. Not a word of explanation did I stay to give them, but running at the nearest, lopped off his head, pierced the second in the side, cut off the sword hilt of the third, and slashing the last with all my force across his face, fled into the street.

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It was deserted, and running low, like a wolf, I gained the grateful shadow of a mighty clump of cactus plants.

As I threw myself to the ground, I heard a loud crash, saw a volume of flame and sparks shoot up into the bright afternoon sky, and knew that the house had fallen in upon whomsoever was within its walls. I was not pursued, so the four I had so roughly treated must have been buried under the ruins, leaving me safe and free, but spent and weary, and in awful agony from the top of my hairless scalp to the soles of my blistered feet.

Thus, writhing and groaning, yet unmolested, I lay, till night with its cooling breezes soothed my sore and aching limbs; then, dragging myself as well as my weariness would let from shelter to shelter and street to street, stopping at every crossing and for every passer-by for fear of discovery, I cleared that thrice-accursed town and reached the open country, a rivulet, and a welcome draught of Nature's sparkling nectar, fresh from the mountain slopes.

Once on the way, whilst I rested in the deep shadow of a silent house, a man passed me like a flash of light, running

Hurled myself fiercely upon it.

for his life, the pursuers, a troop of mounted grey-coats, riding hard behind, their mouths full of bitter jests. Swiftly as he passed, however, I saw his face, and knew him for Phrena, one of my own crew, who was next to me in all our trials of strength and skill. When the mounted troop re-passed on their return journey to quarters, he was strapped by the neck to a soldier's saddle-girth. With a grim smile at my own danger on I crept again.

At dawn I reached the door of the sacred grotto, thinking that there I might find help and safety, but the door was closed fast, and the black, conical hill looked so forbidding in the early light that with an imprecation on it and the priests who dwelt within, I slowly and painfully turned away, seeking the quiet of the great sugar-cane plantations for my resting place till night fell once more. Thus, sleeping and resting by day and travelling by night, eating what scanty food I found by the wayside, I came at last to the outskirts of a great city that I now know was Kronos, the capital of the kingdom, and there, in a fair garden, all blooming with rare and beautiful flowers, and scented with a myriad sweet perfumes, all melodious with the *tinkle, tinkle* of a dozen rills, and the pattering of the spray-drops from a lovely fountain, I lay down and slept upon a mossy bank, with the fern-fronds hiding me from prying eyes.

All day I slept unseen, and when night came was so loth to leave this fairy spot, that I lingered till the shafts of morning light shot slanting through the aloes and tipped the slender palms with coronals of gold, and the birds and insects woke from their nocturnal rest, filling the air with the twittering and the humming of their busy life, and so I, perforce, stayed there for another day. This mattered little to me then, for after that baptism of blood and fire through which I had passed, a dull leaden apathy had seized upon me, and I was conscious only of a gnawing sense of loneliness and loss, wherefore or of what I seemed to have forgotten.

All I knew was that I wandered an outlaw, with a soul sore with sorrow, a heart filled with bitterness, and a body racked with cuts and burns, thinking little of the past, caring little for the present, and still less for the future, saving only to hide me from the gaze of men, and to sleep as often as I might in safety.

And as I slept in that fair garden under the cool shadow of the ferns and the aloes, I dreamed that I was back once more on our lovely isle in the sunny sea, and that in our well-known trysting place Viol and I sat hand in hand, content with each other's love, whilst little Didron—grown since I had seen him last—gambolled carelessly among the mimic breakers that rolled on the narrow strip of shore. Then I thought that a great pain seized me, and I rolled on the sand in mortal agony, whilst Viol bent tenderly over me soothing my distress.

I looked again at my darling, as, sweetly solicitous, she tended my misery, and when I looked I saw that her hair was no longer the rich gold crown that I so loved, but a head-cover of deep and glossy black, falling on her shoulders in ample, darkling folds. I looked again, and the face changed; it was no longer Viol's face, but another, prouder and more passionate—the face of a veritable goddess of love.

I started, awoke, and rose, and there, in very truth, was a superb beauty bending over me, regarding me with manifest surprise and unhidden interest, which expression turned to one of suddenly assumed anger and mortification at being thus discovered by me whom she had thought fast asleep. For my part I neither moved nor spoke for some moments, being absorbed in unrestrained admiration at this glorious vision of womanhood, straightway forgetting my dream as though it had never been.

And small need is there for wonder that I should be so lost in contemplation of this goddess, who stood returning my gaze with furtive glance, half-defiant, half-coy, the raven darkness of whose luxurious hair rivalled the blackness of my own (before this last was frizzled up by the fire), whose eyes shone brighter in their deep, dark lustre than any of the brilliant stars that twinkle in the splendour of the tropic night, whose olive cheeks, with just the faintest tinge upon them, were shaped and shaded more tastefully in their unaided beauty than the most elaborate charms of art can simulate; whose figure, in its tall and lissom contour, suggested grace and ease, yet lacked not sign of strength and suppleness in every outline curve and every intertwining symmetry of form, whose dainty, sandalled feet, all heedlessly wetted by the early dewdrops from the grass on which she had ventured to gain a glimpse of me, peeped out shyly, like twin sisters, from beneath her snow-white robe, embroidered with richest purple, and whose very presence diffused a charm, a something indefinable, yet real, which stole on all my senses, reaching to my inmost heart through all the avenues of life, irresistible, unresisted, holding me in spiritual bondage to her from whom it emanated from that moment till now, even to my life's end, when Briseis herself is no more with me.

Now as I stood, gazing in rapt admiration at this lovely

figure of Briseis as she looked when but a year over a score, I suddenly remembered what a sorry sight I must present to her, all blackened and blistered from head to foot, all scarred with grievous cuts and slashes, clothed only in the scantiest remnant of a scorched and shrivelled garment, with hair burnt off or curled and whitened out of all semblance to its former darkness, and thought it best to speak, lest this vision of beauty should take fright and be gone.

"Lady," I said, "do not leave me—yet; for I am in sore need of help and in fear of my life."

She became at once all interest and gentleness and sympathy.

"I know not who you are," she said, in a voice so soft and tender that it seemed as though a ministering servant of the Spirit of Love spoke, "but your voice rings true, and you seem to be in sore distress. Seemst as though you have passed through fighting and through fire, both cruel and severe. Pray tell your name, stranger?"

I thought awhile, pondering whether to give my rightful name or no, but feeling certain that Vichri, the conqueror of Miropis, would believe me dead, and feeling, moreover, a strange confidence in my new-found friend, I answered:

"My name is Arnon, lady; the foster-son of one Didron. And how are you named, who are so gentle to a scarecrow like I?"

I neither moved nor spoke for some moments.

"My people call me Briseis," she replied, "but pray, are you not a pirate, one of those whom Vichri my cousin surprised and killed at Miropis but four days agone? The name sounds familiar in my ears, as though I had heard it before."

"I was the leader of that pirate band, the captain of that pirate ship, who am now left without a ship or crew," I answered boldly, "but oh, Briseis, if your charity be equal to your loveliness and grace, you will not breathe my secret to any—least of all to your cousin Vichri, whom I saw in the fight."

A radiant blush overspread her cheeks and mantled her lofty brow with deepest crimson, as she said, stepping nearer to me and taking one of my grimed and aching hands between her own, warm and soft:

"I will keep your secret, Arnon, for I feel that I am guarding the life of a true and brave man, but"—and here her regal head was tossed haughtily upwards—"indulge thee not in such flattery of me, who am but a general's cousin, with a strain of royal blood in my veins!"

Now I saw that I was treading on uncertain ground and had need be careful if my benefactress was of royal kinship, and so at once assumed a tone of submission, which I must say, sat ill upon me, who was used to rule and to command.

"Lady," I said, "you may do with me as you will if you but first hear my story. Suffer me to tell you that and I shall no longer fear your displeasure for aught I may be."

"I am all impatient to hear it," said she, her woman's curiosity aroused, "but it can wait till you are cleansed and rendered fitter for a lady's dwelling. Follow me and fear not, for here my word and wish are law."

"I would follow you to the ends of the earth and till death itself, if so you wished me," I replied, forgetting her caution.

This she pretended not to hear, but as I limped painfully along after her, my lady, carrying herself with a queenly grace, led the way into the stately mansion she occupied and owned, and where she reigned sole sovereign of her little world of slaves.

Some of these latter, being summoned, ran hither and thither with alacrity to do their mistress's bidding, and very soon I lay in a downy bed, well washed from top to toe, and anointed lavishly with all manner of soothing and healing ointments, scented with fragrant aromas of Ind. I grew well and strong again with marvellous haste, since, added to these new and strange attentions, my Lady Briseis came ministering daily to my wants and whims—for I was at times exacting and troublesome—but I was fain to eke out my spell of weakness as far as it would go, that I might live all the longer in my lady's smile.

At last, when I could no longer find excuse or feign sickness or weariness, I must needs be up and about, attired in the garments of a great lord, which Briseis had bought for me without so much as a word.

Then, sitting on the pillared terrace of her house, I told my lady the story of my life as I have told it to you, hiding nothing nor sparing myself for all the cruel deeds we pirates did upon the sea. Whilst I talked, sitting on that

terrace so full of the great climbing plants and so rich with the sense-lulling sounds and perfumes borne in upon us and swept around us by the evening zephyrs so refreshing after the heat of the day, she sat near me, holding one of my hands in hers and watching my face with wondrous interest, that turned to admiration, and deepened into awe, and when I reached the end of my story, seemed changed to worship, almost love, I thought. For awhile after she was silent, looking dreamily over that fair garden; then, as the spirit of meditation was beginning to cast its subtle spell over my soul, the sweet cadence of her gentle voice broke in upon me.

"'Tis a true story, Arnon, that you have told, and right glad am I to have sheltered you and made you my friend. I, too, can tell you something that has happened since the day, now three weeks ago, when my cousin Vichri burst upon you and captured your ship. It is ill news, I fear."

"Pray tell me, even though it break my heart," I cried, my thoughts flying back to Viol and her babe.

"'Twill do that, I am afraid," said she, but smiling as she spoke, "unless there be an antidote at hand wherewith to blunt the edge of its pain. My cousin's soldiers captured one of your men alive, and when he refused to tell anything of your hiding-places they put him to the torture. When near bereft of his reason by the racking pains they administer to such stubborn dogs, he told them where your little island lies and how to steer to reach it. Something more was on his tongue, 'tis said, but before they could gather its import the poor wretch died, exhausted by the torment. So a fleet has been sent out to lay waste the island and kill all its inhabitants, old and young, men, women, and children, that none of the breed may be left alive."

I bowed my head in silence, as for the blow to pass over me, but honestly, it hurt me less than it had done a three-week before, for I had grown to expect it.

"The will of the Gods be done," was all I said.

"The Gods have been very merciful to you, Arnon," answered Briseis, "since they have saved you alive, when all else have perished, and have guided your footsteps to one who will befriend you as long as she lives. And I think, son of Didron, that the priest Unim spoke truly concerning you, for even now the first part of his saying has come about."

This I began to think myself, and therewith my old self-assurance came back with double force, and I resolved to make the most of my lot, wherever it might be cast.

So I sat at the right hand of Briseis at her feasts, clothed in the finest, and eating of the best that the land could lavish on its nobles, having a social standing, as the privileged friend of the lady Briseis, second to none in that magnificent city, well named Kronos the Stately.

Also I gained renown and the admiring gaze of damsels' eyes for my skill and strength in the trials of arms that were held continually in the town, until none dared to stand up before me at sword-play or spear-practice or in the use of the sling or bow, or even at trials of speed or horsemanship or wrestling, and above all, none came against me who had an iron grip like mine.

For this latter notoriety I was named Phrena the Iron-Fingered by the soldiers and men-at-arms who thronged the vicinity of the Court of King Dulo the Tenth—for I deemed it not wise to tempt the fates by still retaining my real cognomen. To Briseis only I was Arnon, the son of Didron. Also I came to the notice of royalty and was crowned with decorations of merit by the shaky hands of the wine-and-women-loving king, who, I verily believe, beneath his smug and smooth exterior and quavering, mirthless laugh, was monstrously jealous of my unimpaired physique.

All this was well, and so well that I had been content to live there in the sunshine of Briseis' smile and the favourite of a war-loving populace, till courtier life had sapped my manhood, and I had gone down with grey hairs to a tame and peaceful grave, had it not been that I was in constant fear of recognition as my true self should I come face to face with one-eared Vichri, who, though away on distant service, was expected to return at any time; and that I was on precarious footing in the house of my protectress, whom I had grown to love with an ardour I never felt for little Viol, but who seemed to treat me merely as a plaything to be proud of, a privileged retainer, or at most a faithful friend, though I flattered myself that her heart told another tale.

So I resolved that I must become rich, and purchase lands, and count amongst the wealthy nobles of the city, before I put my love to the trial, and what better way of getting rich than to take ship and secure for myself the treasure of that cave wherein I had found refuge some fifteen years ago, and of which I alone knew the secret? But first I must have a ship, and from whence could I get that? In my perplexity I saw no way but to consult my fair friend.

(To be continued.)

POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 15.

THE titles of two of the stories in this number have been interchanged. A guinea will be sent to the first person living within 100 miles of London who sends the title of each story and the page on which it *should* appear. Another guinea will go to the reader living more than 100 miles from London under the same conditions. *Post-cards only, please.*

"What's the matter with your brother lately?"

"Oh, he's been like that ever since he won a prize in *Pearson's Weekly* Straight Line Competition."

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JUMBLED STORY NO. 15.

MAKE DISABLE OUT.

SEE PAGE 460.

THE MURDER ON THE GREAT BRITISH RAILWAY.

I gave a slight shudder as I finished reading that a jeweller was killed and robbed yesterday in the proximity of Shrewsbury clock was nothing to the ladies. Mr. Fossdyke, I found, had left the railway carriage with the murderer of Mr Symons. He was not in the slightest degree dismayed by his heavy blows. After that he made no effort to travel together. He's a gentlemanly man; you'd crowded round and clamoured for an explanation.

What was to be done?

Archy was a lord and it was the ambition of Archy's future father in law, Mr. Samuel Fossdyke, that the position I was in placed me entirely at his rug, and the "click" was caused by his turn-in, I felt an uncontrollable desire to slumber.

We had a long run before us so taking a pull at Samuel Fossdyke, the celebrated pork dealer of Bond Street, deposited the jewels with the jeweller, partially opened one eye.

Gracious heaven! The description of the Miss Jeromette Fossdyke to marry a lord. Archy was not to be cooled even by what I had gone and involuntarily clutched my bag.

"Now, Tom," said Archy. "I want you to take me over the top of his paper, still taking into the flask, I filled my pipe and opened the paper.

I cheerfully promised.

"You'll have to be careful, old fellow," he must introduce you to Fossdyke before you start. Later in the day he drew me aside and said:

"Say, officers, I guess you've got the wrong victim, the assassin opened the carriage door, and following poor Fossdyke who was being dragged to give time for refreshment. I was in the act of well-bred appearance, slightly above the middle platform. I hadn't the remotest idea where my man was found in the footway, death having choose a moment when he would be able to take Chicago, and his family.

So I agreed to go.

Oh! if I could only get a good look at his face. A thick moustache nearly hides his mouth, which pushed the body out, and then waiting quietly till I sat up and found myself within three feet of him.

"Wal, Mr. Rothsay, I didn't expect to meet you under the same delusion. We had each taken the the wealthy pig dealer of Chicago, for the murderer of the robbery.

"It's a fact Tom. You have heard me speak of justice to be had in this played-out country, I'll have the daily paper.

"Thank heaven," I murmured.

So I leaned across the carriage, and said:

"'It's very nice! but don't you think the setting has a most determined expression. Eyes dark, active, and considerably above the average in Edinburgh.

I was musing over the absurdity of this destinctness. Click! There it was again.

When the train drew up at the terminus in Thompson's, Bond Street, and have them reset. On the death of his father, finding the estates dressed. What *was* I to do? If I allowed the man. That man," he added, pointing to me, "is handed over to the police.

He had recovered from the blow I had dealt Mr. Symons, a traveller in the jewellery trade. and hiring a yacht went for a cruise in Eastern London the prisoner was securely handcuffed and touched my foot. In an instant I was awake. I conceived a great liking for the girl and in due horror I found that, despite the mortal peril I was the murderer of Mr. Symons."

"The body has been identified as that of a man and from the carriage window in graphic course they became engaged.

The train stopped a few minutes at Peterborough but the "click" had sounded with ominous discription which might serve for thousands of fools in Europe, but for downright cussedness, it's rather irritating to have to listen night quietly disappeared."

Yes, Archy was right; here were the particulars I showed it to her. She handled it in a most softly opening it took something out, and then closed, and his shirt literally torn from his back.

But Fossdyke, I noticed, kept his one eye—the unusually large, and very sinister. He dresses with such intentness during the service that I can without losing consciousness, for I found it for this night's work, I will as sure as my name is supposed that, after rifling the pockets of his man."

"Could you oblige me with a light?" My companion dropped his paper.

He had succeeded to the title two years before.

Surely I could reach him before the revolver and fired. The next instant I flung myself on him, again. The shaving alters you, but I should know one occupant beside myself and he was reading.

The English weakness for making speeches began to melt as I realised the truth. I had taken him with the revolver but he presented a sorry affair next morning. "Desperate struggle in a night's work."

I am no coward, but I as nearly fainted as a man for that I recked nothing.

"Promise never to reveal your share in that position.

Lunch was then announced and I was introduced to Fossdyke in a railway carriage. A. G.

"What have you done with your moustache darn me, if you don't beat creation. If there's any talker the world has ever seen, I cleared my throat dreadfully encumbered, he shut up Castle Ferrers, and I was to be Archy's best man.

Fossdyke has made a good story out of our Three feet!

The passengers getting scent of the affair between Peterborough and London. I'll pack them to understand that the English were the biggest sex I say nothing.

I kept away from Castle Ferrers till the wedding I to wait for the end without making one single overlook what has taken place on one condition."

It was a first-class carriage and there was only me, I waited for his next move. Presently to my disparaging manner, and said:

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"Wal," he continued, "I've always been given his mercy. After regarding me for a moment with male countenance to deceive me; as to the other rather formidable weapon—and I was vigorous, through. Imitating the example of the greatest shouldered middle-aged gentlemanly-looking man but I had a large clasp knife in my pocket—a head, the thick moustache, hiding the cruel mouth, shaved. Archy stared at me in astonishment.

I was surprised, for Archy was such a good-physiognomist. I do not think it possible for any consideration the enormous value of the stones I went on, "for I see by this morning's paper the train reached Riley—where tickets are taken—the 'Light of Asia,' and what a magnificent strength.

I looked cautiously round. The crowd was at his moustache and frowned heavily.

The marriage was to take place in a fortnight and whiskers," he whispered, "I shouldn't have you among a thousand. Wal, sir, I am willing to renew the combat but lay on the seat regarding no one will suspect the nature of its contents. I attempts to level the pistol at me, but I held his footboard. Directly these were observed, an engine at a terrific speed and the vibration was very great. which reposed in the netting over my head and no one I dare trust them with but you."

Why should I not lie back? In that position I could be withdrawn from beneath the rug, aimed, language described to the awe stricken crowd not have slumbered many minutes when something felt sure I was recognised. I was not mistaken. cartridges. A numbness began to steal through the eyes large and sinister. The man, too, was well and a deadly struggle ensued. Backwards and for-sounded, so I set the cup down and rushed on the murderer! There was the low retreating fore-wards we swayed our breath coming in short, quick struggle. The curtains were torn, one of the windows after the well known manner of the aged states-pockets rifled and my dead body flung out. Was I aways had a great belief in my skill as a spectacle. His mouth was cut, one of his eyes placed the bag at my side, lit a cigar, and opened me with a ferocity impossible to describe. But I was unarmed as far as firearms were concerned, surrendering to the influence I fell asleep. I could and telegraphed to Archy as if nothing had hap-been caused by a revolver. No money or valuables in this black bag. It's a shabby old thing, and that was all I cared for. When the train stopped what had taken place.

"Name it," I cried.

I leaned against a pillar for support.

"About ten miles from London the body of a carriage that had been the scene of a most deadly vengeance leaped into life. Wresting the revolver crept back to his seat. I breathed freely again.

Quietly opening the large knife I had with further examination revealed blood stains on the gasps. The murderer made the most desperate effort to save myself? No, a thousand times no. He's going to London on business and you can clear that the object of the attack was robbery. It became aware that my fellow passenger was re-garding me attentively over the top of his paper.

The scoundrel was standing over me.

It was not likely that I was going to feel to the station. So I sneaked—sneaked is the fellow to fancy that I suspected him, he would mingled in the throng on the platform, and promised to wire the moment I had placed the other was behind a green shade—fixed on me height, forehead rather low and slightly retreating. his attack.

The lights faded and the faces around me directed to an empty compartment of a first-class eyelids lowered watch him from beneath the lashes. known you."

Escape of the murderer. Arrest of an innocent word—out of the station and drove straight to a look of deadly intentness, he took down a bag of Mr. Symons. In fact, we had both laboured last evening the attention of the officials was at Riley I summoned the guard and transferred from his now weakened grasp I struck him several double mistake. It's a good story, I admit, but these confounded jewels to London at once, to waters. In Japan he made the acquaintance of The man the police are looking for is a broad-ments, then he might not be so careful in making her speak so." And my old friend tugged irritably on the seat. Then the smouldering embers of morning and then appeared at the altar clean and as the train steamed out of the station, is dreadfully old fashioned?' It riled me to hear the murderer to his charge.

But supposing I could contrive to lull his sus-ment I came to, managing to secure an evening resigned myself to a journey alone and having pened. This is how the papers chronicled the other for the assassin.

ANOTHER GREAT ROBBERY ON THE GREAT BRITISH RAILWAY.

Presently I stretched my antagonist full length after night to his shameless mendacity. Falstaff could simulate slumber and by keeping my picions and yet keep a sharp watch on his move-ing the chamber piece round as he inserted the paper as the train glided out of the station.

Click! What was that? The train was going alarmed because a fellow passenger chose to peep at me at a disadvantage.

This statement was received with a laugh.

I had captured the murderer of Mr. Symons, and missing, is estimated to be worth nearly £10,000. tempered fellow as a rule.

For some time I resisted the inclination but the jewels in Thompson's hands, I said good-bye. The jewellery he had with him, and which is smashed, and the floor stained with blood. A never think that he'd been a pig sticker."

As I shouldn't know him if I saw him, I was signalled for to search the line.

Why, the man had a revolver concealed beneath my limbs. In a few seconds I should be shot, my stone it is. Well, what do you think she did when drowsiness grew on me more and more till at length people, including even myself, when I suddenly plainly, and generally carries a small black bag."

"On the arrival in London of the great 9.15 train of vigorously blowing a cup of coffee when the bell carriage was, so I bundled into the first compart-of any kind were found on the body, so it seems Castle an hour before but would join the train at had with me it behoved me to proceed with caution. wrist in an iron clutch.

They are heirlooms and worth £20,000, and there's is Samuel Fossdyke."

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"How long have I been on a case?" repeated Inspector Belville musingly, "well, I should say that Blackingly business took as long as any to unearth, and that was the best part of three years. Not that I haven't been longer, off and on, at other bits of business; for the matter of that, I am still looking out for a man who killed his sweetheart fifteen years ago; but for steady, downright, day after day investigation, the Blackingly affair is certainly my record.

"I dare say you think that as soon as the newspapers have dropped commenting on any particular crime, whose perpetration has not been immediately traced, we police shelve the investigation and turn our attention to something fresh. Quite a mistake; our chance comes when the papers give us a little peace.

"Thanks to their gratuitous suggestions, supposed clues, and up-to-date information, our wide-awake William Sykeses are too often enabled to evade our vigilance. If it is a serious matter, a special man is put on the job, and he has to stick to it, night and day, till he succeeds, or the heads arrive at the conclusion that nothing will ever come of it. I thought at one time, in connection with the case I am going to tell you about, that it would have to be included in the "Undiscovered Ledger" at the Yard. However, by a stroke of luck, nothing else mind you, I managed to clear things up.

"I dare say you will remember reading about the conviction of the Blackingly gang some few years back, but I don't suppose you ever heard exactly what brought about their downfall. They were a dangerous and mysterious lot, and the extraordinary part of it was, they confined their operations to one county, Surrey. We never heard of them in town; they stuck to lonely country houses, and you can take it from me there are a good many such, in what most people reckon our fairest county.

"One night it would be a gentleman's seat near Redhill, next week the owner of a place at Epsom would be found half killed and his silver cleaned out, and never a trace left behind. They were wonderfully clever at their little games, and not without a sense of humour, too, it would seem.

"They locked up an eminent J. P., a staunch teetotaller, who had been roused by the marauders and had come upon the scene in his night-shirt, in the bath-room, and blocking the overflow pipe, turned the tap on (cold water only). That gentleman gave us no peace at the Yard until the offenders were caught, and he was really the cause of my being put on their track.

"From a close study of their mode of operations, it seemed to me that they must have their centre in the country. They could never hope to get back to town after every foray by train, or on foot, and driving the orthodox dog-cart was too risky. To find out this centre was my first endeavour. I had a choice of some twenty villages, and it took me twelve months to make up my mind that Blackingly must be the rendezvous. This was a little village on the Brighton line some twenty miles from London. The villagers were mostly agricultural labourers, or lime-burners; a more unlikely lot among which to find a gang of burglars one could hardly wish to see, and yet I was convinced that under their apparent simplicity and guileless ways I should find my men.

"I arrived on the scene as a jobbing gardener, but ready and willing to turn my hand to anything from ditching to lime-burning; in the latter capacity I soon discovered I was not wanted. The ranks were always full. Nine men and a foreman constituted the staff of the day and night shifts, and to all appearance the men were typical of their class, with nothing extraordinary in their appearance or behaviour. They lived in a row of wooden huts in the village, just off the main road, and not very far from the kilns. Some were married, and had families, the unmarried males seemed to share a couple of huts between them, and depended on their mates' wives to 'do' for them.

"I was always fond of a bit of gardening, so the odd jobs I picked up at the various gentlemen's houses round suited my taste and left me free to prowl about unsuspected. At the same time I could never make much headway with the lime-burners. I would drop in of an evening at the 'Bay Leaf' and make myself as sociable as possible with the labourers, but I never seemed able to win the confidence of the men of lime. Whether they distrusted all outsiders, or suspected me in particular, it was hard to say, but never by any chance did they let fall in my hearing any hint that would identify them with the daring gang which still continued their depredations.

"On various pretexts would I drop in to one or other of the huts while the men were at work, leaving, perhaps,

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a few vegetables for the lady of the house or some flowers for the children, but nothing in the shape of stolen property met my gaze, and you may be sure I had a very complete, not to mention lengthy, list of missing articles. Often, too, have I shadowed the huts at all times between midnight and dawn, on the chance of tracking an inmate either outward or homeward bound, but never a man to be seen. They seemed to keep most exemplary hours. Again, at a safe distance I would spy upon the night shift at their steamy work in the 'wee sma' 'oors.' Not a member missing.

"I was sorely puzzled because, from the very fact of their reticence and their hanging so together, I felt convinced that they were somehow concerned in the mysterious burglings, but without a scrap of evidence to go upon it would have been folly to have made a search.

"As a matter of precaution I had provided myself with a search-warrant, and was in constant communication with the nearest station, which had instructions to supply as many men as I required.

"Nearly two years had passed and I had acquired quite a reputation in the neighbourhood as a jobber. All the same it was monotonous work, and not by any means so easy as the good folks of Blackingly imagined.

"My lodging was within sight of the end wooden hut, and many an hour have I, in a darkened room, sat and watched for the developments that never came. Hardly ever, save on Saturday, did a light show in any of the wooden tenements after ten o'clock at night. This I tested by many out-door vigils, varied by an occasional peep at the lime-kilns, some hundred and fifty yards away.

"It was getting near Christmas, and my duties as gardener were perceptibly lighter; but increased leisure to track the enemy seemed to bring me no nearer, yet I hung on dog-like, my tenacity rather increased than lessened by the not too polite requests from the Yard for information.

"I was sitting one evening at the 'Bay Leaf,' partly concealed by the open tap-room door, conning quietly a list of articles stolen the previous night from a private residence not five miles away. I could almost have sworn none of my lambs were in it, because I had watched the greater part of the early morning, both near the huts and at the kilns, without a suspicion of an absentee from either home or work, and yet all the indications of their handiwork were there. All manner of things they had pilfered, from a Victoria Cross, much prized by the owner of the house, down to a large plum-pudding, destined to adorn the Christmas board. I was just smiling to myself over this last item, when one of the wives of the party tripped in, and, seeing one of the gay bachelors of her set apparently lounging alone at the bar, cried out heartily:

"'Well, Joe, wen are yer a-goin' to look in for your share o' the puddin'?'

"A sharp but stealthy 'hush' from Joe was all the reply she got as he, by an almost imperceptible nod, indicated my presence. I, of course, remained absorbed in my literature, but, though not an excitable man generally, I distinctly heard my heart beating away a hundred to the minute. The couple conversed for a moment in an undertone and left together. I could see from the woman's gestures that she did not consider I ought to be taken into account (I had made myself rather a favourite with the ladies), but the man seemed suspicious. Was it a mere coincidence, or could there be any possible connection between the Bourne House plum-pudding and the toothsome fare referred to by the 'lady-limer.' It was worth risking; I sent a wire to the police station at C——, using a special indicator to avert suspicion in case the telegraph people might talk, to send on the 'half-dozen bulbs' by next train. The 'bulbs,' in the shape of six stalwart plain-clothes men, arrived in due time. At ten o'clock I had the hut where the talkative female resided surrounded and timidly knocked at the door. The woman's voice asked:

"'Who's there?'

"'Only George, the gardener, mistress,' I answered as she proceeded to unbolt the door.

"'And what may George the gardener want this time o' night?' queried the good lady suspiciously.

"I temporised by getting my foot well inside the door, and then boldly said: 'I've come for my share of the pudding.'

"The look of surprise and horror in the woman's face was almost laughable, but leaving me master of the doorway, she made a dash for the back room, and following close upon her heels I found her in the act of raising a large black substance to throw it out of the window. I let her alone, and the article in question (the Bourne House pudding) was neatly 'held' by one of the 'bulbs' stationed just outside—shock number two for Mrs. Jargins. I asked her where her husband was.

"'Ain't come 'ome yet from the pub,' was the prompt reply.

"'Won't do,' says I, 'saw him come in an hour ago and I'll swear he hasn't left the house since.'

"'Find him, then,' she returned, with just a ring of triumph in her voice. Alas! the exultation was short-lived—shock number three was upon her. I had just turned to leave the kitchen when, to my astonishment, I saw the hearth-stone cautiously raised and a man's head and shoulders appeared in the opening. He commenced:

"'I say, Polly, I've come back for the sack, I——.' He got no further; he caught sight of me just as I made a dash for his throat. I got hold before the stone dropped, and with assistance soon had my gentleman outside of his burrow. Then it all flashed upon me. I hastily dispatched four of the men to the brink of the lime-kilns to be within call, and again raised the hearth-stone, and secured the dark lantern with which my underground friend was provided.

"'Now,' I said, producing a revolver and motioning one of my men to follow me, the other being left in charge of Polly and the house, 'down you go again and take me to the other end of that tunnel; at the first sound or struggle this pistol will go off, accidentally, of course, but your head will be just in front of the muzzle, so you know what to expect.'

"The lime-kilner seemed to grasp the situation, and led the way down a few steps cut out of the chalk to the entrance to a passage about four feet high, leading, as I suspected, in the direction of the lime-kilns. The tunnel was beautifully dry and had been hewn with comparative ease out of the solid chalk.

"At length we heard the murmur of voices. With just a touch of the revolver against the back of our leader's head by way of a reminder we pressed on. Suddenly we came upon a small chamber with an exit on the other side. Lying about round a blazing fire were three men in working garb; shown up by the blaze, and piled around on shelves, cut out of the chalk, were the spoils of many a raid. We had come upon their store-house. At our approach one of the men, not noticing the increased numbers, growled out:

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"'Nice time you've been after that there sack, I'm blowed if——'

"Then he stopped in amazement. Still holding Joe by the collar and allowing my assistant to take up a position by my side with his six-shooter prominently displayed, I said, recognising the young man of the 'Bay Leaf':

"'I called for a slice of that pudding and Joe kindly brought me on here to have a look at the other things.

"'That's no use,' I continued sharply, as the others made a move for their hip-pockets, 'we've got you covered and there's half-a-dozen more outside, so just take it calmly.'

"Releasing Joe for a moment I blew my whistle and heard a faint reply in the distance. An exchange of signals resulted in the appearance of my other men with the horny-handed ones fresh from their toil in tow. They had seized the men at work and discovered the not too well concealed entrance to the cave. So we were quite a merry party.

"Well, we got them away safely and you know the result—fifteen years. You see they did the thing well. The men who were off duty at night snatched a few hours' sleep, then sneaked out by their tunnel when I supposed them safe in bed, walked across country by different routes to the appointed house to be plundered, did their work and returned the same way to their cave and homes. The night men, of course, remained at their posts and kept an eye on things in general; all the huts were connected with the tunnel.

"Polly's outspokenness, combined with Joe's fatal lapse of memory, had been their undoing, and I never see a plum-pudding now without thinking of the Blackingly gang."

R. J. Turner.

A Lock of Flaxen Hair.

MR. EBENEZER FRESHFIELD looked the personification of self-satisfaction, as he lolled back in an easy-chair after his sumptuous dinner. In his hand was the morning's *Telegraph* in which with a self-approving smile he surveyed, under the head of "The Kamschatkans' Relief Fund," "Ebenezer Freshfield, Esq., £1,000." Then, turning to the editorial comments on the progress of the fund, he read: "Another addition has to be made to the countless instances of the generosity and public spirit of Mr. Ebenezer Freshfield, who has made the munificent contribution of £1,000 to our steadily-growing fund."

Yes, there is no doubt that Mr. Ebenezer Freshfield, public philanthropist, churchwarden, and proprietor of the famous drapery emporium bearing his name, was exceedingly pleased with himself. To invariably have the adjective "respected" attached to his name in public references was grateful to the soul of Mr. Freshfield. It had been whispered, however, that it was a case with that gentleman of no publicity, no philanthropy, and suggested that no advertisement was so efficacious as the philanthropic one. But when did success ever escape the tribute which envy pays to it? Certainly, Mr. Freshfield's private beneficences were unknown, but, as the preservation of the left hand in a state of ignorance as to the procedure of the right is expressly enjoined, that, surely, should be reckoned to his credit!

Mr. Freshfield's contemplation of the evidences of his munificence was interrupted by the announcement that his brother, Mr. Samuel Freshfield, wished to see him.

Mr. Ebenezer condescendingly extended the tips of two fingers to his brother, as the latter entered the room.

"How d'ye do, Samuel?" he inquired, in a patronising tone of voice.

"I am fairly well, thank you, Ebenezer," answered the other, meekly. "And you?—you look well."

"I am well—exceedingly well!" said the elder brother smugly.

The brothers were a strange contrast as they sat there. Ebenezer thrown back arrogantly in his chair, with an air of pompous prosperity, and the other fidgeting nervously on the edge of his seat, as though he recognised his own presumption in being there at all.

"Well," continued Ebenezer, after a pause, placing his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets and spreading his hands out over a comfortable rotundity, "still painting masterpieces, Samuel, eh?"

There was a suggestion of contempt in the manner in which the question was asked which asserted itself through its veneer of affected jocularity.

"I am working at a picture which I hope may be considered to show some improvement," answered Samuel modestly.

"Does your work bring you any more money?" asked Ebenezer drily.

"There is a delight in one's work which is not necessarily to be measured by money," replied Samuel, with a faint assertion of dignity.

"Ah!" said Ebenezer superciliously, "you fellows of the 'artistic temperament,' or whatever you call it in your own jargon, all affect to despise money, but it's a useful standard—a useful standard to enable one to judge where one stands."

Samuel did not reply, and there was silence for a moment. Then Ebenezer spoke again.

"It has always seemed a great pity to me, Samuel, that you had never put your money into some respectable

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business. Look at the difference between us. We both come into a thousand pounds. You go off wandering about Europe, picking up an art education I think you called it, and I dare say have a very small fragment of your capital left, while I, like a sensible man, if you will pardon my saying so, go into business and prosper. Freshfield's Drapery Emporium is a household name, and I am—well, not, perhaps, a millionaire, but warm, Samuel, decidedly warm! And then look at the good that money enables you to do to your less fortunate fellow men—that's a blessed thought, indeed, Samuel!"

Samuel plucked up heart at that. "That sentiment does you credit, Ebenezer," he said admiringly, "and at the same time makes it easy for me to tell you what I came here to see you about. The fact is, Ebenezer, I am engaged upon a painting of great scope and ambition, which I am certain (I say it in all modesty) will bring me both fame and money in abundance. My devoting myself exclusively to this work has led to the neglect of other and more saleable works which would have provided for my living requirements. I have come to you, therefore, Samuel, to ask whether you would temporarily assist me with a small loan. My picture will soon be finished—there is no question as to its sale, and I shall then be in a position to repay you."

Ebenezer did not answer for a few minutes. It may have been that he was not so sanguine as his brother regarding the disposal of his picture, and thought the prospect of seeing his money back not particularly hopeful. Then he rose from his chair, drew himself up to his full height, and said pompously:

"Samuel, I am grieved that you should have asked me that, deeply grieved; for it compels me, quite in your interest, let me assure you, to decline your request. It has ever been a principle of mine," he continued, in the manner of one addressing a public meeting, "to decline to use my money as a pauperising agent to lower the self-respect of any man. If you were disabled, Samuel, my purse would gladly be placed at your disposal; but you are not. You are well able to pursue your calling, and when, by your own unaided efforts you have extricated yourself from this temporary embarrassment you will bless me for my attitude, and cherish with pardonable pride the thought that you are beholden to no man for the proud position in which you then stand!"

Ebenezer beamed round the room as though in imagination he heard the rapturous plaudits of a multitude approving his sentiments.

Samuel arose, and with a gesture of pathetic dignity said:

"I am sorry I asked you, Ebenezer—good-night!"

"Do, pray, believe, Samuel," said Ebenezer, "that it is only in your interest, and for your good. You will thank me some day, I am certain!" and he waved his brother from the room.

There was no resentment in Samuel's heart against his brother as he walked slowly home to his lodgings. After all, he argued ingenuously, he had spent his inheritance. Was it fair that he should seek a portion of his brother's? Perhaps his dreams about this great picture might be only dreams. But he was sorry, and not altogether for himself. He had counted upon being able to relieve the more pressing necessity of a stricken brother artist—that saddened him far more than his own need of a good meal.

Then a thought struck him which caused him to quicken his pace till he came to a dingy-looking shop in a side street, which he entered. When he emerged therefrom he was minus an overcoat but plus a small square of cardboard and half a sovereign.

He hurried on and came to his friend's house. He shot past the landlady who opened the door and ran up the stairs to the small back room in which his friend was lying.

"It's all right, my boy!" he said cheerily. "I've seen my brother and here's half a sovereign for the present. We'll see about some more when that's gone. He says you can repay him when you get to work again. Now, don't disturb yourself—that's all right! I'll send Mrs. Brown up to get what you want. Good-night, good-night! my boy. I'll come in again the first thing in the morning," and before the patient could get in a word of thanks, Samuel had dashed out.

He only lived a few doors off, and when he reached his den he ransacked his cupboard but only found a small piece of butter, a crust of bread and sufficient tea to make one not over-strong cup. However, with these ingredients he was able to prepare a royal feast, to which, no doubt, the thought that his friend was provided for added an agreeable sauce.

Day by day Samuel worked at his picture, limiting his appetite by the efficacious expedient of circumscribing his corporeal circumference, until one blessed day the work was finished.

Samuel surveyed his handiwork with the proud satisfaction of one who feels that the result of his labours has, approximately, at least, realised his lofty intentions. And a well-known connoisseur, Lord Everard, who had been introduced to Samuel by a friendly dealer, thought so, too, for he gave Samuel an exceedingly handsome cheque for the work and a flattering commission for another.

At last the tide in the affairs of Samuel Freshfield had turned, but by the irony of fate it had turned just a few weeks too late. The privation and self-denial he had undergone had strained his constitution to breaking point. Two days after the favour of his patron had so altered his fortunes he was found dead upon the floor of his room.

Mr. Ebenezer Freshfield was much affected by his brother's death. Seeing that, as next-of-kin, he succeeded to Samuel's works, of which there were some specimens, it was said, a little brutally, that he was very favourably affected. The interest of Lord Everard had been so beneficial to the commercial value of the late Samuel Freshfield's pictures that they fetched extraordinary prices, which materially benefited the balance of Mr. Ebenezer's account at his bankers.

And paragraphs appeared in the newspapers to the effect that Mr. Ebenezer Freshfield, the well-known and respected philanthropist, whose talented brother had so recently met with an untimely death, was quite prostrated by the sad event. The paragraph went on to state that when the many evidences of Mr. Ebenezer Freshfield's munificent benevolence were remembered, it would occasion no surprise to the world to know that he had made his brother's welfare his especial and loving care for years, and had, by his generosity, enabled his brother to pursue that artistic career which had been crowned with such splendid success, but which had come to such a tragic and premature end, to the poignant sorrow of the artistic world and general public, who would extend their heartfelt sympathy to Mr. Ebenezer Freshfield in his sudden bereavement!

HENRY GORDON.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NURSE JENNETT—HAS MORE IDEAS.

ALLAN MURRAY felt day by day during Braetoun's long illness that he was passing through one of the most crucial tests that ever fell to the lot of man. The surgeon's share in the case soon came to an end. "I can do no more," he said; "it is the business of the physician to see if he can build up the old waste and keep the flame of life burning. It is a marvel to me that the man is alive, and I frankly own that I could not have saved him."

The long fight continued. Everyone was utterly exhausted with watching, and one night Olive and her father, who never left the little house, had been forced to go and lie down. The nurse, who had been indefatigable, had come on duty, and Murray, whose brain felt to be numb, was seated there by his patient.

The nurse had been busy preparing such things as would be wanted for the night, and had just arranged a table and placed the shaded lamp in its place, according to the regular custom, and then gone through the folding doors to the back room, leaving one fold half closed so that she could hear the slightest movement and come back at once if required.

Then the watch began, Murray being about to stay till one o'clock, when Olive would come and take his place, and the nurse lie down, Emsworth always coming in about six to relieve his daughter.

Murray's spirits were very low that night, and the temptation to give up was terribly strong. Something whispered to him that it was madness to go on. He rose to his feet, walked to the folding door and looked through the narrow slit to see that the nurse had sunk back in her chair and was sleeping heavily with her lips apart.

Murray frowned, and then his face grew smooth again.

"Poor creature," he said to himself; "she can do no more."

He returned to his seat intending to let her sleep till it was time for him to leave, and he had just taken his place again when the door opening upon the landing was softly opened, and the blood flushed to his temples, and a strange fit of trembling came over him as he turned to meet her who, he felt, was about to enter.

But it was Emsworth who came in very softly, nodded, and bent over the bed, to stand gazing down at the insensible man for a time.

"Why have you come?" said Murray at last.

"Can't sleep," was the reply. "Too much worn out. She has gone off very fast to-night, thank goodness."

No more was said for a few minutes.

Emsworth had turned and sunk into a chair opposite to the doctor, and kept on looking at him uneasily; but as soon as in the dim light he saw that Murray's eyes were directed inquiringly at him, he looked down nervously.

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This took place several times, and at last his lips moved as if he were speaking, but no words came.

"You are utterly worn out," said Murray. "Go and lie down; perhaps you could sleep now."

"Well, so are you worn out," said Emsworth, in an irritable whisper. "It's killing her, too; even the nurse is asleep. Look here, Murray; I'm not a brute. I want to do what's just and right, but there are bounds to everything. Why are we doing all this?"

Murray was silent. He dared not trust himself to speak, for these seemed to be the echo of his own thoughts.

"I say why are we doing all this? He can't recover. It is only keeping him in misery. Nature seems to say that he must die, and all this prolonged struggle is killing her. Come, speak out like a man; you feel, don't you, that you can't save him after all?"

"No," said Murray, after an effort. "I will not give up."

Emsworth was silent for a few minutes.

"It's like fighting against fate," he said at last. "That surgeon told me it was quite hopeless, and that he should have given it up from the first."

"How am I to look in Lady Braetoun's face if I have not struggled to the last?" said Murray coldly.

"Ah! and what for?" said Emsworth, after another pause; "for him to go on breaking her heart?"

"Or repent, and make her happy after all."

"Never," said Emsworth, in a passionate whisper. "I can bear it no longer. It is maddening, all this. It's killing her, poor child. I wish to God he was dead; she would suffer, and then be at rest."

"You must not talk like that," said Murray. "Go and lie down again."

"I cannot."

"You must. Go and try to sleep."

The stern masterful man rose with a sigh, and in obedience to the stronger will went slowly out, closed the door, and descended on tip-toe to the little back room, where a couch had been made up for him.

Murray listened till the last creak of a stair told that Emsworth had quite gone, and then he let his face fall into his hands, and groaned softly as he pressed his teeth upon his lower lip to keep it from quivering, for the temptation was stronger than ever.

At that moment there was a light, sharp tap on the window-pane, as if something had struck it, and looking out he let fall the blind again, glanced at his patient, and then stepped to the folding doors.

Nurse Jennett seemed to be sleeping soundly, and he passed out and descended the stairs, to softly open the front door and admit the cool night air.

As he stepped out, a closely veiled figure came quickly across from where the street lamp cast its light.

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"You again!" he said, in a low, reproachful voice. "And after what you promised me!"

"Don't, don't speak to me like that," she said faintly. "I'm weak and ill, Doctor."

"Then go home, and let your friends call in medical help."

"No, no," sobbed the girl, and she reeled and caught at his arm. "You don't understand. I—I can hardly speak."

"I did not mean to be so rough with you," he said more gently, and as she clutched at him her head fell back.

"No trick," he muttered. "Poor little lass! She is a true woman in spite of all."

In a minute or so she came to herself. Her eyes opened, and she stared about wildly.

"Where am I?" she panted. Then, with a faint cry of alarm, she tried to start from his arms.

"Wait a few minutes," he said kindly, "or the faintness will come back."

She looked at him suspiciously.

"Where am I? Who are you? Ah! I remember now, the doctor."

"Yes, the doctor. You should not have come again."

"I was obliged—I couldn't ask there. Oh, pray, pray tell me! I've been watching for hours. How is he now?"

"You promised me——"

"Yes," she said hysterically, "but don't torture me like this; tell me how he is now. They said he was dying. I saw you go in, and I've been here by the railings ever since. Is it—oh, please, please, speak!"

She caught his hand in hers, and made as if to sink upon her knees, but he prevented that act.

"Lord Braetoun has got over the worst, I think."

"Got over the worst, and he'll get well?"

"That depends on himself."

"Ah! this is a bad, miserable world; but what would it be without doctors? Thank you. I'll go home now. I'm so tired and so ill. But he will get well?"

"I have told you all I can."

"Thank you. I am so glad. Please," she added simply, "may I go now, and——"

"If you feel well enough. Shall I get you a glass of wine?"

"No. I only want to get home now. I feel as if I could go to sleep. Please, forgive me for calling you out. I saw your shadow on the window. I was nearly desperate, and felt as if I must go off the bridge."

"But now you'll go quietly home."

"Yes, I'll go back to Aunt's and wait; but I must come and ask how he is. I have been so patient, you know. I don't think I should have been able to live if I didn't come here and watch, and ask the girl for news. Thank you so much for speaking to me, for I don't think I want to die yet. I don't know, though. Everything is so hard. Life isn't such a great catch, after all."

She looked up at him piteously.

"Got over the worst, though," she said softly. "God bless you for what you've done. I'll go now."

She nodded at him quickly, drew her veil closely over her face, and glided along the pavement, while a minute later Murray heard the rattle of a cab.

"Gone," he said softly. "Ah, there are others suffer as much as I."

He entered and closed the door and stole up the stairs into the little drawing-room, to find Olive standing there in the shadow, ready to look at him indignantly.

"That woman sleeping, too," she cried reproachfully, "and my husband left quite alone. Oh, Doctor, it is too cruel. You insisted upon my lying down."

"I have not left him more than five minutes," he said deprecatingly.

"Five minutes! And he might have died. It is horrible—so cruel. Is there no one I can trust?"

Murray said no word in his defence, but went softly to the table, took a glass, and poured in a portion from a bottle. Then he turned to go and summon the nurse, but Olive checked him.

"No," she said, "let her sleep. I will help."

Then she went to Braetoun's left, to pass her hand softly beneath his shoulders and back, as Murray did the same from the right, and together they raised him, arm resting against arm, while the glass was held to the insensible man's lips, and he drank the contents of the glass. Then, as they lowered him down, and were withdrawing, hand touched hand, and as if an electric current had flashed through Murray, his fingers closed round the soft warm palm and held it in a spasmodic grip, which was softly returned, and Olive's eyes met those of Murray as they bent together over Braetoun, neither stirring for some moments.

Olive broke the silence, and her voice, mere whisper as it was, sounded humble and appealing, but there was no trace of passion or tremor in its tones as she said softly, returning the pressure the while:

"Forgive me. I was wrong. I know how cruel and unjust my words must have sounded to you who have been so unsparing of yourself;" and she began to smooth the pillow.

"I beg pardon, my lady; shall I do that?" said a voice. "I would have come directly if I had known."

"There is no need now," said Olive gently. Then to Murray, in the calmest, most unruffled way: "I'll go again now."

She bent down to gaze intently in Braetoun's face, and placing a hand on either side upon the pillow, kissed his forehead, while Murray felt the blood surging through his veins, as his temples throbbed, and a sensation as of fire scorching his brain assailed him, unconscious the while that the nurse was going to and fro, furtively watching first one and then the other from the darkened portion of the room, and with a tread as silent as that of some feline beast of prey.

Olive stole softly to the door, and then turned to whisper: "Mind that Dr. Murray has a little coffee soon."

"Yes, my lady, I shall not forget," said the woman, and the next moment doctor and nurse were alone.

The woman glanced at him from time to time, but he made no sign, spoke no word to her, merely sank in his chair by the head of the bed, as if to continue his watch, his nerves thrilling, and the blood still throbbing through his veins with the recollection of the soft, warm pressure of that hand, which seemed still to be lying clasped in his own.

And the nurse stole softly into the back room, to stand there motionless as soon as she was out of sight, thinking of what she should do. The light was very much lower, but it was far from being as dark as in the sick chamber. Her eyes shone out clearly, and a peculiar smile widened her mouth, as she made a suggestive gesture by pressing her mouth down upon the palm of her hand.

"And she's breaking her heart about him all the time," she said to herself, with the smile now displaying her white teeth; "but I don't think he'll get better—now."

CHAPTER XXIX.

In Lucy's Window-Box.

Two months crept by.

"Now you look here, miss," said Aunt Duncan sternly, as she sat at an open window facing the sea, and nodding her head slowly like a Chinese figure. "I know I'm a very weak old woman, and that the stouter I get the more stupid I seem, but I'm not quite so stupid, or such a blind old mole as you think."

"I don't know what you mean, Auntie," said Lucy, who in a very pretty seaside toilette, was also seated in the window, armed with an opera-glass, watching the passers-by, and scanning the seats and carriages along the sea front.

"Very well, then, I'll tell you, my dear, though you know

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all the time what I mean. My arm's getting as strong and well as can be, for I tried a bit of cutting out with the scissors and a noosepaper yesterday morning, and it's all nonsense for me to be stopping down at the sea-side, pretending it's doing me good."

"It is doing you a great deal of good, Auntie," said Lucy with a sigh of satisfaction, as her glass rested at last upon a group, about three hundred yards away, of an invalid carriage, beside which stood a thick-set gentleman, and a tall, graceful-looking lady.

"'Tisn't, and I'm beginning to fret again. I want to get home."

"You shall go home again soon."

"I shall, my dear, and very soon. Seaside's very nice to come to if you want to spend an 'appy day; but 'appy days kill one another, and it gets 'orrid sitting here so long doing o' nothing."

"You think so, Auntie, because you're not quite well and strong yet."

"No, I don't, miss; so don't you be a little 'umbug."

"Auntie!"

"Oh, I mean it; I always speak my mind. Seaside, indeed, where you can't get a bit o' real fresh fish! Don't tell me! It all comes down from London. It's second-hand—that's what it is. What they couldn't get rid of at Billingsgate they send down here, chuck it into the sea for about an hour, and pull it out again to 'umbug visitors with."

"What nonsense, Auntie!" cried Lucy, who sat there now with her elbows resting on the window-sill, so as to steady the glass, which was kept in one position.

"No, it ain't, miss. Think I don't know? Ketch me believing we get fish caught here! Why, them oysters I had yesterday were shameful. Of course, I didn't see 'em in both shells—fishmonger took good care of that—but I knowed they were all yawning, with their mouths wide open, because they were so tired of waiting to be sold."

"A'l a sign that your mouth's out of taste, Auntie."

"It ain't, miss, and don't you be so aggravating, or I shall 'it you. Look at the lobsters, too. Think I don't know the difference between a fresh boiled lobster and one put in the pot again? None for me, unless they're bought alive, and I have 'em boiled at 'ome. Then there was them s'rimps, why their skins was downright soft. We'll have a carriage and drive out this afternoon."

"Yes, Auntie, you shall," said Lucy eagerly.

"And go right away, ever so far, Shoreham way, where there's a real fisherman, and buy a lobster and some s'rimps, and bring 'em 'ome alive."

"No, no, Auntie; you can't ask the people here to boil them."

"Can't ask the people here to boil them? Oh, can't I? If they give me any of their nonsense, I'll go down in the kitchen and boil 'em myself. Pay 'em dear enough for what we do get done, anyhow."

"But there are plenty of fishermen along the beach here, Auntie, if we drive up and down."

"I dessay. Then I ain't going to drive up and down, miss. I don't want to show people my face and my noo dress. I want something decent to eat. Fishermen on the beach here? Tchah! I know. Half of 'em roughs from London in disguise, come down to see what they can get out of the visitors. You can't deceive me. There's that man with the flannel trousers up to his arm-pits, as is always worritin' me to go out in his boat, and as impudent as can be. Fishermen, indeed! Why, if he didn't once drive a Paddington 'bus, I don't know nothing. He's got a reg'lar Royal Oak look about him. Why I heard him say to the man as helps him push the boat off into the water. ''Old 'ard' as natural as life, and if that warn't enough, he sings 'Wo!' directly after. If ever I do come to the seaside again, I'll come to some place where it's real sea and real sand and real fishermen."

"Well, so it is here, Auntie," said Lucy, laughing merrily but without moving her eyes from the glass.

"No, it ain't, miss; it's all London stuck down by the sea-side, just like a noo piece at Doory Lane. Nothing don't seem real. It's all acting; even you're as bad."

"Why, Auntie!" cried the girl; "what amI doing?"

"Sticking there at the window just as if the manager had give us a box; and there you are with your opera glass, watching the show."

"Well, it's nice to watch the people," said Lucy, reddening a little.

"There, what did I say? Now, don't you call that acting? It's making life a reg'lar play, as it all has been lately. Fancy you trying to deceive me!"

"Oh, Auntie, I don't; I never would."

"And thinking me such a stupid old woman. I ain't blind. I saw my lord go by in his chair, with a man pushing him, and my lady and her father alongside, and ever since there you've been sitting with your silly eyes glued to that glass. Just as if I didn't know."

Lucy turned sharply round, and laid the glass on the sill, her cheeks flaming now, but gradually turning pale as she gazed with a wistful look in the old woman's eyes.

"Ah—ah—ah! Lucy, Lucy, if you dare to cry! There, look at you, with the hot water coming running out of your eyes. You'll spoil your frock. Oh, my own precious, don't cry, don't cry."

"I can't help it, Auntie. You are so cruel to me."

"I ain't, dear, only you do make me mad to see you go on as you do. Why couldn't you say downright why you wanted to come to Brighton, instead of pretending I wanted sea air? It was so mean."

"Yes, Auntie, it was, but I was so miserable when I found they'd left Brompton to come down here."

"Well, of course, I had my love affairs when I was young, but nobody can't throw in my teeth that I ever made such a fool of myself about a man as you do."

"Perhaps not, Auntie," said the niece. "I suppose I am very weak."

"Weak? It's shocking. Where is your pride?"

"Don't, don't talk about it, please, Auntie," said the girl humbly.

"I must, Lucy, for your good. Now do try and be reasonable. You know how nice that Mr. Emsworth spoke. Why, he was like a father to you, and really, old as I am, I took to him so that really I do believe if he'd have asked me I could have thought about getting married again."

"Oh, Auntie!"

"Well, my dear, human natur' is human natur', but it wouldn't have made no difference to you, for my will's made, and it can't be unmade. I call him a man, that's what I call him. None of your stuck-up arrystockricy sort of people, but a real honest gentleman. I saw how he took to you, and when you'd gone upstairs, crying, he sits down on one of the chairs, never noticing as there was a lot of gauze and spangles in it, and talks to me like a man should. Why, what did he say?"

"I don't know," said Lucy wearily.

"Don't tell stories, miss! You do know. I've told you times enough. Why, we were the best of friends directly. Just as if we'd known one another for years. It was just because he opened his 'art to me, just as men should, and because we was both in love."

"Auntie!"

"No, no, no, stupid girl, not that sort o' love, but proper sort o' love. I let out to him how fond I was of you, and he lets out how fond he was of his dear gal. And there we was at once. That settled it. I told him how I'd brought you up, and he told me how things had gone with him ever since his poor dear lady was took. Ah! how we did talk. Why, if there they ain't a-coming back! Lucy, my dear, I've a good mind to go and call on him at the 'otel."

"Auntie, no!" cried the girl, springing back from the window.

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"Oh, I don't see why not. I believe he'd be glad to see me. No, he wouldn't. You've spoiled that. Makes it look as if you'd followed them down; and so you did, and cheated me."

"I couldn't help it, Auntie," sighed the girl. "I felt obliged," and she stood away from the window and watched the little party go by.

"But you should have had more pride, my dear. Nobody couldn't have spoke more fair than he did, my dear. He says bygones must be bygones, which is quite right. He says he was very sorry for you, for you seemed to be as nice and sweet as any gal he'd ever set eyes on, but he couldn't help loving his child, and if you'd do the right thing he was prepared to do the same.

"'That must be all over now,' he says, 'for both their sakes. My poor gal has forgiven him, and I can't have her heart broke again by his coming to see your daughter.'

"'Which she's only a niece,' I says.

"'Well,' he says in his arbitry way, 'it's all the same. She's a woman, and a very beautiful one too, and if she'll do the right thing and promise never to see him again, I'm a rich man, Mrs. Duncan,' he says, 'and whatever you think would be a fair thing for her to have every year, she shall have it, for I'll buy her a nooity.'

"I told him he was a gentleman, and it was very han'some of him, but there wasn't no need, for I'd got plenty for both of us; but I promised him that if ever you wanted money I'd ast him, and then he said he'd see as you should keep the little house and everything, and, as you know, I promised him as everything should be all over, and then you cheated me into comin' down here, and you—— Well, of all—— You reaching your head outer winder with the glass to stare after 'em, and I don't believe you've hardly heard a word I said."

Lucy turned to gaze in a bewildered way at her aunt.

"I'm ashamed of you, Lucy, that I am, and we'll go back to London at once."

"Go back?" faltered the girl.

"Yes; it's shocking. You know he's made it up with his lady, and he's getting well again and you going on like that."

"I did not promise anything, dear," said the girl stoutly, as her eyes wandered towards the window again.

"Look this way, miss," cried Aunt Duncan. "I ain't got so much breath that I can waste what I have got by shouting at you and you not listening. I promised her father for you, and I told him I'd see as you behaved right, and you shall. I haven't had a happy moment since I found out how you cheated me. It's too bad, Lucy, too bad for anything. I did think you'd have behaved better than this."

"Did you, Auntie?" said the girl wearily. "You can't understand—you can't understand."

"Oh, yes, I can. I haven't seen all the best plays for nothing, my dear. You're trying to be the leading lady, and the heroine, but it won't do. That old gentleman was as handsome over it as ever he could be, and I've undertook for you to meet him half way, and, if you don't do as I want you, it's going to be bad times for both of us. Now, then, Baby, I've had quite enough of the seaside and so have you. You say I'm better, and it's done me a lot o' good, and I say you're worse, and it's done you a lot of harm, besides making you cheat your poor old aunt in that 'orrid way. I wouldn't ha' thought it of you."

Lucy sank back in a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

"I couldn't help it, dear, I couldn't help it. I only wanted to be where I could see him and know that he was getting better. He doesn't know I'm here. That wasn't much."

"Yes, it was. It keeps you always thinking about him, my dear, and making yourself mis'rable, instead of forgetting him. That's what you've got to do, and as soon as possible. There, I must speak. There's times when we can't do what we like, and this is one of them. Now, I'm going to tell these people we're going back to London to-morrow, and that means paying 'em up to Saturday and another week."

"No, no, Aunt, dear, I can't bear it," cried Lucy. "Stop till Saturday week, and by that time I can bear it better."

"Not you, Baby. If you've got to take a nasty dose of physic, it's best took at once. You can't take it none the better for thinking about it for more'n a week, so just you be a good girl, and don't go making two married people's lives unhappy, after one of 'em's been just on the edge of the grave, and the other ready to go after him. You've got to come away, my dear, so don't you make no more bones about it. That affair's all over and done with."

Lucy said nothing, but sat back with her face still buried in her hands, while Aunt Duncan wrinkled up hers a little more, and then rose and rang the bell.

CHAPTER XXX.

On the Brighton Line.

A careworn-looking, hard-worked girl answered the summons, and Aunt Duncan sent word by her that she wished to see the mistress, who came in then and stared hard on hearing her lodger's first words, while Lucy turned ghastly.

"I want my bill, please," said the old lady. "We're going back to town this evening."

"Going, ma'am?"

"Yes, going. Didn't I speak plain? Brighton don't suit me, nor my niece neither."

"Why, really, ma'am, I was thinking how much better you both looked."

"Oh, were you? Just look at her face; she's as white as white."

Lucy darted an indignant glance at her aunt, but said nothing.

"Let me have my bill up to Saturday night," continued Aunt Duncan.

"Oh, certainly, ma'am, if you wish it, but——"

"You want a week's notice, well, charge it in the bill, and the sooner the better. Come, Lucy, my dear; you and me had better see about our packing, and what time there's a train. I'll go by one of them fast ones as don't stop nowhere, and get it done."

There was a flash of resentment now in Lucy's eyes, and the old lady tightened her lips, and made ready for a scene, but, to her surprise, her niece hung her head directly after, and followed her docilely enough up to their bedroom, where, as soon as the door was closed, she gave her a warm hug.

"Now, that's just what I like, my dear, for it shows you felt you were wrong, and want to do what's right. I dare say the people what's had to do with the stage may be very wicked in some folks' eyes, but we've got our 'arts in the right place, and when we've got to do the proper thing we know how to do it. You're going to do it, and so let's pack up, and first thing you look at the time-table, and tell me what time there's a train."

Lucy obeyed without a word of opposition, and in a few minutes announced that there was one at five o'clock.

"Does it stop anywhere?"

"At two or three stations, Aunt, dear," said Lucy, who looked now as if she had been stunned.

"Then that won't do. I want a fast train. I want to get home without dilly-dallying about, my dear. What other is there?"

"One at a quarter to six, Aunt."

"Say Auntie, my dear, Don't be cross with me when I'm working for your good. Now, then, how many times does that stop?"

"Only once, Aunt, for tickets."

"Then we'll go by that, and have some dinner as soon as we get up, and go to the theayter after. This place is too dull, and we want a change. Now, then, pack up, my dear,

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as soon as you can; then we'll have a cup of tea, and it will be time to go. I've had enough Brighton to last me all my life. Two months have we been here, and I'm hungry to get to dear old London again."

Lucy made no reply, but busied herself over the packing in the same crushed, dreary way, unconscious of the fact that her aunt was watching her furtively all the time, till the task was at an end. Then only did she look up.

"She's a-scheming out something or she wouldn't be so quiet," thought the old lady, but she said nothing then.

"Shall I ring and tell them to have a fly here in time, Aunt?"

"Auntie."

"Yes, Auntie," said the girl sadly.

"Yes, ring, my dear, and let's get it over," whispered the old lady, drawing the girl to her breast. "There, don't fret, my precious; it's quite right, and you must never, never see him again."

"Aunt!"

"Auntie."

"Well, Auntie, dear, you're killing me."

"Then it shall be with love, my precious, and nothing else. But I did promise that old gentleman as I'd do what was quite square, and you will, my own. There, ring."

Lucy obeyed, and dressed for their departure, still as if she were in a dream, and stepped at last into the luggage-laden fly, which was there in ample time for their departure.

Few people were returning, and, after enlisting the assistance of a porter, who promised effusively that the luggage should all be seen in the van, and selected an empty *coupé* for them, long experience having taught him the value of well-rendered services to stout, elderly lady invalids, Aunt Duncan and her niece sat in the comfortable carriage alone.

"Ah!" exclaimed the old lady, with a sigh of content. "This is nice. Isn't it time we started? Oh, my precious, don't, don't cry."

"Auntie, you're breaking my heart," cried the girl, breaking into a passionate burst of sobbing.

"No, no, no, my darling," cried the old lady, petting and caressing her; "indeed, indeed, it's what we ought to do; and it'll save you a lot o' pain by-and-bye. You mustn't cry now and make a scene. We don't want all the world and his wife to know our troubles, and oh, dear, oh, I do wish they'd start and let us get away. Lucy, Lucy!"

But the girl cried more bitterly, turning her face away to let it sink in the corner of the cushioned carriage, her breast heaving and the sobs tearing their way from her breast.

"Don't, don't, my dear, pray," wailed the old lady, "or I shall break down, too. I never saw you cry like that before, and you mustn't, dear. Oh, why don't they go on? Where's the porter? Where's the guard? Don't, don't be ill, my own dear. There—there, I can't bear it, I give in. Never mind the price of the tickets. I give in, and you must be wicked, I suppose. We'll go back to the rooms, and you shall sit and watch him as if it was a play. Life is all a play. Shakespeare said so, and he knew; and you make me cry as bitterly as I ever did at the best piece I saw. There, wipe your eyes, my precious. I'm a stupid old fool, I suppose, but I aways did give up to and indulge you in everything, and I must now. Be quick, or they'll take us. Here, guard, guard!"

"Quick, please, if you're going on," cried a voice from the platform, and they had a glimpse through their tears of the stalwart guard in uniform, as he stood looking towards the rear of the train, with his whistle to his lips.

The next minute a gentleman appeared with a lady, and the guard opened the door.

"Quick! in with you, my dear!" and the words froze upon the lips of Lucy and her aunt, as they half rose to leave the carriage.

It was nearly instantaneous. As the lady stepped in an invalid chair was run up to the door, and two porters lifted a gentleman into the carriage, jumped out, and another gentleman stepped in, and the door was banged.

"Nurse in the next carriage, sir," said the guard, whose whistle immediately sounded loudly, and the train began to glide from the platform, as Lucy sank back in the corner, feeling her dress brushed by the invalid's elbow as he sank back, while the lady was opposite to him, side by side with Aunt Duncan.

"That's about as close as ever I was to being left behind, eh, Doctor?" said one of the gentlemen by the door.

"Yes, we drove it too long. Don't feel any worse, I hope, Braetoun?"

"I? Oh, no. Legs a bit shaky, that's all. Don't put on a white face like that, Olive."

"But are you sure you don't feel faint?"

Braetoun did not answer, for a low gasping sigh on his left had taken his attention, and he turned to the right, where Lucy sat shrinking back in the corner, not seeing him, but with her eyes fixed on Olive's.

The fascination of her long look was mutual, and neither could for the time withdraw her gaze, while the train was fast gathering speed for its hour and a quarter's run, and no stoppage until London was pretty close at hand.

For this is a little world, and fate plays strange pranks in bringing together those who do and those who do not wish to meet.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

NO. 13.

The first correct London post-card received was that sent by Mr. F. Cameron, 3, Harford Place, Drury Lane, W.C.; from the provinces by Mr. Edgar E. Williams, 55, Grant Street, Birmingham. The correct total was 1,051.

RESULT OF *Jumbled Story Competition.*

No. 12.

Fourteen competitors succeeded in correctly solving Jumbled Story No. 12, and, in accordance with the conditions, the first arrivals have received the prizes.

Mrs. Nayler, 74, Lyndhurst Road, Peckham, S.E., has been sent £5; and £1 each to the following readers: Miss R. Cahuac, 27, Commercial Road, E.; Mr. Henry W. Searle, 25, Beauclerc Road, Hammersmith, W.; Mrs. C. Milton, 2, Horton Street, Newcastle, Staffs; Miss Lylian Ralph, St. Hilaire, Canford Cliffs, Bournemouth; Miss Blythman, Skenington Rectory, Banbury.

To each of the remaining eight correct competitors, whose names appear below, a penknife has been forwarded as a consolation prize:

T. E. Murray, H.M. Customs, Custom House, Liverpool; W. Cheetham, 1, Belmont Villa, Victoria Road, Romford; E. M. Tilsley, Perry Barr, Birmingham; B. C. Smythe, St. Anne's House, Lewes; S. L. Pratt, Rothsay House, Longley Road, Tooting, Graveney, S.W.; Miss K. H. Whiteford, 29, Fairholme Road, W. Kensington; Wm. Boyle, Harbour Office, Swansea; Wm. Lester, 6, Ranelagh Road, Wood Green, N.

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LONGEVITY AND CORPULENCY.

We have received a copy of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.). This issue is in itself indicative of the widespread influence which the author now exercises as a successful expert in the treatment of obesity, while the additions to the evidence which, as a statistician, he is in the habit of collecting on the subject are suggestive of some curious reflections. It is evident that Mr. Russell is annually treating thousands of cases of excessive fat with a success which, in the rapidity and the permanence of its manifestation is truly marvellous. That the enormous popularity of his system is likely to increase in the future is most probable, because it is free from all the drawbacks which have rendered the Banting and other methods of reducing corpulence unacceptable to the majority of the sufferers, who have regarded these cures as rather worse than the complaint. By attacking the causes rather than the symptoms of obesity, he strengthens the digestive organs, thus actually increasing, instead of decreasing, the appetite, while the surplus weight is being reduced at a wonderfully rapid rate, amounting to pounds per week, and often stones per month. Add to this that there is no mystery about the nature of the absolutely innocuous preparation, the recipe for which Mr. Russell supplies in his capital little volume (256 pages), which may be obtained post free by sending two penny stamps to the author's offices, at the address given above. It seems certain, therefore, that, as a result of the happy revolution which the patient researches of this specialist, with the aid of a distinguished physician as a collaborateur, has effected, the average of longevity will, before long, be appreciably raised. Obesity is, indeed, one of the few antagonistic influences remaining which, especially among the more prosperous classes, prevent the great majority of people of both sexes becoming centenarians. With advanced ideas in regard to wholesome food, clothing, and sanitary arrangements, it only remains to get rid of clogging fat to live an ideally hygienic, and, therefore, a very prolonged life.—*Belfast Evening Telegraph.*

GOOD NEWS FOR STOUT PERSONS.

It is a matter for congratulation that obesity is taking its proper place as a disease, and is receiving that scientific attention which it has long lacked. It does not follow that a person need to be the size of Sir John Falstaff to show that he is unhealthily fat. According to a person's height, so should his weight correspond, and this standard has been prepared by Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., so that anyone can see at a glance whether or no he is too stout. People in the past have been wont to regard fatness as constitutional, and something to be laughed at rather than to be prescribed for seriously; but this is evidently an error, as persons whose mode of life has caused a certain excess of flesh require treating for the cause of that excess, not by merely stopping further increase, but by removing the cause itself. It is astonishing how long we go on perpetuating error, and how difficult it is to make people disbelieve anything, no matter how palpably false the principle, if it has become at all firmly fixed in the public mind. These facts with regard to obesity, however, are so obvious, that there ought to be no difficulty about the acceptance when once they become known; and as a matter of fact, the immense number of persons who have already acknowledged their truth by recording the benefits received from Mr. Russell's treatment is simply wonderful. It is marvellous how this "Pasteur" and "Koch" of English discoverers can actually reduce so much as fourteen pounds in seven days with a simple herbal remedy. His book only costs twopence, and he is quite willing to afford all information to those sending as above. It is really worth reading.—*Southport Visitor.*

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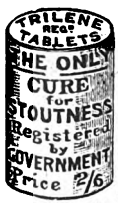

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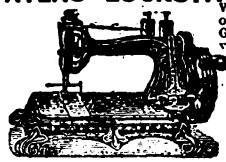

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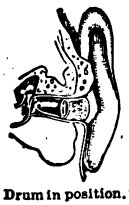

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Ladies desiring any improvement in this direction should send me stamp for free particulars of a simple, inexpensive, harmless self-treatment, whereby a *full natural bust* can be obtained. Address, in confidence, Mrs. B. K. NORRIS, 7, Addington Crescent, York Road, London, S.E.

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 407. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 17TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

Worth a Guinea a Box

has passed into a proverb
expressive of universal approval
concerning a medicine of rare value.

This Notable Verdict,

justified by a sale of 6,000,000 boxes yearly,
must secure the confidence of sufferers
in all climes and countries,
and
ever-widening fame
of

BEECHAM'S PILLS

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QUALITY GOOD AS EVER.

NEARLY 100,000 BEDS ALREADY SOLD

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Inventors and Manufacturers:

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If unable to obtain it in your neighbourhood, send 9 stamps for sample bottle; or samples of both Wine Essence and Extract of Herbs, post free for 15 stamps.

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Lamb's Wool Shirts and Pants, 3/6 each.
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By a simple inexpensive self-treatment, effecting a rapid and permanent reduction without change in diet. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. G. A. BOYD, 14, York Buildings, Charing Cross, London.

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The greatest beautifier in the World. Produces a lovely skin and complexion, and cures spots, pimples, redness, and freckles. The finest and purest soap made. For Eczema and all irritations it is the most emollient and soothing. Absolutely harmless. But beware of the many worthless imitations. Have Dr. Mackenzie's or none. At all Chemists and Stores, 6d. and 1s. a tablet.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 407.] For the Week ending Oct. 17th, 1896. [1d.

EDITED BY C. Arthur Pearson

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RELEASED!

In the cosy isolation of a first-class carriage, speeding its way westward from London, sat a lady and gentleman whose travelling-bags, dressing-cases, rugs, and other paraphernalia of modern travellers were all so new as to suggest the thought that they were bride and bridegroom. This was indeed the case, their marriage having taken place at noon of that same day.

It had been a very quiet, modest wedding, with no music, no bells, and no bridesmaids. The spectators had consisted of an aunt of the bride—who had given her away with an air of great relief—her maid, the pew-opener, and Mr. Trevor's valet.

The minister, who had a bad cold, and felt chilled and out of humour, had hurried through the ceremony without any show of interest or pleasure, and then, after signing their names in the register, the "happy pair" had driven off. An hour had been spent at the hotel, where the bride exchanged her wedding-dress for one suitable for a journey, but there had been no wedding breakfast, no gathering of merry friends to offer best wishes and congratulations.

Arriving at Waterloo in time to catch the down express, the bridegroom had secured a private carriage, had seen that his companion was comfortable, had provided her with a magazine and an illustrated paper, and had then settled himself in the corner opposite her, and fallen at once into deep, impenetrable thought.

The bride, though a little wounded by his indifference, made no attempt to break the silence. Occasionally she looked at him with wistful curiosity, wondering what were the thoughts which so completely absorbed him. Were they of her? It scarcely seemed possible.

Handsome as his face was, it had the worn and haggard look of one who had passed through much mental suffering, and the dark lustre of his eyes was shaded by an ineffable sadness. How had he suffered? What unhappy secrets did his past hold?

As she asked herself these questions the bride's heart sank. She was forced to acknowledge to herself that, dearly as she loved him, she knew little of him. She had met him—just six weeks before—at a small watering-place where she was staying with her aunt. From the first day of their acquaintance, which was due to an accident, he had paid her marked attention; and she, grateful to him because he had drawn her away from her dreary past, and stirred into colour the pale and even tenor of her life, had turned towards him as a sunflower towards her god, and wondered at the great good fortune which had come to her.

Her aunt, and only near relative, had been delighted to rid herself of the responsibility and expense of a penniless charge, and had willingly agreed to Mr. Trevor's wish for an immediate marriage, assuring the girl that she had received the most satisfactory replies to the inquiries she had made in regard to Mr. Trevor's standing and character.

Laura, with the enthusiasm of a young and inexperienced girl, believed a new and perfect life stretched gloriously before her, and even her husband's strange silence did not altogether quench her delight in the thought that henceforth she was to have a home. They were on their way now to it, and there need be no more weary wandering from one little town to another, no annoying struggles with poverty, no dread of the unknown future.

The journey lasted all night, and Laura slept through most of it; but whenever she opened her eyes for a moment it was to see her husband still staring from the window with that fixed, impenetrable gaze.

It was six o'clock in the morning when the train reached the little station of Dunstan. George Trevor helped his bride out, found a comfortable seat for her in the little waiting-room, and then went to secure a carriage and cart to take them and their servants and luggage to Wincot House.

"I won't be gone a moment longer than I can help, Laura," he said, as he walked away.

As he spoke, an old woman, who had come in just before them, and taken a seat in a corner, started up with an exclamation of surprise, and threw back the thick veil of her old-fashioned bonnet. Taking a few steps forward, she seemed about to address Mr. Trevor, but as he walked away without apparently perceiving her, she sank back into her seat again with a deep sigh.

Laura, generous and impulsive, rose and approached her.

"Did you wish to speak to Mr. Trevor?" she asked. "He will be back in a few moments."

The old woman, who looked as though she had known better times, shook her head.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "He mightn't care to speak to me." Then she looked searchingly into Laura's face. "Are you any relation of his?" she asked.

"I am his wife," answered Laura, blushing rosily.

"What! He has *married!*" cried the old woman in a shocked and horrified voice. "It—it can't be," and her hand, in its cheap, cotton glove, closed like a vice on the bride's arm.

Laura drew back, a little offended, wondering if this oddly-acting old woman could be in her right mind. It was a relief to her to see her husband enter. She turned to meet him and was about to speak when she saw his eyes travel to the old woman behind her. His face was overspread instantly by a ghastly pallor, his eyes dilated with a strange mixture of pain and vacancy in their look, his arms fell to his sides, and a shiver ran through him from head to foot.

"I see you haven't forgot me, Doctor George," said the old woman, curtsying respectfully. "I hope you're

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well, sir. I've got a place to nurse a sick lady near here, Mrs. Maxwell of Cedar Lodge, and I'm waiting for the fly now. You're married, I hear, sir."

"Yes, I am married," rejoined Mr. Trevor mechanically. Then, with an evident effort, he turned to his wife. "Come, Laura," he said, and led the way to the carriage that waited for them.

Laura hardly waited to be seated before asking the question that fairly burnt on her tongue.

"Who was that strange old woman, George? You seemed so surprised to see her."

"She is a Mrs. Henland, and she nursed me once during a long illness," he answered. Then after a pause, he added: "I would rather not talk of her, my dear; she is connected with a very painful incident in my life."

"But why did she call you doctor?"

"I practised medicine once—many years ago," he replied in a stifled voice; and then he bade her look out and admire the little village through which they were passing.

But Laura could not feign an interest she did not feel. She obediently gave one glance from the carriage window, then clasped both hands round her husband's arm and nestled close to his shoulder.

"How little I really know about you, George, after all," she whispered. "You are almost a stranger to me. Some day you must tell me all about your past life, dear."

His only answer was a deep sigh.

Wincot House was about two miles from the village, and was surrounded by an old-fashioned brick wall, with a solid, projecting coping thickly covered with ivy. The wall inclosed grounds so thickly wooded that no glimpse of a house could be obtained from the road. But after passing a lodge, which was shut up and in a ruinous condition, the carriage entered a pretty winding drive under the trees to a large, rambling, old-fashioned house of red brick, with a red-tiled roof, gable windows, and a thick growth of ivy and wisteria over the rear portion of it.

"Oh, what a charming place!" cried Laura, as her husband assisted her to alight. "I know I will be perfectly happy here, George."

"Heaven grant it!" he said, in a hoarse, low voice, and led the way into the house.

As soon as her toilet had been made and breakfast disposed of, Laura made an inspection of her new home under the guidance of her husband. She was delighted with everything.

"All it needs to make it perfect is an air of being occupied," she said.

"No one except the caretaker has lived here since my mother died, eight years ago," said Trevor. "I came down once for a day or two, but found it too lonely."

"It shan't be lonely now. Everything will be entirely different," whispered Laura tenderly.

He looked down at her with a wan smile.

"Heaven grant it!" he said again.

The tour of the house finished, they went back to the morning room. Laura noticed as they entered that her husband glanced at the clock on the mantel. The hands pointed to twenty minutes of eleven.

"How time has flown!" she said. "I think I will leave you now to look over your papers, George, while I go upstairs and see to the unpacking of my boxes."

To her surprise, he seized her by the hand, an expression of fear and anxiety overspreading his face.

"No, no," he said in a voice which vibrated with a strange alarm; "remain with me half-an-hour longer, Laura. I will not ask you to stay—after that." His voice sank to a husky whisper over the last words, and she felt his hands tremble.

The bride made no attempt to break the silence.

A little puzzled by his manner, yet pleased by his reluctance to let her leave him, she laughingly seated herself beside him on the lounge, and began to talk animatedly about the little changes she intended to make in the arrangements of the rooms; but she could not but observe that her husband paid little attention to her; that he seemed nervous and excited, and that his eyes wandered again and again to the clock.

"My time is so nearly up," she said at length, as the clock chimed the hour of eleven, "that I think I must ask you——"

She stopped, startled and alarmed at the extraordinary change which had suddenly come over him. His eyes had fixed themselves intensely, almost fiercely, on the perfectly vacant wall to the right of the mantel; a livid paleness had overspread his face, his features altered, he sat still before her looking like a man in a death trance.

"George," she cried, "what is the matter? Let me ring; let me get you something."

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She started up to rush from the room, but his voice, faint and hollow, detained her.

"Don't call anyone," he said slowly, speaking not to her, but in the direction in which his eyes were still fixed. "You can't help me; I—I hoped——"

He stopped; his face whitened horribly, and the perspiration broke out all over it. He tried to continue, said a word or two, then stopped again. Seriously alarmed, Laura again made a motion to leave the room, and again his voice detained her.

"It is I who must go," he said, staggering to his feet.

She started up to rush from the room.

"Laura forgive me! Heaven knows how I believed——" He stopped, threw up his hands with a gesture of pain, flung open the door, and rushed out like a madman.

The horrible suspicion that he might indeed be insane made Laura tremble from head to foot. Too weak to stand, she sank upon the lounge and buried her face in the cushions.

She had lain there for perhaps half-an-hour when she heard the sound of wheels on the road outside. Springing up, she rushed to the window in time to see a dogcart dash furiously from the door. The occupant was her husband.

Stupefied with surprise, she did not hear the door open, and started as the voice of her new maid broke the silence.

"Mr. Trevor bade me give you this note, madam," said the girl.

A note! That would explain all! Laura caught it from the tray with trembling fingers, and tore it open the moment she was again alone.

"My darling Laura," she read, "in marrying you I did you a great wrong. It was not intentional, for I had a wild hope that I might make you happy and that my own life might be blessed. I see now that this cannot be. The greatest kindness I can show you, I show you by leaving you for ever. You will believe this when you learn the history of my past life. The woman we met at the station this morning can tell you all you need to know. Farewell."

In half-an-hour Laura, on foot, was on her way to Cedar Lodge.

Following the directions given her by a labourer she met on the road she found it without difficulty, and was readily admitted into the presence of the woman she wished to see, who happened to be at luncheon.

Laura broke down when she told her errand, and perhaps it was the best thing she could have done, for it enlisted Mrs. Henland's sympathies at once, and removed all objections she might otherwise have made to telling the story the strangely deserted bride was so anxious to hear.

"When I first met your husband, nine years ago," began the nurse, "I was taking care of his cousin, young Philip Trevor, who had been thrown from a horse and injured about the head. He was soon out of danger, but it was discovered that his memory was strangely affected. He could not recollect any incident half-an-hour after its occurrence. There was a consultation of doctors, of course, and they decided that a piece of skull was pressing on the brain, and that the boy's case was hopeless unless this pressure could be removed. In fact, there was every reason to suppose that his mind would give way entirely. But the operation necessary would be attended with such danger that not one of the doctors cared to undertake it.

"After an interview with old Squire Trevor, who fairly idolised his son and heir, all three positively declined to have anything to do with it." The nurse paused a moment, and looked at Laura as if expecting her to speak. But as the girl remained silent, the old woman sighed and resumed her story.

"Doctor George Trevor had been practising about two years at that time, and, of course, took great interest in his cousin's case. He didn't agree with the three doctors. He insisted that though the operation would be a very delicate one it could be performed with entire safety. Every day he and his aunt—who was beside herself over her boy's condition—talked the matter over. She urged her husband to let their nephew perform the operation; but the old squire steadily declined. He had confidence in the doctors, and would run no risks.

"One day, however, he left home early in the morning to attend to some business in the country that would keep him all day. But he happened to meet at the station the very man he desired to see, and so gave up his trip and returned home. It was ten minutes after eleven when he reached his house in Berkeley Square. The man who opened the door for him blurted out at once the most terrible news. Philip was dead—had died ten minutes before under an operating knife. The man who had held the knife was his cousin, Doctor George, now heir to everything his uncle possessed.

"The first person the Squire saw after he heard the awful news was his wife. She told him that his nephew had taken advantage of my absence and his to perform the operation; that he had done so secretly, and without consulting or informing anyone; that his zeal in his profession and desire to win renown had led him——"

The nurse stopped. Laura has risen, and was regarding her with indignant eyes.

"I don't believe it," the girl said vehemently. "She said what was false. She was either a weak or a very wicked woman."

"My dear," said the nurse, "if it was a falsehood it was never contradicted. But, of course, the old Squire believed his wife. He rushed straight to the room where his dead son lay, and there branded his nephew as a murderer. He raged and stormed like a madman, accused Doctor George of scheming to enrich himself through the death of his cousin, and swore a terrible

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oath that he would suffer for what he had done. He had hardly uttered it when he fell to the floor like a stone. He had been seized with apoplexy, and the words of that oath were the last that ever left his lips. Before night he was a corpse."

A long, shuddering sigh escaped Laura's lips. "And —and George?" her pale lips whispered.

"Ah, my dear, the worst isn't told yet. Poor Doctor George in less than a week was down with brain fever. I nursed him, and he got well again—as well as he ever will be in this world, I suppose. There's no man so poor, so wretched, that he would want to exchange places with Doctor George. Do you understand? Can you put what I have told you with what happened this morning at eleven o'clock and know what it is that is killing him?"

"You mean——"

"I mean that every morning at eleven o'clock he sees the spirit of his uncle, or *thinks* he sees it. He gave up practising medicine, he has never touched the Trevor estate, but nothing appeases the spirit. Regularly every day, at the hour of the poor boy's death nine years ago, that phantom has appeared to the man you have married. There are people who say your husband's

On her way to Cedar Lodge.

mind is affected. Perhaps, it is. He has tried travel, change of every sort, but it hasn't rid him of the phantom. The grief and pain of it all broke his mother's heart. She died eight years ago."

"And Philip's mother? What of her?"

"She's living twelve miles from here at Trevor House. I was told to-day that she's in the last stage of consumption."

"Thank God, she still lives. I shall lose no time in seeing her. I must hear what *she* has to say about my husband."

"She can't keep the spirit from appearing to Doctor George, my dear."

"Perhaps not; but she can do my husband justice before she dies. If what she told the old Squire that awful day was untrue, let her say so now before her lips are stiff in death."

"I fear you won't gain anything from her, my dear. She was a hard one always."

"Time may have softened her. But whether to lose or gain, by ten o'clock to-morrow morning I shall be at Trevor House."

And she was. But at the door an unexpected obstacle met her. The girl who answered her ring told her that no visitors were ever admitted, and that the house was kept as quiet as possible, for Mrs. Trevor was not expected to live the week out.

"All the more reason why I should see her at once," said Laura. "It is a matter of life and death."

The girl shook her head. "I'm sorry, but I can't admit you, miss. I would lose my place if I did."

Tears of desperation stood in Laura's eyes. She tried a last resort. She caught the girl's hand and pressed a sovereign into it.

"You need only tell me in which room I can find her —then go downstairs," she whispered. "And should you lose this place you can find another as good at Wincot House."

The girl hesitated, then said in a low voice: "She has the first room to the left at the head of the stairs," and walked quickly away without glancing behind her.

The next moment Laura was hurrying up the staircase, and with a wildly-beating heart she knocked at the door of the first room to the left.

"Come in," said a low, weary voice from within.

"Pray heaven she is alone," thought Laura, and opened the door.

The room was darkened by heavy brown shades at the windows; but the leaping firelight showed Laura a couch drawn up at the foot of the bed. Upon it lay a woman of, perhaps, forty-five years of age. The look of unutterable sadness about her mouth, the weary hopelessness marked on every feature, moved Laura strangely. A second glance showed more than weariness on her face—Death itself was there. The heavy grey hair rippled back in damp masses over her forehead of marble pallor; the large blue eyes glittered with feverish brilliancy, and on either cheek the scarlet flush glowed like a flame. She raised herself on one elbow as Laura drew near.

"Who are you?" she asked in a faint voice.

"I am George Trevor's wife," answered Laura, "and I have come to ask you to do him justice before you die."

A startling change came over the worn, white face. Laura shrank from the fixed stare of agony in the great glittering eyes.

"To do him justice! After all these years!" The words were almost a cry.

Hardly conscious in her excitement what she was doing, and fearing every instant that she would be interrupted by the entrance of some servant, Laura dropped on her knees by the couch and poured forth her pitiful story.

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"Help him," she pleaded in conclusion. "Oh, if you only knew what he has suffered."

"Suffered!" repeated Mrs. Trevor, in a bitter tone. "His suffering has been nothing compared to mine. My sin has cost me dear."

She closed her eyes and lay back upon her pillows as if exhausted; but presently she moved, sighed faintly, and extended to Laura one frail, white hand.

"Find your husband," she said in a low, broken voice, "and tell him that in a little while the world shall know the truth. In a few hours my spirit will be able to commune with that of the one who haunts him now. Living, I cannot help him; dead, I can give him his release."

Her eyes closed. The hard despair settled again, wan and white, on her face. Without a word Laura bent low, gently kissed the pallid cheek, and then noiselessly left the room.

* * * *

In the little parlour of the solitary inn that Chad's End could boast sat a gentleman and lady, who had evidently just finished breakfast. The lady, who had arrived in the early morning train, and had not yet removed her hat, was speaking.

"And so, George," she said in a clear, flute-like voice, "I hunted up your lawyer in London, found out where you had hidden yourself, and—here I am. And here I intend to stay until I can take you back with me to Wincot House."

As she uttered the last words she folded her hands around his arm, and looked up at him with tender, humid eyes.

Her husband's arm went around her waist at once.

"My brave Laura," he said, as he tenderly kissed her brow, "you little know what you have undertaken. But you shall stay. As you have surmised, it was at my aunt's earnest request, and upon her assurance that my uncle had given his consent to the operation, and had left home in order to be out of the way during the ordeal, that I undertook it. Fury at me for my failure, grief for the loss of her only child, and dread of her husband's anger, led her to deny all knowledge of my intention to perform it. And afterwards, when she might have repented her falsehood and exonerated me from blame, it was too late. My uncle was dead; and he had died with that promise on his lips——"

"My release has come, thank God!"

He stopped and shuddered. She waited in silence until he had controlled himself.

"I never asked her to make a confession," he continued. "What good would it have done to me—I was a haunted man."

A knock at the door, and the landlord entered with a telegram. It was from Trevor's lawyer, and contained startling news: Mrs. Trevor had died that morning at three o'clock.

The telegram fell from George Trevor's hand; he seemed almost overcome with a strange excitement; his breath came in laboured gasps; his straining eyes riveted themselves on the face of the mantel clock, the hands of which pointed to five minutes to eleven.

Breathlessly Laura waited. Her eyes, too, were fastened on the clock. One minute, two, three, four—eleven strokes rang out in silvery music on the silent room.

A moment passed—a moment during which Laura's heart seemed to stop beating. Then her husband turned and looked at her, his heart in his eyes.

"My release has come, thank God!" he cried, and clasped her in his arms.

Percy Rowen.

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LADY SHULDAM'S MEMOIRS.

When Henry Mainwaring arrived in England from South Africa and ascertained that his betrothed, Kate Tomley, had gone to Switzerland with her aunt, Lady Shuldam, for a month, before joining her sister, Lady Nugent, at Staples, he stayed in town just long enough to make arrangements for the investment of the pile he had made at Johannesburg, and then started for the Continent.

Three years before Lady Shuldam had come upon the young people in the conservatory and there had been a scene.

It all came back to Mainwaring now as the train tore on to Folkestone.

"Do you dare tell me, niece, that you have been mad enough to love a poor man? In these days a wife cannot have a husband too rich."

"However poor Harry is," was the simple reply, "I know I shall be happy!"

Her ladyship glared. The romantic fool must have been born on purpose to disgrace her.

"But have you realised what it is to be the wife of a poor man?" she cried. "To wear your dresses till they are threadbare and do all the washing at home. As Mr. Mainwaring tells me that he has no clients at present and that his available means consist of eight hundred pounds, you would, if you married him, have to do without a nursemaid"—there was not much delicacy about Lady Shuldam—"and wheel the shabby, pale-faced babies about in the rickety perambulator yourself till they got old enough to go to a Board School in patched clothes and worn-out boots. In three years," went on her ladyship with great unction, "you would be an old woman, for care is the great destroyer of beauty, not time, and good looks soon disappear with hard work and poor food"—her ladyship had never done a day's work in her life; still she was not considered, strictly speaking, beautiful—"and once they are gone, Mr. Mainwaring, judging by what I know of men, would seek attractions and pleasures anywhere but at home."

But this temperate and considerate speech had no effect on Kate; she simply replied: "I have promised to be his wife, Aunt, and I shall keep my word."

Then Lady Shuldam lost her temper, and, as her ladyship in her tantrums had always been remarkable for the tropical fervour of her language, the strife waxed warm.

At length peace was declared on the following terms: Henry was to go abroad to seek his fortune, to acquire which three years was allowed. During this time he was not to write to the young lady, but he might if he chose communicate with her ladyship at intervals, informing her how he was getting on. If at the end of three years he was not the owner of twenty thousand pounds, or thereabouts, Kate, to use her aunt's words, was at liberty to marry the first rich man who proposed, and as she would then be twenty-one she should advise her to take the first.

So the lovers, after an affecting farewell, parted, and next day Mainwaring started for South Africa with his friend Thorpe, who was as eager to find a short cut to wealth as himself.

Lady Shuldam was the widow of a city knight. As we have indicated, she was a shrewd, hard woman of the world, but she had a weakness, a weakness which, in her old age, developed into a positive craze. In early life her friends were principally to be found among the city magnates residing about Clapham, but when the title came the Shuldams immediately migrated to Kensington.

Her ladyship did not, however, entirely desert her old friends. The Dobsons, for instance, who occupied a large house facing the common, had no cause to complain of her ladyship's treatment. True, she did not much care about the Dobsons at Kensington, but, on the other hand, she was affability itself to the Dobsons at Clapham. On these occasions her conversation mostly bore on the social successes she had achieved with other titled people at the West-end.

According to Lady Shuldam, the *élite* of society, and even Royalty itself, was not averse to spending an hour or two in the Shuldam mansion.

The Dobsons listened to the recital of these triumphs with hearts bursting with mingled malice and disbelief.

Carried away by her theme, Lady Shuldam would sometimes relate the same story twice over, and, if the two versions differed, which was frequently the case, the Dobsons would, in a pleasantly facetious manner, point out the discrepancies and look at one another. Lady Shuldam was, however, equal to the occasion. If her memory was defective, her craft was great.

On the next visit to the Dobsons she produced a diary which was found to contain a vast amount of most amusing and instructive information concerning the sayings and doings of eminent people known to her ladyship.

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The Dobsons learnt on the unimpeachable authority of the diary that:

"The Duchess of Teck had informed Lady Shuldam on Wednesday, the 16th of July, that her mother during her lifetime had always been extremely partial to liver and bacon.

"That the Queen made a point of never discarding her boots till they had been soled and heeled twice.

"That Mr. Gladstone was rather fond of custard puddings, and that Lord Salisbury drank eight quarts of hot water a day to keep down his growing stoutness, and that when Lady Shuldam recommended to his lordship that the hot water should be flavoured with the juice of lemon, to take off the flatness, his lordship had instantly adopted her advice and called specially to thank her for the suggestion."

Now, the compilation of imaginary conversations with eminent people is very much like building castles in the air, the result depends, wholly and solely, on the vividness of the imagination. Lady Shuldam's imagination was a fine one, and as the years rolled on the diaries multiplied apace, and nothing gave her greater pleasure than in looking over these records of her industry and inventiveness.

True, the lapse of time rendered it a little difficult for her to know what was true and what was not, but matters were greatly simplified when her ladyship pronounced them to be *all* true.

One day an idea flashed into her mind. Why should they not be published? Other people who had moved in society had published their memoirs with the most gratifying results. They had dealt principally with people who were dead and gone, and who consequently were not in a position to contradict anything they might not have liked.

Her ladyship's memoirs should be on the same lines, as most certainly they would not be dull. Why should they not create a *furore?*

No great amount of literary ability was required.

An inquisitive world simply wanted to know whether the late Duke of Wellington really did say at Waterloo, "Up Guards and at them," or if it was true that Bismarck drank three quarts of lager beer a day, and that Lord Palmerston was never allowed a latch-key, and Lady Shuldam was quite prepared to gratify these wishes.

The memoirs should be in three volumes and should be entitled, "Lady Shuldam's Memoirs." The work had been commenced some months when she met Henry Mainwaring at the house of her eldest niece, Lady Nugent.

Mainwaring was, as we have said, poor, and poverty tames one mightily. So when her ladyship, who found the labour of filling three volumes trying—being at that time nearly sixty years of age—discovered that the young man understood shorthand, she proposed that he should help her, Mainwaring made a very wry face, but consented.

He didn't like the work. He never dreamt that a knowledge of shorthand could be put to such base uses, but he was deeply in love with Kate and ready to swallow anything—even the memoirs—to secure her aunt's favour.

That, as we have seen, was given conditional on his returning with twenty thousand pounds, or thereabouts.

His friend Thorpe, who had been through the School of Mines in South Kensington, was confident they would find gold in South Africa, and thither they went. Thorpe was right, and as they were the first in the field the money poured in fast. Mainwaring, as arranged, wrote at intervals to Lady Shuldam in most hopeful terms, and although he didn't return in three years—it being nearly four—he offered—if her ladyship liked—to remit to England at once seventeen thousand pounds of the stipulated sum.

As no reply was made to this offer, he concluded that no objection would be made to his staying a little longer, which was necessary, in order that his interests in several mines should not be disposed of at a loss. Lady Shuldam and her niece did not to travel to Switzerland alone. They were accompanied by Viscount Pilkington, who had met Kate at her sister's, and fallen desperately in love.

His lordship knew something about her having been engaged to Henry Mainwaring—Kate had frankly told him that she had given her heart to a gentleman from whom she had not heard for over three years—and his lordship had gone to her aunt for particulars.

Her ladyship assumed her blandest manner: "A foolish, wayward creature, my lord. She was a mere child when she engaged herself to a man, well born I will admit, but of whose character and prospects we knew next to nothing. The man went to South Africa, and, of course, forgot all about her."

But his lordship did not look pleased. Her second lover. It sounded like a warmed-up dinner. Lady Shuldam began to feel alarmed.

She was exceedingly anxious that Kate should make a rich marriage. Her losses on the Stock Exchange had of late been exceedingly heavy, and she had serious thoughts of relinquishing her house.

"Your niece tells me that she was deeply attached to Mr. Mainwaring," said the Viscount moodily.

"I believe she wrote several poems having reference to despair, and became familiar with the idea of suicide, and then like a sensible girl forgot all about him. A brief infatuation which wore itself out like all other infatuations."

But his lordship was not convinced.

"She refused me yesterday," he said.

"Of course," replied Lady Shuldam with great animation. "Why, you foolish man, how little you know our sex. Now, if you'll promise to be good, I'll tell you a secret. A woman always refuses a man when he first proposes, that is if she is sure he will propose again."

"Why?" asked the astonished nobleman.

"Because they think it enhances their value. Now I've told you everything. Speak to the sweet girl again, and I'll be bound you will have nothing to complain of."

But her ladyship had not told him everything. She had said nothing about her objection in the first instance to the engagement with Mainwaring.

Lady Shuldam had a rooted disbelief in South Africa; in fact, she had no idea where the place was. If a man could not make a fortune *in* his own country, which she had always understood to be the richest in the world, she did not believe he could make it *out*.

Even the hopeful strain in which the absent one's letters were written did not convince her. So she thought the best thing to do would be to burn them, and then declare he had not written at all.

She will fret a little at first, her ladyship had mused, but with plenty of society and pleasure she will soon forget him.

Twenty thousand in three years, why, poor dear Shuldam, who always insured his unseaworthy vessels for three times the value of the cargo, couldn't make that, and as for his having already made seventeen

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thousand pounds, rubbish! Directly the Viscount had promised to propose again Lady Shuldam hurried to her niece to plead the Viscount's cause. It was not an easy task.

His lordship was not clever. But then, lords, in her opinion, were not expected to be clever. Neither was he entertaining, except when the conversation turned upon dogs. But if she could not find much to say of the man, she found ample scope in his belongings. She dwelt rapturously on his stables, recently built with all the most modern improvements. His three country seats, his yacht, and his town house. His large circle of acquaintance, composed of the most exclusive people, and his snug income of thirty thousand a year, drawn principally from ground rents, not land. A girl, went on her ladyship, who would refuse a man whose income of thirty thousand a year was derived from ground rents, and not land, would hesitate at no crime, however terrible.

She gave the girl no peace. She intreated, she implored, till poor Kate, thoroughly wearied out, gave in.

Then his lordship proposed, and was accepted. So great was the joy of her ladyship, that she promised the Viscount to devote a whole page to him in her memoirs, which were now approaching completion.

When Mainwaring arrived at the hotel where they were staying, great was his consternation when he found how matters stood.

He instantly sought Lady Shuldam, who solemnly declared she had never received a single letter, and called Kate to witness that she had never once spoken about breaking the engagement till the three years had expired. When he was told that Lord Pilkington had gone to Rome, where his mother was staying, to ascertain if she would like Kate to visit her, he was in despair.

Kate was equally despondent. She had found that her love after all was not dead. She had thought that the flame which once burnt so brightly was now ashes, but she discovered, to her horror, that it was still smouldering.

She frantically tried to pump cold water on it from a moral fire engine, but the embers obstinately refused to be extinguished.

She shut herself up in the sitting-room at the hotel, but Harry was always coming in on some pretext or other to see her aunt. She tried to keep him at bay by talking enthusiastically of his lordship, but found the task too trying, as she also did when she sought refuge in a freezingly cold and distant demeanour.

"If some good fairy," she thought, "would only change the two men and turn his lordship into Harry, how happy I should be."

On the evening the Viscount was expected to return, they met in a secluded walk a mile from the hotel quite by accident. Kate cried very much, but otherwise behaved exceedingly well. "Good-bye," she said, "I am going to be a rich lord's wife, Mr. Mainwaring—silver and gold, houses and lands; there are better things than these, but they were not for us—good-bye," and then she threw herself into his arms and cried: "Save me, dear, save me; think—think—there must be some way," and Harry had walked back to the hotel and straight into Lady Shuldam's room to see if nothing could be done.

Her ladyship had dined and was now having a nap on the sofa. So the young man seated himself, determined to wait till the lady awoke.

Not knowing how to pass the time, he opened the memoirs, which happened to be at his elbow, and turned over the pages. He was smiling to himself and thinking what a sensation they would make when published, when he came to an entry which caused his heart to stand still.

"21ST.—Received another letter from that infatuated young man in South Africa.

"22ND.—Kate asked me after breakfast if her lover had written. I have my faults, which of us have not, but my regard for the truth has always been more than a superstition, it has been my religion. Should I say: 'Yes, Kate, I have received a letter,' and thereby shatter the sweet girl's future? Summoning all my courage, I looked up from the book I was reading and said: 'No, I have had no letter.'

"23RD.—The recollection of the falsehood I told Kate yesterday still weighs heavily on me. I had little or no sleep during the night. I have burnt Mr. Mainwaring's letter."

Henry drew a deep breath and swore, but Lady Shuldam still slumbered.

The champion liar had eaten heavily at dinner. She always did when the tariff of the hotel she was stopping at was more than a pound a day.

At the hotel Verma it was thirty shillings, and her ladyship had partaken of every course.

"Virtue is not its own reward," murmured Harry, "but impudence is. Every man has a hand in the shaping of his destiny, and I mean to have a finger in moulding mine." He then placed the memoirs in his pocket, and stole softly from the room. On the staircase he met the Viscount, to whom he introduced himself and demanded an explanation.

Before the Viscount knew what he was doing Harry had him in the hotel grounds and was endeavouring to show him that his engagement with Miss Tounley was the result of a misunderstanding But the Viscount, like most dull men, was exceedingly obstinate. He had made up his mind to marry Kate, and he should keep his word.

"But if I can prove that an alliance with her family would bring your name into discredit."

His lordship got anxious, seeing which Harry immediately produced the memoirs.

"I have here, my lord," he said, "a manuscript work of great interest. I have read the work. Lady Shuldam's intimacy with the illustrious dead fills me with envy and wonder. Listen, my lord, to this:

"'My stay at the Court of Napoleon was a short one. The Empress, not without cause, was madly jealous.'"

The Viscount looked puzzled.

"'The late Lord Palmerston was the romantic fancy of my girlhood. I rejected him because he would insist on eating tripe and onions before he went to bed.'"

"Deuced funny!" murmured the Viscount.

"'The late Lord Beaconsfield was very lucky at double dummy. He won ten thousand of me before I discovered that he cheated.'"

"She'll never publish that," cried his lordship, his face betraying alarming signs of agitation.

"She will," replied Harry. "How do you like this?"

"'During a long reign of fifty years the Queen has always had rump steak and kidney pie for dinner on Tuesdays

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"'The liquid from which Mr. Gladstone derives such sustenance during his speeches is prepared from a receipt I presented him with.

"'I was always a great judge of character. Many years ago I was in Wales with my late husband. One day I saw a poor butcher boy in the street of a town, the name of which I forget, crying. I stopped the carriage and spoke to the lad. He told me his name was John Rowlands. I was much struck with his appearance, and remarked to my husband that evening: "Mark my words, that boy will be one day a great man; he has patience, courage and resource. He will develop into a great traveller and explorer." That boy, John Rowlands, is now known as Henry Stanley.'"

At this moment Mainwaring saw her ladyship approaching. She had missed the memoirs. Thrusting them into the Viscount's hands he retreated behind some fuschia bushes and waited.

"I have been reading your memoirs, Lady Shuldam," stammered the gentleman, "they are most extraordinary."

"Oh, my lord," replied her ladyship, much relieved, "a compliment from you is something to treasure."

"I don't mean that," blurted the Viscount getting very red in the face. "A lot of untruths—untruths. Do you mean to say you intend to publish this—this stuff?"

"Most certainly."

"Then I must ask you to release me from my engagement. I should be the laughing-stock of the country."

Her ladyship was now crimson with indignation.

"We release you most willingly; my memoirs are paramount to every consideration."

She then recovered possession of her MS., and sailed grandly away.

"How did he get hold of the memoirs?" she thought.

She was not destined to learn this, neither was she fortunate enough to discover the thief who robbed her of them.

The day before Mainwaring's marriage Kate had her suspicions, and one day was heard to say to her husband: "Now, Henry, dear, tell me the truth; wasn't it you who stole auntie's memoirs?" and Harry had whispered something in the soft ripples of his wife's hair which caused her to exclaim:

"You don't mean to say the memoirs were in that bag which fell overboard while we were crossing the channel. Oh! Harry, whoever would have thought you were so artful. Everybody thought it an accident. You looked so unconcerned."

"Of course, I did," replied her husband, "your aunt was present."

Kate thought it very deceitful, but she never told Lady Shuldam, who still laments their loss.

ARTHUR GOODRICH.

FANCHETTE.

A SLIP of a girl with slim shoulders, childish form, and shy, rosy face, half avoiding, half inviting the gaze—this was Fanchette.

Fanchette Hugot they called her in the village, where old Mother Hugot was well known. But Fanchette shook her head. She was no kith and kin of Madame Hugot, that she knew, and Jacques knew it also, Jacques with his bonny brown head, and bright, bold face, and gay attire, which marked him of the better class. Jacques who loved her better than she loved the turkeys which she tended, and swore that every dark hair of her head under her red turban was precious to him.

Jacques' father called her the little turkey tender, and threw her a coin from his carriage as he passed. But Fanchette treasured the coins, and made herself more beautiful in her lover's eyes with her finery; ribbons that matched the blue of her eyes, and roses that rivalled the carmine of her dewy lips.

When Jacques took her in his arms and told her that he loved her, and let the light of his beautiful eyes shine into hers, she forgot the whole world just for that one moment. She forgot to wonder that God should let his creatures suffer so, that He should distribute blessings so unequally; she forgot that old Mother Hugot was a hard mistress, and forgave her the bruises on her poor body, and the unkind words she used towards her. She mounted into heaven when Jacques put his arms about her, and she could lean her head for a moment on his broad shoulders.

But these opportunities were seldom granted her for sinking her soul in Lethe; there were the cows to milk, and the pigs to feed, and the turkeys to tend, and when she could finally slip away to her lover whistling impatiently round the corner of the lane, she had but a few moments to spare to him from her mistress, who was impatient the instant the girl was out of her sight.

They used to watch the moon come up sometimes, round and fiery and glowing, in the soft, warm sky; and Jacques would claim a kiss for every star that appeared in the heavens as they watched. Ah, Fanchette loved the stars! One shone into her little casement at night, and she always thought of Jacques when she saw it, and his kisses seemed to her again laid on her lips as she fell asleep with her eyes fixed on the distant light.

Fanchette was very faithful to Mother Hugot, who grumbled at having to keep her, and called her shiftless and a good-for-nothing. But Fanchette knew from the tiny gold locket round her neck and from the embroidery on a bit of a gown Mother Hugot had shown her, that she was Jacques' equal, at least; and she always looked for a deliverer to come to her in some guise or other. Every morning when she arose she would say: "Perhaps, to-day my deliverer will come," and every night when she went to bed she prayed: "God, I thank thee that I am yet alive, for I know Thou wilt send me a great blessing to-morrow."

So when the fairy god-mother finally did arrive, Fanchette was the least surprised of any of the village.

When Jacques met her that evening in the lane, he laid his head down against her to hide his face, out of which the gay light had faded.

"You are going away," he cried, "to be a great lady. You have a title; you will live in a palace. I, poor Jacques, what shall I do? I think death would not be difficult."

"I shall come back, Jacques, in a year—they have promised me that—and then we can be married if you are waiting for me still. Parting is but a test for

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true love. Don't give your kisses or your love-words to other girls to make the time speed faster, my own Jacques. If I feel that you are all my own, in deed as in thought, there will be no sting in the sadness of our parting."

Jacques lifted up his head. The moon came up lightly over the lime trees, and shone upon his boyish face.

"I promise," he said, solemnly lifting his hand on high; and then he drew her dark head against his shoulder, and pressed her lips with his own.

"In a year from to-night I will meet you here. Oh, Fanchette, my love, my own, you will not fail me?"

"Never, Jacques, if I come in rags, I will keep my word. If I come a beggar, still I will meet you here."

"Remember our star, Fanchette. Every night I will look for it, and when you see its rays you will know your Jacques is dreaming of you and praying for your return."

When the sun chased the shadows from the earth the next morning, Fanchette was many miles away.

She went to a palatial home. She gowned herself in satins, and saw herself bedecked with jewels; she grew more fair than a poet's dream, and she danced with nobles, and was attended by aristocratic dames.

She was still Fanchette, and at night she looked at the stars she loved, and murmured the prayer of her childhood's days. Every heart-beat was for Jacques, every tear for Jacques, every smile for Jacques. She knew not if he were dead or living. When she was of age, at the end of the year, then she would know.

Her beauty expanded. Her eyes were deeper, her form rounder, her skin firmer, with a glow like polished marble. She carried her head with a saucy tilt, her lips melted into smiles, her cheeks dimpled. They called her Fanchette the lovable.

When eleven months had passed she put her arms about her newly-found father. She told him of her promise. She murmured Jacques' name with an intonation like a ring-dove in her voice: and a frown corrugated the old man's handsome brow. He flung her aside.

"Ingrate!" he cried stormily.

Fanchette kissed him sadly and crept away. Just at that moment she longed for the star-lighted lane, the coins that Father Badeau threw to the poor turkey driver, and the scoldings of Mother Hugot, with a heart-sickness that terrified her.

She never mentioned Jacques' name again. She stole from her room one night at the hour of twelve. She paused beyond in the corridor, and gave one glance behind her at the luxury-wrapped nest she had quitted. She saw gilded panels, shining mirrors reflecting, painted ceilings hung in roses, with a frieze of Cupid's soft, rich carpets, and lace-hung bed, where dreams of Jacques had circled round her drowsy head.

She saw her tiny satin shoes, subtly suggestive of indolence, and with a touch of her personality seeming to cling about them still as they lay discarded on the white fur rug before the fire. Her glance wandered to an open chest of antique wood close at hand, heaped up with the choicest treasures of the milliner's art. Here a fan coquetted with an opera-cloak, there a dainty ball-gown spread its filmsy flounces over a Parisian bonnet laden with purple violets.

She dropped a tear, she burst into a sob. Her woman's heart cried out after all this luxury. Her better nature whispered Jacques' name into her ear. The tear became as a rainbow, touched by her smile. She turned, and fled, crying:

"The world is well lost for love, my Jacques! I come, I come!"

In the old familiar trysting place at last, waiting for her lover, she echoed those words. She crouched down and kissed the turf, and the star-eyed marguerites, and laughed to herself softly and gleefully.

She heard his step at last. She rose with a new shyness born of her fresh beauty and her solemn joy.

"Jacques!"

"What, Fanchette! You! What! Fanchette in the rags of the turkey girl?" he stammerd.

"Oh, yes, Jacques, yes! The turkey girl, Fanchette, whom you love. Not the lady Fanchette ever again! I am yours, Jacques, yours!"

He dropped his hat from his hands; his rugged face paled, and his lips quivered.

She thought his joy unmanned him. He put both hands over his face and stood so, abashed before her dewy eyes. She brushed his hands with her red lips, and whispered to him:

"Look up, my Jacques. Surely you will speak to your own Fanchette? Oh, fie, friend Jacques, tears for joy, forsooth! Methinks that is worthy a woman. What? Will you not look at me? They say that I am greatly changed—a beauty, Jacques, your little Fanchette! Are you not glad?"

She was sobbing and laughing and clinging to him; the moon showed her dimples and her soft, quivering lips, and her new great beauty to him in a maddening way. Her hair fell around him, her warm arms were laid upon his shoulders, she was leaning against him, delicious in her womanly gladness. But he did not touch her after the first involuntary caress. He dropped upon one knee at her feet, and laid his face against her hand.

Their star on high looked down upon them benignly.

"Look, Jacques, look—our star! Do not kneel to me, my own Jacques, do not, I pray! See, it is smiling at us, it is happy, too. The year is past, is past, Jacques, let us thank the good God together. But first will you not kiss me? Am I to sue for it then? Dear friend, do not give way thus. I am here close beside you, Jacques; I will never leave you now, love, unless you bid me go."

"I bid you go."

The voice was hoarse, agonised with deathly anguish in its modulations.

"Jacques!"

"I am married."

He caught her, held her to him as her eyes closed, and cursed himself.

"Fanchette, Fanchette, look up and listen! Oh, heavens, I hate myself! I married Rosamond Cartier six months ago. I—I thought you would not come back. Father influenced me——"

"Don't!" Fanchette said.

She seemed more beautiful than ever when she stood up again. But Jacques could not bear to look at her.

She slipped away from him over the grass towards Mother Hugot's house.

"Come to our house, Fanchette," he pleaded.

But she shook her head, lifted the latch and went in.

She is the turkey tender once again. She sees Jacques' wife roll by in her carriage. She is humble and patient; but she prays the old prayer no more.

All that remains of the past are the stars, and on calm nights, when she looks out of her window, she still fancies, as she weeps herself into troubled dreamland, that Jacques is once again claiming a kiss for every star in the crowded heavens.

P. Gowler.

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The Last King of Atlantis

OR,

The Romance of a Lost Continent.

By **Geo. C. Wallis**, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

SUMMARY.

Arnon's memory of his early days begins at a time when he finds himself abandoned on the seashore, whence he discovers the cave of a band of pirates, by whom he is captured. Under the care of Didron the Chief he grows up as one of them, and on the death of the former he takes command. Viol is the daughter of Didron and marries Arnon, who, on one of his voyages, lands at Miropis and consults the Priest of the Spirit of Truth, from whom he learns that within a year and a half he will be a captive in a foreign land, and that he need not fear death until he has visited the Grotto of the Sleeper three times. On returning, he finds his ship burnt and men killed. After fighting he escapes, and meets and falls in love with Briseis, daughter of King Dulo X. of Atlantis, and to her he reveals his identity. Vichri, Briseis' cousin, believes Arnon to be dead.

CHAPTER V.

BETRAYAL.

Five months thus gaily passed in the whirl of court life before I mustered courage to make an end of it. But the pirate spirit was still strong in me, and I began to long for the swell of the boundless sea.

So one balmy night when the evening breezes seemed to whisper rest and sweet content, I led Briseis to a deep, umbrageous grove, where the silver shafts of moonlight found few weaknesses in the armour of the trees through which to glint, unwelcomed, on a lovers' meeting. It had been a great feast day, and the house and gardens had been thronged with guests of their fair owner, many of whom—rich, young nobles, moneyless adventurers, and even miserly old men, dissolute all—were suitors, eager, pressing for the favour of her hand. These I had scowled upon right scornfully, provoking many a taunt at my sour visage from the polished wits, whose shafts, however, I had learned to answer with consummate cunning; but now all were gone, and alone we strolled to the leafy retreat, and alone sat there together, each waiting for the other to break the mystic spell of its dim and silent solitude.

"Know you why I brought you here, Briseis?" I ventured at length, when in the darkness her arm clung nervously around my own, which burned beneath the touch.

"Nay, I know not, my Arnon," said she, "but whatsoever it may be, I am here to listen."

"I came to tell you that I purpose bidding you adieu for a time whilst I go to seek for the treasure stored in the pirates' cave."

Briseis started and gave a little cry, a strange thing for her to do, who, for all her youth and beauty, was so very grave and dignified in all her acts, and then asked, in tones wherein anxiety and curiosity were quaintly intermixed:

"Have you not all you want, my Iron-fingers? And am I a cruel mistress, that you would leave my service so scurvily?"

Now my heart sank again, for I thought she surely liked me only as a trusty servant, whose prowess only reflected the greater glory on herself as the fortunate possessor of such a serf, and I answered somewhat bitterly:

"I have all I want, my mistress, but my liberty, and even your gentleness cannot replace me that. Give me liberty, let me find the wealth, and then I stand your equal."

Her arm here disengaged itself from mine, and she drew herself a little way from me on the rustic seat to where a stray moonbeam fell upon her marble brow and the clustering curls of her jet-black hair.

"Ungrateful!" she cried reproachfully. "When I have healed your wounds, screened you from certain death, given you the best that my wealth can procure—even pardoned

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you the cutting off my cousin's ear, though he is my nearest of kin; when I have done all this you ask for liberty; you want to shake me off as one who has been of use, but is no longer desired! Men call you iron-fingered; methinks you must be iron-hearted, too. I thought you were a true man, but you have broken that trust, and I am minded to betray you to the king for your cruel, careless callousness. But, no! I have befriended you and been deceived, but you can go secure and free, only see to it that you cross not my threshold any more." And the speaker rose to her feet, holding out her arm in picturesque command, her eyes blazing with passion.

I was not the least dumfoundered or dismayed by this fiery outburst, but pleased, for I thought that no mistress would be so distressed for the loss of a mere bond-slave, and, therefore, seizing her dainty hand again and holding it fast, in spite of her little struggles, I asked:

"Would you call me ungrateful, Briseis, if I told you wherefore I wanted my liberty?"

I felt that dear hand tremble for a moment like a frightened bird fluttering in the fowler's net before she answered, speaking softly now:

"I do not know, my Arnon; tell me, I pray."

"Because," I said, my boldness coming back with the confidence her words inspired, "because, Briseis, I would be free that I might be rich; rich, that I might be your equal; your equal, that I might become your life-long slave, bound fast by the flawless fetters of love. Nay, I am bound by them already; but I would fain they were the only ties, for I think they will bear the strain."

"Ungrateful!" she cried reproachfully.

Then, it seemed almost instantly, I felt a pair of soft, warm arms wound lovingly about my neck, a throbbing frame clung closely to my side, a velvet cheek was pressed upon my rough, scarred face, a fringe of softest hair brushed across my forehead with magnetic thrill, and twin sweet lips touched mine in a soul-given kiss that made the nerves to tingle with delirious delight, and the flood of life to course through every vein and every artery like molten fire. I clasped my Briseis in my strong, bare arms then and held her fast.

"My love," she murmured, after a sweet silence, "didst not see that I loved thee before—loved thee from that day when first I saw thee, all blackened by the cruel fire, sleeping soundly in my garden?"

"Nay, dear one," I replied contritely, "I saw it not, deeming that you valued me only as a bond-servant."

"Then, sir, you were blind indeed, for all your cleverness! But now I see why you want your freedom. Well, shalt have it, for I may not marry you unless you be my equal, being of Royal blood. Go, then, and bring your treasure, and Briseis will await you as a bride."

I said, and truly, how vastly I should grudge the time of absence, and asked from whence I should obtain a vessel and a crew to aid me in my search. These Briseis promised me with pleasure, and presently, the night having sped apace, we rose and went back to the house, the frogs that harbour in the grass croaking dismally as we walked, though for all else the night had that oppressive stillness which at any other time had made me sad and restless, but which now, as through the paths we knew so well, my love and I went side by side with new found joy in every thought, was full of soothing symphonies.

So I sought me out a crew as soon as I could tear myself from the house of Briseis, and my sweetheart bought me a trusty ship and gave me sufficiency of coin to pay my men and stock the vessel, and got me a signetted safeguard against his warships from old Dulo himself.

Soon it was noised abroad that I went to seek for secret treasure, and when the object of my quest was known, Phrena, the Iron-fingered, had little trouble to get him a band of sturdy, reckless fellows, ready to face anything or journey anywhere they might be led. In about a month I had all ready, and after bidding good-bye to Briseis, I set sail with a favouring breeze and a light heart, confident of the future, and well pleased that once more I could put hand to the helm.

That parting in the grove, where her arms had encircled my neck, was in strange contrast to that last parting from little Viol, whom the king's soldiers had slain along with her babe and all friends; for then my love had never thought to see my face again, and I had laughed at her fears only to find them true, but this time nor Briseis nor I feared or thought aught different than that we separated

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for a little time that we might unite in closer ties thereafter.

"May the gods speed you, and the wind blow steady till you return," said the maid, a tear trembling on her eyelid's verge for all her smiles.

"Trust them," I said, "for I fear not death, if the priest spoke truly. Keep heart, sweet one, and I shall be back in a very short season."

Ah! little thought I then what Fate had in store for me; little did we dream how long that short season of absence would be! How long you shall know if you read on.

A storm fell upon us.

Out into the ocean we sailed for many days, but either the treasure cave was further off than I had deemed, or my memory played me false, for sail and search as we would, day by day and night by night, I never caught glimpse of that strip of sand backed by its frowning cliffs and bounded by its sullen, rugged headlands. The sky kept clear, and the sun bright, and the sea calm, as is its wont to be under a trade-wind blowing without a storm, but, voyage as we might, I never had view of that precious shore.

I grew moody and irritable, finding fault with the men when there was no need, clapping on sail when the gale blew strongest, running before the wind with recklessness many a time and oft—which same folly, I verily believe, lost me the right direction—making the slaves row when the sails would have sufficed, and being as miserable a man as hopeless love could make me, disliked and feared by the crew, and hated by the wretched rowers as only those chained-down beings can hate.

Once I got on the right track, as I thought, and for two days ran with all press of sail and every oar going to a measured stroke, and my heart grew light again, and I laughed and joked and sang with the merry crew as though I had ever been a prince of good fellows, and the men, themselves all feverish for sight of the promised gold in which all were to have a goodly share, drank my health in boisterous jollity, some even asking me if I would lead them a-pirating in the ship when the hoard was found.

I tore the scented missive into a hundred tattered shreds.

But on the second day, like a thunder-blast, a storm fell upon us such as I had never seen before, and drove our craft through the flying clouds of spray like a cockleshell.

Five days we laboured in the stress of the tempest, now nearing the breakers on a rock-bound coast, and sheering off again by the merest touch, now battling with the giant waves which rolled in countless numbers over our drenched and beaten vessel, and anon just escaping the destruction lurking in a sunken reef; and through it all, with every mast overboard and leaking at a dozen places, the ship lived on, keeping straight before the wind, not losing a man of all her crew. And when that cursed storm went down, the first clear view of land that we obtained was of the verdant shores of Atlantis, not a dozen leagues from the town of Miropis!

Half beside myself with rage, all the more acute after the hope raised, I was minded to put back to sea all dilapidated as we were, but on second thoughts deemed it wiser to run into the harbour of the town and there repair our damages. Thither, then, seizing the helm, I pointed our prow, and soon came in sight of the low, wooded shore and the white roofs of the town, plainly outlined underneath the rays of the late afternoon sun.

As our vessel sailed slowly in, two warships lying at anchor slipped cables and stood out to meet us, for what reason I could not guess, but to which, feeling secure with the king's safe conduct in my keeping, I paid no heed till they drew alongside and hailed us. A man on the quarter-deck, armed from top to toe and backed by a large number of soldiers, was the first to speak as our disabled and rakish-looking craft rubbed sides with his own.

I began to fear, then, that something strange was in the wind, especially when I saw the man in command, for I knew him as one of the cleverest swordsmen in the capital, whom I had defeated in a trial of skill with his favourite weapon, so hailed back:

"What mean'st this, Sothi, son of Ombos?"

"A message from the King," he answered, waiting till the other vessel hove alongside before he added, "and one that I must deliver to you in person on the deck of your own vessel, Arnou, the son of Didron, known to most as Phrena, the Iron-fingered!"

And Sothi laughed softly to himself as one who sees his enemy in a trap.

"Call me what you will," I retorted hotly, "but out with your fool's message and be about your business, so that I may not be troubled further."

Then, the sailors having laid the gangway plank across from ship to ship, Sothi and a score of his soldiers came on

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board, and he put into my hand, with a mocking smile, the King's message. I took it with an ill grace, and this is what I read:

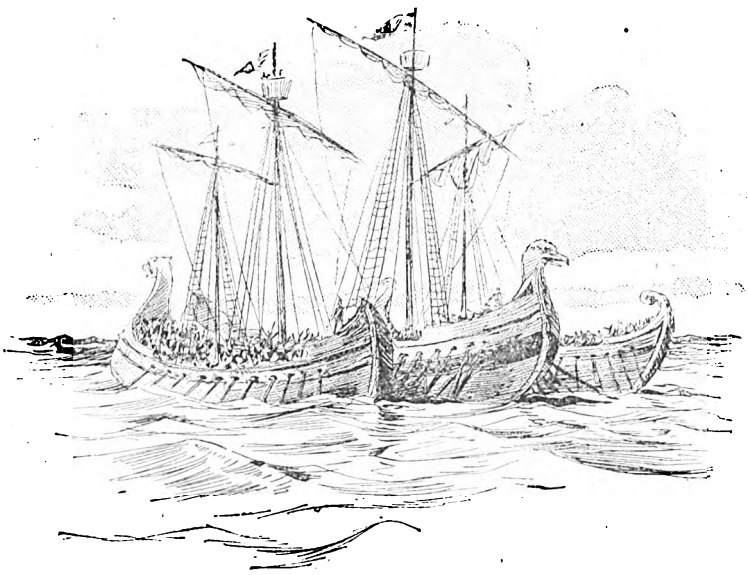
"To Sothi, son of Ombos, the Captain of our Guard, is given the duty of obeying these our commands: That when Arnon, the son of Didron the Pirate, who hath named himself as Phrena, and been named by men the Iron-fingered, shall return to Atlantis with his treasure, it shall be given up by him to the Royal Treasury without complaint, and that he, Arnon, shall be stripped of all his favours and dealt with as my servant Sothi shall think well, except that he may not slay him.

"Given with our Royal Signet, in the Temple of Life and in the presence of the Priest of Life,

"DULO X."

Once, twice, I read this piece of royal bluster, then tore the scented missive into a hundred tattered shreds and threw them overboard.

"*That* is my answer to the King's decree," I said to Sothi, who stared with surprise. "Go, tell those who sent you not to send you again without the King himself and his army at his back. But first tell me how you came to know my name?"



An evil smile, so evil that my heart felt cold as I saw it, came over Sothi's face as he answered—that accursed answer which filled my sober, thoughtful hours with bitterness for near a score of years from thence:

"There is one only in Kronos who knows you rightly, save I and the King, and she thought she loved you. Her thoughts have changed. Need I speak thee further?"

In that awful moment I first knew the dreadful pang of jealousy, and it seemed to rend my very soul into a thousand aching, quivering threads of agony. Briseis, whom I had loved so dearly and parted from so hardly; Briseis, who alone had healed the wound of my grief for the loss of Viol; Briseis, who was the only star that beamed in my cloudy sky; Briseis to have betrayed me thus!

I thought my blood had turned to fire and that my reason tottered to its fall, but with a great effort, gathering my swimming senses, it came over me that if love was gone and false love was arrayed against me, vengeance and a warlike death remained. So, with sword flashing, I leapt on Sothi and his men, and called to my crew to follow me and clear the vessel of the King's dogs.

Some followed, and fought hard, and died well, but most hung back—the craven hearts! And soon I stood alone, at bay in the stem of the ship, and a host of foes in front, striving to bring me down without killing me, Sothi himself, remembering my prowess, keeping judiciously in the rear.

Long I stood there with madness in my face, and fierce despair gnawing at my heart, and superhuman strength nerving my arm to its work. So terribly I struck and pierced, so sure was death to follow the light of my shining steel, so many blades there seemed to hover in the air when there was only one, that, when two score of them lay piled in a writhing heap before me, the soldiers gave back a moment.

But on they came again, and though the sword ravened in my hand as it had never done before, and though I fought more wildly, more desperately, as my strength waned, yet at last I must be beaten, and when three stalwart fellows rushed upon me at once, pinning my sword-arm to the bulwark with their long spears, I was easily secured, and strongly bound with twisted thongs of hide.

They left me where I had fought whilst they went to seek the treasure, not heeding the protestations of my remaining crew, and how I laughed, when crestfallen, one by one, the searchers came on deck again. Certes! their faces were a sight to make the dead laugh! Sothi asked me roughly how was it that we had not the riches on board, averring that we had hidden them before we had touched Miropis. To his questions I answered, surlily enough, that if he could find the wealth he was welcome to it, but that torture would not wring it from me and could not from the crew.

He replied that he would see for himself the truth of that, and forthwith gave orders to screw the facts out of all who belonged to my vessel. Some of the victims fainted, one died, but none could tell more than that I alone knew where the treasure was hidden and had failed to find it.

Thereupon I swore that sooner than lead anyone to it, if I could find the way, I would die of torment, and Sothi, being greedy for a share of the wealth, said he would put to the test likewise. But the soldiers cried shame on him for it, admiring me for the courage with which I had held them at bay, so in the end I escaped that misery. After debating for a long time what he should do with me, Sothi at length decided, condemning me to life-servitude as a rower in a slave-galley just then ready to set sail for the eastern slave country. For this I reviled the wretch as long and bitterly as my sharpened tongue would allow, for of all fates that is the worst.

At dawn the ship would sail, and at eve, therefore, was I sent on board, one boon only being granted me—to keep my long, trusty blade with bloodstains burnt into it by fire. To keep it, I say, but that was all, for having sheathed it, Sothi commanded that it should be bound tightly to my back, so that I could not by any means move it, and one word only being spoken to the captain of the vessel to hold his peace, for I was a troublesome captive.

Now in my misery and madness I grew crafty, and when the three ships had drawn off, leaving me on board the slaver, I asked the captain to let me tell him my story. He was a little, voluptuous man, who liked to idle whilst his men were working, but had, withal, a kindly, generous heart, so he sat down upon a coil of rope and bade me tell it him if I pleased, adding, however, as roughly as he could, that I needn't hope he would let me set foot on shore again now they had shown him the signet of the King.

To which I said that my desire was not that, but only to

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avoid, if it might be, the horrors of the rowing pit beneath the deck. So I told as much as I thought needful to move his heartstrings in my favour, in which I succeeded beyond my highest hopes, and before the sailing of the vessel my fetters were undone, and I was once more a free man whilst I chose to keep my feet off Atlantian soil.

A good soul was that captain, for all his love of ease, and firm friends grew we as I, little by little, displayed my knowledge of sea craft, and showed him how I could manage his ship for him during many a spell of sleep and many a drunken bout in his cabin.

He even cracked a skin of fine mountain nectar from his own store with me—for the slavers are rich folk—as we talked together on the clean washed deck, and when I ventured to tell him how I had nearly captured his vessel—for, strange is the irony of Fate, I recognised in this vessel which was to bear me away to a foreign land, that flying barque which the *Ravager* failed to seize upon now nearly a year agone—when I ventured to tell him this, I thought he would split his sides with mirth, so mightily was he amused, and so well pleased that his vessel was swifter than the most notorious pirate ship that ever skimmed the tropic sea.

Just as the full round orb of day leapt into the waiting sky, we drew our anchors and stood forth down the wide waterway, and as we slowly passed from view of that accursed, bibulous town, with its gaudy oil lamps still burning on into the rosy dawn, I shook my clenched hands at it, in spite of the pain my wounds gave me, and swore a mighty oath by the Three Eternal Spirits, that if ever I set foot within its tawdry streets again, it should be as a conqueror and avenger, and in that guise only.

Cool blew the freshening breeze as we neared the sea, and my wrath went down and my misery abated at the sight of my native element opening out before me in all its grandeur, and once more as we left that hateful town behind and swept through the narrowing channel of the bay, the pirate blood ran eddying in my veins with quickened speed and new-born joy.

None so love the surging, restless sea as I; none so love to watch the great rollers breaking into foam on rocky coasts, the quiet tide bubbling harmlessly in little creeks and on shady forest shores, the birds that skim its broad expanse, the petrel that rides on the wings of the gale and lives in the spray, the glory of the noonday sun upon it, or the pillars of silver moonlight shimmering adown its liquid glades; none so love the sea in every mood so well as I, and yet when our barque ploughed the trackless waste of ocean, and the land was gone from sight, my old pain-sorrow came back with tenfold force.

The captain would have cheered me, but 'twas vain; silent and moody I went about my work, and silent and moody I sat in my leisure time thinking of the evil crowded into my last year of life.

Long and moodily I brooded till I almost doubted if the spirits lived, and had well-nigh cursed them if I thought they did, and ever that which caused my greatest grief was not the death of golden-haired Viol, or my son Didron, but the treachery, the sudden falseness of my love, my Briseis; she who had seemed as different to guile as blackest midnight is to most unclouded sun.

Long I pondered on it, but found no answer to the riddle from all my mind's troubling, so at last, perforce, must cease to wear myself with it, coming at length, I said to myself, to hate her whom I had loved, yet knowing through it all that I loved her still, whom I should have hated. Thus in time a calmness grew upon me and my sailor spirits returned, so that I became a favourite on board the flying slaver-barque with wide-spread sails.

CHAPTER VI.

The Nubian Revolt.

Day after day we journeyed to the east, where I had never ventured in the *Ravager*, and day after day fresh sights burst on my bewildered eyes. There were many islands, now, alas! buried under the pitiless waters, and some of them were scenes of beauty unsurpassed, inhabited by a blue-eyed, fair-skinned, sweetly-spoken race, all sailors, well equipped with great canoes.

Fain would I have made my dwelling there, amongst those lovely islands with their tapered mountain tops, their steep and rocky shores, their darkly-shadowed woods, their restless breakers on the harbour-bars, their peaceful, mellow eves, their calm and starry-brightened nights, and their nearly perfect people, whose innocence made the house ever welcome to the stranger, and ever set his life to sweet enjoyment; but my captain would not hear of it. I was one of his crew, he said, if I was not a slave as I should have been, and he allowed no deserters.

So I had to sigh and look content, and amuse myself with watching as the swift vessel sped on.

One day, as I was thus employed, the wind having gone down and the oars beating the water with measured strokes, whilst the captain lay asleep under the shade of the bulwarks, I saw a ship, urged forward by her banks of oars, coming rapidly up with us from the west. I woke the captain, called the crew together, and pointed it out.

"'Tis a pirate ship," I said, "and if you do not keep your distance from her, we shall be the slaves, instead of making any."

So he clapped on sail, but the wind, though it gave signs of rising, was not enough for present hope, and though the sailors went down into the rowing pit, and flogged the miserable wretches there till the blood must needs be bailed out into the sea, on came that pirate ship, taking us up, hand over hand. We were in despair (for it never came into my mind to desert my protector in his time of need), till the ship came close enough for me to see her name. Then I knew her, and knew her owner for a friend of Didron, whose hunting ground was in the eastern seas, and was no longer afraid.

"Stand back!" I said to the crew, getting into the prow with sword in hand, for my arm was healed, "and leave this matter to me."

Soon she came to hailing distance and her captain cried:

"Heave to, ye fat, old merchants! In the name of Tirhak the Pirate, ship your oars!"

Loud and clear across the water my answer rang:

"Arnon the son of Didron ships not his oars for a thousand threats. Go your way; I go mine."

"So 'tis the son of Didron," he answered, seeing me as the vessels drew closer, "but even so, tell me wherefore you go a-pirating in a trade ship like that, and wherefore you are in my waters? For this last I could sink you, as I could sink Didron himself."

"If you *could!*" I said. "But I am not pirating, Tirhak. 'Tis a slave cargo I seek, and for that reason you will not molest me. But try my teeth and you will find that the young cub can bite as well as bark!"

"Talk not so braggartly!" roared back old Tirhak, the vessels now drawing apart again, "lest I even now stop to give you a lesson."

"Farewell!" I cried, as a parting shot. "Braggarts are not always young!"

"I waste no time on thankless tasks," I heard him say, and then no more, as the gale, now freshening from the west-nor'-west, caught us and bore us away, and the pirate craft sank back into the haziness of cloud-hung sky and mist-covered sea to windward. Thus I repaid my debt of gratitude to the slaver captain, and thenceforth was a traveller on board, his friend, and no longer a sailor by name, though I must keep my hands employed whenever the good soul sat nodding in his cabin over that hillside wine!

At length we made the coast of Nubia, as they called that fierce, tropic land, and one day, just as even fell, we steered in and let anchor down at the mouth of a small river, the last Atlantian slave-ship whose keel has grated on the slaveland shore.

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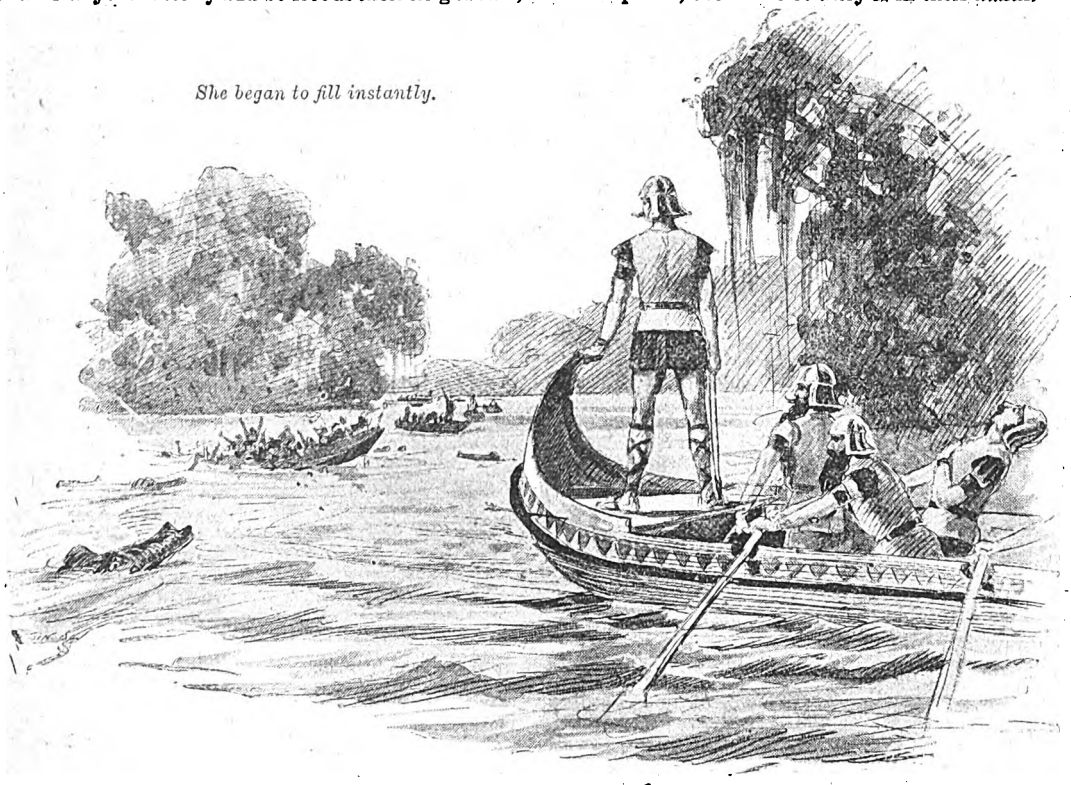
A little higher up the river was the town, to be secure from sea attacks, and thither we purposed going in our boats at dawn, not caring to face the unknown terrors of those tangled, overhanging forests in the misty night. Indeed, I had misgivings of the wisdom of setting foot anywhere on that vast land, whose coasts are thick with miasmatic mists and unseen, poisonous exhalations, and whose inland woods are peopled with a thousand savage tribes, both dwarf and giant, of whose cruelty and cunning the slaves tell such sickening tales. Verily a Land of Dread, which only greed could make men penetrate.

Moreover, I had heard vague, dark rumours when at court that the coast of Nubia which our colonists held—though but a tithe of what had once been ours in the years of Atlantis' greatness—was held by a very slender thread, and it needed only for the Nubians to feel their strength to shake off our yoke utterly and be free as their neighbours,



She began to fill instantly.

saving when the soldiers of that mysterious northern land of Khem should swarm down and tread them under foot.

Therefore, having all these forebodings in my mind, notwithstanding that my captain laughed at them for a homester's fears, 'twas with a testing of my sling and a sharpening of my sword that I prepared to take seat in the boat at morn.

Past curving narrows in the river, under vast o'erarching trees, leafy and bird-thronged, near perilous mudbanks where black-snouted alligators treacherously dozed, over floating lumps of weed and through thick beds of waving rushes, we made our way up stream, and as noon with its scorching heat fell upon us, burning and blistering everywhere, we pulled up at the town, now silently sleeping its midday rest. An old man, clad scantily in panther skin, greeted us as our stern swung round on the stone quayside.

"May the spirits guard you, Captain; hast left your ship in safety?"

"As of yore, Teli," said the Captain, in a careless way, for he had known the old water-side man many years, "as of yore, moored at the river's mouth; will there be many slaves to be bought in the market next settling, think you?"

The old waterman heeded not this query, but cried agitatedly, referring to our vessel.

"And hast left her there, and thy crew are not watchful, the rebels will have gained her by this, for they watch the coast well."

"What mean'st thou?" cried my Captain, seizing old Teli and shaking him like a rat, "out with it man, and let us be knowing what has happened since I left."

"The Nubians have risen," answered he of the panther skin, shaking off the rough grasp, "and their canoes lie hidden all along the shore, ready to seize any vessel left as thine is. Moreover, saving this town and three other walled places, the whole country is in their hands."

"Back all! and pull for your lives!" roared the Captain, "jump in, you, and shove off, and down to the ship before these accursed rebels seize her!"

So down the stream we went, leaving Teli staring after us and shaking his head in misgiving, and pulling with a will, till the perspiration streamed from us under that broiling sun, and the oars slipped through our hands with the moisture, we came in sight of the ship again. In sight, but no nearer.

All round her, like birds of prey round a carcase, the sea was black with long narrow canoes, most of which were filled by the strong, lithe Nubians, thick-lipped and woolly-headed, all signing and vociferating one to another with evident delight, for the ship was theirs already, we could see, and those rebels on board were arming the released rowers as well, and as quickly as they were able.

"A plague on the black-skinned fiends!" cried the Captain, seeing himself ruined. "May the Powers of the Darker Shadows take them for their own for ever!"

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"Rather curse our own countrymen," I said, "for putting no signal to warn all incoming ships."

By this time they had seen us, and before the Captain could make reply, were upon us with shoutings and yellings and a rain of arrows. One or two fell out of our boat, then, with a will but also with muscles already tired with rowing, we put about, and strove hard up the stream, the rabble after us, jostling their canoes one against another, overturning not a few, and keeping up a clumsy, harmless discharge of arrows and javelins.

But our arms were weary, having done the distance twice already that sultry day, and soon the foremost canoe, containing close on fifty of the rebels, was so near, that with their throwing-darts they effectually prevented us from steering and keeping our way. This could not last, so I ordered the men to rest on their oars and keep steady whilst I gave the foe a greeting.

They obeyed, and standing up in the stern, defying the Nubian missiles, I swung the sling round fiercely, waiting till the free end of the rude canoe was within a fathom of our helm, and then, with a mighty, hissing whirl, sent the leaden bullet crashing through the curving side of the canoe, just below the waterline.

She began to fill instantly, and her crew, thrown into sudden confusion, fell in a heap in the middle of her, assisted in their activity by a shower of arrows from our men. Some of the terrified rebels leaped into the river, thinking to escape that way, but from the right bank three long, scaly bodies slid into the water and glided across, followed by a couple more, and then a pair from the left bank, and soon nothing but a spreading circle of blood-stained, rippling water told where the swimmers had been.

Then, we pulled on with might and main, reaching the town before the brief twilight, angry, weary, ruined, but at least alive. Thus, I thought, was broken the last link that bound me to Atlantis, heeding not the priest's prophecy, although so far it was well fulfilled.

We silently marched out upon the beaten track.

The town, now the evening coolness had fallen, was all astir with an anxious, fearsome populace, amazed at our safe return, wondering how long the King would be before he sent to rescue them, and dreading the moment when the Nubians would feel confidence enough to attack the place.

Bit by bit I learnt the history of the outbreak. How in a single night the rebels had risen, massacred their masters by scores and hundreds, seizing their women as prisoners, burning unfortified villages and towns, laying waste all cultivated areas, and destroying cattle; how they had swarmed forth suddenly on all the lakes and rivers, and on the coast in fleets of rough canoes, of whose existence the settlers had never dreamed, and in which they surrounded and captured every ship then in their ports, and all that had since arrived; how sortie after sortie of our soldiers into the forest-depths in pursuit of bands of the desperate enemy had gone but never returned; and how at length all the Atlantians left alive in the great territory were cooped up in four towns, well garrisoned and fortified, but scantily prepared with food and water, the most eastward being on the far coast.

I heard the story, thought it over long and gloatingly, exulting in my mind that this evil had fallen on Atlantis, where I had met with naught but misery and treachery, and having roundly upbraided the townsfolk for their fears and their carelessness, telling them that they would certainly be buried under the ruin of their own houses before help from the mother country could reach them if they did not acquit themselves more like men instead of acting like a herd of stricken deer, I retired to an upper room and there sat brooding, thinking—not of my present dangers, but of the unaccountable falseness of my beloved Briseis.

'Twas such a monstrous perfidy that one who had tended my wounds, screened my identity, and sworn a deathless love so passionately, should so soon turn round and speak the words that had sent me away an exile.

Time after time I cried aloud in my anguish and perplexity that it could not be; my sweet, dark beauty could not be so heartlessly untrue, so vindictively false, and yet it must have been, for how else could Sothi have learned my real name, how else have revoked the King's safe conduct that I held, when one and one only knew my secret, and that one—Briseis?

True, Vichri, her cousin, with one ear missing, might have returned and shrewdly suspected the true character of Phrena, and demanded my punishment, but if so he would surely have sought me out in person, and surely in such case, Briseis would have interceded for me, both with him and with her royal kinsman, and I had not been dealt with thus.

Far into the night, almost till the dawn sprang into being with the fulness of its busy life, I sat torturing my mind with vain interpretations of the mystery, always ending as before with the hopeless thought that Briseis, whom I had deemed pure as a country amaryllis, must indeed be false, and wishing I could hate her for it, yet knowing through all the clouds of doubt and shadow that I loved her fondly, madly still!

In weariness I made essay to sleep, and when the hour of the first meal came was ill-fitted to face the present dilemma.

But as I looked on war as a man's highest calling then, the prospect of strife ahead served to somewhat calm my restlessness and infuse some small zest into the affairs of life; some interest in the morrow.

Many weeks we stayed in that town, sorely beleaguered by the Nubian hosts, which latter were led and reinforced by many deserters from the Atlantian garrisons and villages. These deserters were called Ethiopians, after the chief renegade, one Ethiop, who had been high in the colony, but who had devoted his wealth and talents to freeing the native people.

Multitudinous and bitter were the imprecations called down upon his head by the townsmen, for if the land were lost to Atlantis for ever, as seemed then likely, and is now too true, there would be an end of all the luxurious merchandise from far-off Ind, that mystic country in the vast and wealthy East, where, so report and hearsay has it, the rivers roll down jewels plentifully as our streams rub rounded pebbles in their scooped-out beds; where gold lies

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in masses so huge and widespread that cities are built, from paving and foundation blocks to towering turrets and tapering spires, of naught but the yellow gleaming metal, and where a million fruits and a myriad flowers, such as those only who have seen them can imagine, grow, blossom, ripen, and seed in such prodigal profusion that nothing noxious can there live. Thus rumour whispers. I have found that these golden dreams of enchanted lands vanish into the thinness of a morning mist when the eyes of the flesh once glance upon the vision.

Distracted, dejected, and hungry, weary with waiting and watching for the help that never came, tired of the ceaseless vigil that must needs be kept against the wiles of Ethiop and his savage hordes, and strung to the highest tension with suspense, because no news came from the other three towns, we determined to abandon the place, and marching to the others in turn, unite our forces, hoping as a forlorn hope to thus defy the Nubians, and, perhaps, carry the war into their own camp.

So one morning we started—not thinking it wise to brave the night terrors of that forest, with its weird, whistling trees, at first—with sad and doubting hearts, the women leaving their houses untidy, the table left from the scanty, hasty meal, the fire yet burning that had cooked it, and the doors and casements open for the first intruder to enter unforbidden; the men leaving their tasks unfinished—the fisher taking away his nets, the dealer leaving his useless goods heaped up in bulky bales, the woodman his piles of rough-hewn timber, the worker in bricks and pottery his stores of baked and modelled clay, and the maker of coloured glass his costly array of exquisite and brittle ware.

All were left disorderly, and we marched out upon the beaten track with heavy hearts, a silent, melancholy band forsaking a town more silently melancholy still, abandoned to spoliation and decay. With anxious, earnest eyes we kept a constant watch for sign or sound of the enemy, whom we knew to be lurking somewhere in the dense, shaded woods, since they had apparently withdrawn from round the town, but, strangely enough, were unmolested, and reached the nearest friendly post unharmed.

If we expected help and welcome there, we were sorely disappointed. Nothing but a silent ruin, mournful as the place we had deserted, met our tired eyes. We ran through all the streets, into all the houses, penetrated into every nook and crevice, trod every patch of ground in that still, dead city, made the air quiver with our shouts and calls, heedless of the possible proximity of the foe, but not a living being did we find save sundry fierce, gaunt cats, who disputed with us the passage of the narrowest streets.

With many maledictions from the men and bitter bewailings and tears from the women, we set out once more, this time with our faces to the south-east, hoping against hope that our next stopping-place would find us friends and shelter. Again we were allowed safe travelling by Ethiop and his army, whose visible presence was withheld from us, though indications of his passing were strong and numerous.

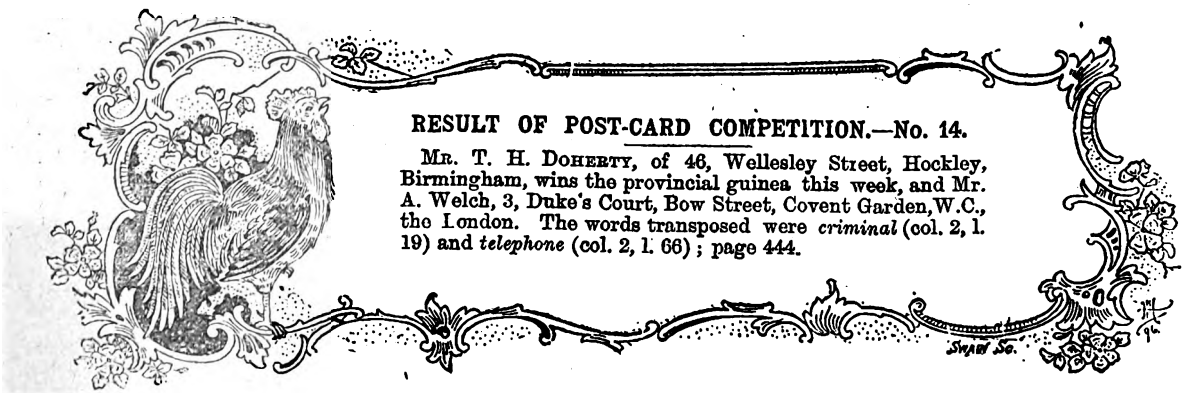
Everywhere villages and unprotected towns lay ruined and forsaken, save where, here and there, a timid child remained, or a woman rocking herself in agony over the dead whom she had loved, or a man wandered aimlessly among the fallen buildings, gone mad with grief and rage and solitude and despair. Everywhere that Ethiop had been a trail of blood and fire marked his passing, like the scorching, blackening march of a host of demons from the densest shade of the land of shadows.

Sick at heart and weary, we pressed on and came to our second halt, only to find that there fire and sword had done their work with terrible completeness. The town, left as a heap of crumbling, smoke-grimed, flame-darkened ruins, held not a living thing of any kind within its boundaries, only the dead, those slain in the sack as well as the victims of the fire, lay scattered in the streets in indiscriminate confusion, and so short a time had passed since the work was done, that the birds and beasts of prey had not begun to settle on the scene of carnage.

In mute despair we journeyed on again, this time to the east, directing our course to Eklohn, our last and only hope. If that were in the hands of the rebels, or destroyed, we were indeed in pitiable plight. It gave us courage, however, to find that the Nubians had been here so short a time ago. It argued that they had not yet, in their devastating march, reached Eklohn. This belief was greatly strengthened, too, when instead of being undisturbed as before, those black, savage hordes showed themselves, harassing our daily journeys, upsetting our nightly encampments, making dashes across our slowly-moving van, hanging about our rear, slaying all stragglers, and guarded by the thick, dank, undergrowth, picking off men from our flanks, thus exhausting our patience, wearing out our strength, diminishing our number.

In the rear, where I was placed, however, the enemy grew cautious and practised more discretion than otherwhere, for they learnt to fear the leaden bullets that flew, death-laden, from my ever-ready sling. Day after day I increased in skill in the use of it, sharpened into quickness by constant direful need; and a foeman had only to show himself amid the foliage of the forest for an unerring missile to find its mark in him.

(To be continued.)



RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.—No. 14.

Mr. T. H. Doherty, of 46, Wellesley Street, Hockley, Birmingham, wins the provincial guinea this week, and Mr. A. Welch, 3, Duke's Court, Bow Street, Covent Garden, W.C., the London. The words transposed were *criminal* (col. 2, l. 19) and *telephone* (col. 2, l. 66); page 444.

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After Many Days.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

It was the day on which the final selections were to be made for the last few *rôles* still vacant in the caste of the new piece shortly to be produced at the Academy Theatre.

Perhaps, there were few busier men in London than Bateman Wallis, the manager. This, his third production in the Metropolis, was to transcend anything yet attempted. His long experience in America, both as actor and manager, had stood him in good stead, and he rather opened the eyes of some old-fashioned people with his go-ahead, transatlantic notions.

Long, thin, and wiry of body, lean and almost haggard of countenance, he had two eyes, peering out from beneath penthouse brows with a look of almost defiant energy.

But this afternoon he was tired. The constant examination of applicants for even the one or two unimportant vacancies had bored him even more than usual. Only theatrical managers can know to the full what a repugnance the second-rate actor or actress has to telling the truth about his or her capabilities without sundries of ornament and embellishment difficult to detach from the slight foundation.

But now there was a lull. The stream of budding aspirants and battered old pros. had ceased, and resting his head on his hand, he stared vacantly at the opposite wall. How dreary it all was! What a grotesque mockery of life it seemed to him whenever he had time to think! The lines about his firm, rather scornful mouth deepened as he reflected, then suddenly resumed their usually immobile, impassive appearance as he called "Come in!" to someone who had knocked hesitatingly at the door.

A lady about forty-five, desperately attempting to look younger, dressed in a pitifully cheap imitation of the newest fashion, with a slight simper—half nervous, half impudent—entered and advanced towards the table.

The manager indicated by a slight wave of his hand a chair, which was so placed that the light from the window behind him should fall upon the face of whoever sat upon it. The lady after seating herself, began:

"Mr. Wallis, you may have heard of me; my name is De Burgh—Miss Marie De Burgh. I play either juvenile or heavy lead, but having been some time out of an engagement, and having heard from my agent that you were in want of someone to play a character old woman, I thought I would go out of my line for once in a way. I hope you have not settled."

The manager, who had given a slight start when the lady entered, having recovered his self-possession, said in cold, business tones:

"No; I have not settled."

"Oh, I am so glad," the voluble lady resumed. "I can give you the best of references. I have played in all the principal theatres, and have been leading lady to——"

Here she rattled off a list of her experiences, engagements, and accomplishments, much as an auctioneer would expatiate on the points of some animal that he had a special interest in getting a good price for.

The manager listened with the same bored air until she had at last run herself out of breath. Then, without lifting his head, he said slowly and distinctly, as if he wished each word to have due emphasis and effect:

"I don't think you will do."

The lady started as if petrified with astonishment, and waited in silence, as if to give Mr. Wallis time to explain this extraordinary announcement. Upon his not taking advantage of this opportunity, she began again:

"I will come to you for a very small salary, and"—here her voice, which before had been pitched in a high, strident key, slightly trembled—"I do need the engagement, as I am on the brink of starvation."

"Madam," Mr. Wallis said, as coldly as before, "I run my show on strictly business principles. The homely pathetic element is only of use on the stage when the curtain is up. I have the honour to wish you good-evening."

Something in the tones of his voice seemed to awaken some old memory in the mind of Miss De Burgh. She leant forward, and gazed upon his countenance intently for a moment or two, then ejaculated, with a short, quick gasp of astonishment:

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"Horace Freeman."

"Well, what then?"

"You are so changed, Horace."

"Am I?" Then, wearily: "I suppose I am."

"Oh, Horace, surely for the sake of the old days you will give me something to do? I may not have used you well then, but for the love you once had for me forget and forgive the past."

"The love I once had for you! Do you imagine I like to think about that? Have you no shame left in you that you appeal to me on that score? Have you forgotten what you once did to me? Looking at you now where you sit, with all the traces of the horrible life you have led marked on your face—your selfish, cruel, ay, dissolute face—I can almost be thankful that you allowed me to see as soon as you did the kind of creature I had loved. But incidentally you killed all my faith in womanhood, and have made me what I am—a prosperous theatrical manager. I hope you don't expect me to feel grateful to you for that."

The hard, dry tones of weary cynicism with which the last words were uttered sounded in her ears like the knell of her newly awakened hopes. She rose as if to go, then, turning to him with a gesture of despair, she wailed:

"Horace, you are rich, they say. I am, God knows, how poor! If you can't engage me, give me a little money to buy some food. I am literally starving."

"Food?" he sarcastically queried, "I should think by the aroma which has pervaded this room since you did me the honour to enter it, that you can hardly be in need of the necessaries of life. You seem to be able at least to purchase such luxuries as *patchouli* and whisky."

"Mr. Freeman!"

"Wallis, if you please. Horace Freeman is dead to you—and to me."

"Well, Mr. Wallis, if you cannot assist me, you might at least refrain from insulting me."

Mr. Wallis rose from his seat, and, quietly walking to the door, closed it gently. Then, turning to the now angry woman, he seized her wrists, and forced her to her chair. Then, gazing on her, not sternly, but gravely and sadly, he began, in a voice monotonous and hollow, to speak to her.

"Years ago, madam, in the city of Glasgow, there was a young journalist—not brilliant, perhaps, nor particularly promising, but a hard worker, and one who loved his work, and found his pleasure in it. He was slowly rising in his profession, and was sure at least of a comfortable living for himself and his aged mother. One of his duties was to attend the theatres and report on the performances. This work he did carefully, criticising fairly and dispassionately each performance and the impersonation of each performer.

"One night, in the course of his ordinary duty, he went to one of the theatres—no matter which. He watched the play, and calmly took his notes until the end of the third act. With the beginning of the fourth act a strange thing happened. One came on the stage, singing as she came—a young girl she was, with large blue eyes and smiling lips. How like an angel she seemed! Oh, heavens, how like an angel!

"Well, contentment knew that young man no more. He loved her at first sight, and for the first time he ever had loved woman. He got introduced to her after the performance, saw her to her home, and thus began an intimacy which resulted in his marriage with her some weeks later in another town.

"As the husband of an actress who refused to leave the stage, he threw up his position on the paper he was working for, and became, like her, a strolling player.

"His mother having old-fashioned ideas, it broke her heart. He heard of his poor mother's death when he and the company were in the South of England. Being poor and struggling, he could not even attend the funeral. She was buried by strangers at the cost of strangers. Her son's wife having extravagant notions, it was left to others to defray the funeral expenses.

"Sit still, and hear me out, woman! There's worse to come, though, God knows, that was hard to bear.

"All else had gone well, so far. That young man had worked, studied hard, was always perfect in his parts and, loving his gay, frivolous wife, denied himself even the properties necessary to his profession, in order that she might be better dressed than the other ladies of the company. What did he care for a bit of self-sacrifice so long as she loved him? All was heaven to him if she smiled, hell if she frowned on him. For her sake he would have undergone any privations, suffered any pain.

"But her vanity was boundless. He began to notice rings upon her fingers more costly than he could have bought, diamonds in her ears worth more than their joint salaries for six months. He asked for explanations, and received such as he was glad to make himself try to believe.

"One night she left the theatre before his part was finished, and when he went home to their lodgings she was not there. He waited, thinking she had gone to spend some time in their rooms. He waited wearily alone. He was oppressed with the memory of his dead mother and the jealous misery of his own too loving heart. She never returned.

"In the morning he was told that he had been deceived all along and that people thought he knew. That man was Horace Freeman, that woman was you!

"I will not tell you of my sufferings—of my madness, of my subsequent wanderings to and fro in a vain effort to forget the past. You, shallow-hearted as you are, could not understand. Now, go!"

The woman, who had been forced to listen to all he had to say, every word cutting her like the lash of a whip, every tone and inflection of his well-remembered voice searing her very soul, sobbing and weeping, holding her hands over her head, as if to ward off a blow—desolate, stricken with the hopeless misery of those who feel outcast and lost for ever, rose to her feet and crept towards the door.

Once there, she turned to him with a world of dumb supplication in her eyes. Silently they gazed on one another's faces—he, the hard, cynical man of the world; she, the poor, battered remains of a once beautiful woman. Again she turned towards the door.

"Stop," he said; "give me your address."

She gave it tremblingly, yet with a thrill of hope in her voice; then, slowly, in obedience to a wave of his hand, she opened the door, and went with tottering footsteps out into the world.

The manager sighed—one heavy, deep-drawn sigh—walked to his desk, and sitting down, he wrote an order on his bankers for a certain sum to be sent to that address each week.

A. S. Walters.

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Brandon Cloud, author, sat on the edge of his bed and gazed in dismal despair at the upturned sole of his boot.

On the table lay an almost completed novel, whose progress had received a dual check. Firstly, the supply of paper had become exhausted, which, secondly, allowed the author time to think of the woman he loved; and this always made him feel so utterly miserable that he could not bring his thoughts to bear upon anything but the apparent hopelessness of the state of man.

"Well, Brandon, my boy," he mused bitterly, "you've reached the end at last. Assets, fivepence; liabilities, an empty stomach and a landlady's bill for £10."

He had thought of suicide before, but he was young and clung to life, bad as it was, living more in hope than substance.

The only other alternative was starvation, and this he considered worse still. He could not have laboured manually if he had got work to do, for having been born in the purple he had always counted poverty out of his life, so had learned no trade. He dropped into his chair again and picked up the manuscript of his novel. How beautifully smooth it read; what a grand plot it was, and what a character was the poor, struggling, ambition-loving journalist—"A *Fin-de-Siècle* Fool." Ah! If he could but finish it. No more starvation, no more lying to widow landladies, no more dreaming of the woman he loved but would not marry.

While he sat thinking of what might be there came a knock at the door, so timid that he did not notice it until it was repeated thrice.

"The landlady," he thought, without rising.

However, it was not the portly form of the widow that met Brandon's gaze when the door opened, but a sweet little vision of a girl enwrapped in sables. He started to his feet with an exclamation as she came into the room, the smile on her face lighting up the apartment like a ray of summer sunshine.

"My dear Minnie," he cried, as he offered her a chair and relieved her of her muff and boa, "what in the world induced you to come here?"

"Curiosity and—and love; but——"

"Curiosity! Seven-eighths of a woman's nature! It has ruined many a woman and——"

"Now it's going to save a man," she interposed with a smile, which died from her eyes as she glanced round the room. "You don't appear to be very comfortable; and no fire. You said in your letter you were making your fortune. That is not true."

Brandon was seated on the edge of the table looking at nothing in particular.

"Perfectly," he answered, shifting uneasily. "Only, you know, it's slow work; there are so many at the game, and I never was clever."

"You have grown pessimistic. Poor Brandon!" and she caught his hands. "How cold you are! Why don't you have a fire?"

The author did not answer.

"Oh, I understand," she said in a sympathetic voice. "No wood, no coals, no money, eh?" and she caressed his hand fondly. "You have not made much progress on the royal road?"

"Don't you understand, Minnie, I have endeavoured to earn my own living honestly, endeavoured to be independent of any man, and I want to continue so? There are enough parasites in the world. It has been a bit of a struggle, I'll admit, but I have grown accustomed to it."

"Brandon," was Minnie's solemn response, "I want to show you the folly of your independence. Did you think I could not read between the lines of your letter to me? A man who is making his fortune, or is earning a living and has hopes for the future, does not implore the woman he loves to forget him and marry some other man. Brandon, you do love me?" She placed her hands upon his shoulders and looked up into his face.

He shut his eyes for a moment, his lips quivered, and he did not speak, but he smoothed her fair hair softly.

"Then you will come away with me?" she pleaded. "You will sink your foolish spirit of pride and indepen-

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dence and make me a happy woman?" and she nestled her head on his arm. "Not long ago, when you were rich, you loved me and we were to be married; but when you lost your all in those wretched companies you would not be my husband, though my fortune is ample for both."

"I wish I could swallow my wretched pride, but I cannot. I could not live on your money, in your house. My inmost feelings would cry shame on me; my position would be unbearable."

Minnie shivered.

"You are cold?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Well, you had better be going," and he handed her her furs. "It is so kind and good of you, Minnie, but—but I'll try a little longer for that fortune," and the ghost of a smile lingered on his face for an instant.

"I suppose I could not help you in any way, Brandon? May I leave my cheque-book?"

The question was put very hesitatingly, and while the inner man cried, "Yes," in piteous accents, the outer gentleman declined the kind offer with a courteous firmness.

"I have read several of your short stories," Minnie said, as she pulled on her gloves, "and I think they are really clever. But you ought to try something big—a three-volume novel."

"They are going out of fashion, and, besides, they take such a time. One can scribble off short stories like nursery rhymes, and the return is quick."

He referred to the return of manuscripts; she thought he meant payment.

"But here," he went on rapidly, going to the table and taking up his unfinished book, "here is a novel I have almost completed. None of your ordinary drivel, but realism, and that is the demand of the hour. It will not be more than 40,000 words, and I am confident of its success."

"When you finish your book, Brandon," she advised, "send it to Irvine and Irvine. They will publish it in their 'Nom-de-plume' series. You will have an eccentric, idiotic poster all to yourself in the new art style and the puzzle of the hour will be: 'What is the writer's name? Is it a he or a she?' Then, when the papers have criticised your book, praised it, slashed it and discussed it for all it is worth, your real name will be discovered; interviewers will regard you as a special prize, and you will be famous."

Her throat burnt as she spoke, her voice was very dry, and her *bonhomie* artificial.

"Good-bye, good-bye!"

"Kiss me, Brandon; a last kiss."

He bent and pressed his lips to hers, then turned quickly away as she hurried downstairs and home, and sat in his chair far into the evening, the most miserable man on earth.

It was about a week later, and Brandon was still in his lodgings. His landlady had informed him after Minnie's visit that someone had settled a long-standing debt, so he need not worry over his little account. He blessed her; she passed the blessing on to Minnie Horton.

He sat at the table endeavouring to think out his novel, but he could not compose a single sentence, for on the newspaper spread out before him there danced in the blackest of type a paragraph which had paralysed all the energy in him. Minnie was to be married! She had taken him at his word, and would marry Percy Olcott in three months' time.

Well, that ended it. The one ray of hope that had made his existence bearable had been flashed from his life, and death was the only panacea. Poisoning, hanging, drowning or a bullet—anything to get out of the world quickly. And he had loved her so much! Of course, it was his own choice; if he could only have conventionally murdered his pride and laughed in the world's face he might have been happy with the woman he loved, but he could not, and now he could not live.

Thus ran his reflections, when the landlady brought him a letter, written on perfumed yellow paper. He recognised the handwriting at once. It was from Minnie, and confirmed the newspaper item. She retained his ring as a keepsake.

"Do not give way to ridiculous passion," she advised him, and his face hardened as he read the words again. Not he! Why should he? Must his life be suddenly extinguished, his hopes dispelled, because he had lost the love of one woman? There were scores of others—all beautiful, all loving, all good—no, some good; and when he was famous! He had struck the right chord, and his whole being sprang into a furious blaze of ambition—a desire to cheat the woman who he thought had jilted him, and laugh at her in mockery and triumph.

He walked his room feverishly, his hands clenched and his lips set tight, while the fire of ambition forged his determination and withered his love. By heavens, he would be famous! Night after night he would toil at that book until it was finished, and then—then his triumph?

Yes, that was it; work, and forget her; and he pitched the dainty note into the fire and commenced. He unfroze; all his energies returned, all his thoughts rushed back upon him and fell over each other as his pen raced across the paper. In a few days his book was ready for the publishers.

Brandon received a reply from Irvine and Irvine within two days. This was a revelation that astounded him. But what surprised him still more was the fact that the publishers wanted to see him.

"It was a pity Minnie had been so hasty," Brandon thought, as he consumed Irvine's note, time after time. Fortune and fame were written all over him; and if he only had her!

At least, he ought to write and congratulate her on her engagement. He wondered with a mean exultation what she would feel like; if she would turn white when she read of his success. So he sat down to write, but, remembering that all eggs did not turn out chicks, he deferred it until he had seen the publishers.

After the interview he was mad with himself because he had not written, for Irvine and Irvine paid him £250 down for the rights of his book. How he walked home from the office he never knew, and he wondered why he had not cabbed it. He remembered changing the cheque at the bank, buying a cigar, which he enjoyed with great gusto, and visiting his tailor's, where he purchased a ready-made suit and was measured for various others. Of course he would have to change his lodgings, now. He would not entertain interviewers in his present garret.

Arrived home, he desired to wipe off his debts with the landlady at once, showering carelessly upon the table in her best parlour a handful of gold, which took all the breath from the old lady's body. She was in no hurry, however. There was a visitor upstairs waiting for him.

"A man!" gasped Brandon, with a sinking heart as

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his mind flew to interviewers. But it was a lady, as he quickly discovered, and that lady, Minnie. His heart beat rapidly, his breath came quickly, his eyes gleamed brightly, and he was about to catch her in his arms when he remembered that she belonged to another, and the memory crushed him.

He attempted to speak, but a sudden attack of nervousness stilled his tongue, and he sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands, while the lump that had risen in his throat almost choked him.

"Aren't you well, Brandon?" Minnie inquired, alarmed at his appearance. She placed her small hand lovingly upon his burning forehead, but he winced at the touch as though it was something that hurt him. "Are you ill, dear?" and she sank on her knees and strove to pull his hands from his face.

"It was only a joke, darling, only a joke," she cried piteously, her eyes wet with tears. "I am not going to marry Olcott."

Brandon sat upright suddenly, his face very white.

"You are not?" as he caught her wrists in a frantic grasp.

"No, no! Forgive me, dearest. I thought if I told you that, you would fancy I was happy, and so be able to work. You said so."

Brandon sighed deeply, bent and kissed her.

"I might have killed myself," he remarked presently.

"You had too much pride." She was smiling now.

"But why have you come here again?"

"You never wrote to me, Brandon, and I thought I——"

"You feared I should do what you knew I would not. That's like a woman!" and he laughed lightly. "But it's all over now, Minnie. I have completed my book and sold it to the Irvines for £250. The announcement of your engagement kicked my pride so hard that I had to do something desperate."

Minnie was a splendid actress.

"What?" craning forward, with one hand on her lover's shoulder: "£250! You darling!" and she kissed him eagerly.

"Yes, and there's more to follow. They are certain it will be a success, and they claim the refusal of all my other works. God bless you, Minnie. But for you—you've got to share this with me!"

He threw the gold and notes upon the table, but the girl shrank back.

"No, no, Brandon, your brains earned it; it is all yours. Yes! We will share it, and all that is to come. No refusal; you proposed it."

They were married within a month, but "A *Fin-de-Siècle* Fool" was not a success. Indeed, it was an utter failure; and one paper remarked that Messrs. Irvine and Irvine had better close up if that was the best rubbish they could secure.

How Minnie laughed at the great unknown scribe who penned these lines! Like Brandon, he never knew that Minnie Horton was the real publisher of the volume; that she paid Brandon the £250, and that she published all his following effusions.

Brandon works merrily on; writes four hours each day, and sells each book as soon as it is finished. Strange to relate, many of his works are out of print. Though paid for, they have never been published. Occasionally he determines to trot round to Irvine's and inquire what they mean by such scandalous conduct; but when this fit seizes him, Minnie always has something for him to do, and he always does it.

AGNES JEWLY.

The Family Honour.

At seven o'clock on a September morning, dressed in white, with a broad-brimmed Panama hat, and wearing slippers, M. Roumegas went down into his garden to water his jacinths. He evidently considered it a great operation, and gave to it the earnest attention of a man who has little else to do, and of an old man who has done a great deal. He had retired from business with a large fortune made by his activity, his intelligence, and especially his probity. Probity! Behold the great strength of Roumegas, the cause of his success. What a fine reputation was this. Pure as crystal, and brilliant as the sun. In the street, hats were lifted like the wings of swallows. One felt near him an atmosphere of calm and well-earned repose. It was an honest, a great man, who passed, when M. Roumegas walked by. Such a life merits a recompense, but heaven had been unjust towards the just, and had not spared trouble. His wife was dead. His only child, Antoine, was thirty years old—dissipated and completely worthless. In the town he was named only with a smile and a shrug. When the tall, blonde, handsome fellow, elegantly dressed, but dull-eyed and stupid, was met in the street, people hesitated about speaking to him, but they thought of his father and bowed. The poor old father suffered deeply. All his ambitious dreams of his son had proved vain. "What was the good of working? The governor was rich, and was not eternal. Let us amuse ourselves," said the young man. Neither reasoning nor threats availed. Wounded in his hope, his pride, his love, how quickly poor Roumegas aged.

A hesitating step on the gravel path made M. Roumegas turn. Antoine was before him—very pale, with soiled linen, disordered hair, and red eyes.

M. Roumegas put down the watering pot, adjusted his glasses, and in a tone half-vexed and half-indulgent asked:

"What is it?"

Antoine appeared to try to gather courage and stammered in a low voice. "Last night at play——"

"You lost—lost again! Ah, misery of my life. He will kill me, that boy! You had sworn to me. By heavens, there is only one thing to do. Pay, pay again and always to the last coin! There is the Roumegas honour! Come, how much?"

Antoine remained silent.

"It is not that."

"What is it, then? A quarrel? You have been

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insulted? You fought? Ah, those gambling-rooms? What was done? They drank, they fought, they disputed, they played, they——"

A terrible thought crossed the old man's mind. He anxiously reached both hands towards his son in a beseeching gesture.

"Oh, not that—it is not that!"—Antoine hung his head—Great heaven, it was true? His son—his son a cheat, a thief! The poor man tottered as if about to fall.

"Father!" said Antoine, advancing to support him.

"Don't touch me. Don't touch me!" cried the old man, recovering himself with wonderful energy. Pointing towards the house he said: "Go to your room."

"Father," cried the young man. "Let me explain. I am not so bad as you think. I have been led away."

"Go to your room," repeated the inflexible Roumegas.

Hanging his head, and drooping like a criminal, the son entered the house and went up the stairs. Behind, head erect, eyes brilliant, with jerky gait, the father followed. They reached the chamber, with two windows on the street, disordered, odd books thrown here and there, guns, swords and pistols on the walls, and pipes, pots of tobacco and cigarettes everywhere.

The young man sat down heavily on his untouched bed, and with downcast eyes crumpled with feverish fingers a hanging corner of the curtain, as he answered in a broken voice:

"The last time, when I asked you for money, I promised you I would not play any more. I did not have the strength, I began again. I lost again. I did not dare to come to you a second time. I kept losing all the time—lost everything. Then someone proposed to me that I should associate with him to play together. We lost again—always. This person advised me. I was weak. A madness, father, a madness! Pardon me!" He half rose and extended his arms towards his father.

"Go on," said Roumegas, erect before him with folded arms.

Antoine continued: "Last night they suspected—and we were arrested—excepting me! I have not been taken yet; they don't know about me, you understand? And if Baptistin does not tell——"

"Baptistin! that Jewish boy—your accomplice—a servant! Great God! but you have fallen!"

"They don't know anything yet, I tell you. Many gamblers of the party are suspected with me. Baptistin is the only one arrested—if he keeps still!"

"And you will let them suspect innocent men! To preserve the little honour that remains to you, you would brand the honour of others! Do you know that is infamous, simply infamous?"

"Father, pardon! pardon! I promise you—I swear to you that in future——"

"In future! Is there any future for you?"

There was the sound of steps along the quiet street; they stopped at the door of the house; the bell rang. Antoine sprang up and listened breathlessly.

The young man rushed to the window.

"Baptistin has told!" he said faintly, turning frightfully pale.

M. Roumegas looked out. The police were at the door. He let the curtain fall, walked the length of the large room, took a revolver from the wall, assured himself that it was loaded, and held it out towards his son, who watched him as if stupefied.

"Come!" said he.

Antoine did not take the pistol. He fixed upon his father wide-open eyes, with no comprehension in them. Below the street door had been opened. The servants and the police were talking. The sound of their voices came up to the room.

"You have lost your honour; at least save ours!" said M. Roumegas. "Come, come!"

The talking below had ceased. Steps resounded on the old stone stairs, large and sonorous like a chapel. They reached the chamber.

"Coward!" murmured Roumegas; "coward to the very end."

He quickly turned the pistol, aimed at his son, and fired.

Antoine fell across his bed with the top of his head blown off.

There was a knocking at the door. M. Roumegas put the still smoking pistol in his son's right hand, opened the door, and pointing to the bleeding corpse, said:

"Too late, gentlemen! He has taken the law into his own hands."

LE VIER.

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 13.

THE prize of £5 goes this week to Mr. M. Campbell, 43, Brook Street Kennington, S.E.; and to the remaining £5 we have added 10s., and divided the total among the eleven competitors mentioned below, whose attempts contained only one mistake: J. N. Cowle, 43, Portland Road, Devonport; Miss D. Warton, 19, Agamemnon Road, West Hampstead; Miss Butt, 32, Kensington Court Mansions, W.; A. Richards, 66, Dalston Lane, Kingsland, N.E.; F. Martyn, "Roseville," Polsham Road, Paignton, South Devon; Miss R. E. Smith, 67, Brockley Road, London, S.E.; J. Richardson, 40, Palm Street, Longsight, Manchester; Miss K. Edmonds, 32, Manor Place, Hackney, N.E.; C. T. Christopherson, 38, Wakehurst Road, Wandsworth Common; J. T. Hutchinson, 14, Longley Road, Tooting Graveney; Mrs. A. Jones, 67, Lewes Road, Brighton.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 16.

ON pages 506-7 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *October 19th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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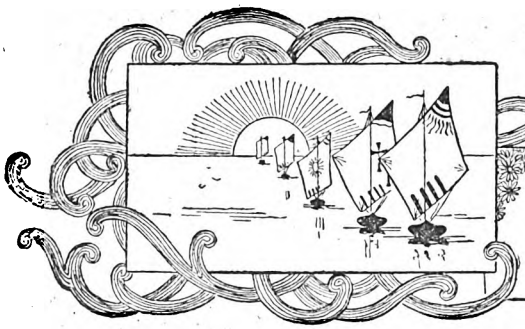
JUMBLED STORY No. 16.



DUHTEEL.

F. Almbert the French of Belpitre

"One morning I left the barracks in company with the conscripts, who came to us in batches to together, and my old comrade promised to look me to fight him.'

"He did not speak for a few moments, and I rose with an officer of another regiment, a friend of mine. I had no doubt that I should be able to carry out the artist, you know. And you?' I asked in my college of St. Cyr.

My companion was now Captain Hammer, and when a couple of soldiers, who had seen his sudden serious breach of honour by insulting a woman, during the chief's absence on leave. We were busy of it because, thanks to the Minister of War, the conversation be forgotten, please. But these things last.

The way in which he replied to my greeting was no difference at all. For the present he is simply a private soldier?

"In a second I realised how shameful my words turned into the buffet at the station.

"'It was stupid of you,' I said with a smile; 'she unhappily she preferred someone else.'

"We selected a table and sat down; behind us pass the army is coming to, *mon Dieu!* when a opening I saw several soldiers and conscripts.

We sat down side by side, and told one another commanding the district, and I told him every plan.

He looked much older than when I had last seen him and turned to leave the room.

I turned and walked with him, but I soon gave up the point.

We found an empty seat somewhat removed from someone hummed the refrain of a popular song, as Mme. de Férisset; she was accompanied by a young boy!"

He flicked the ash from his cigar and continued:

I said nothing; words are useless sometimes.

"Since I last saw you, that evening at Besançon I feel like a murderer.

"The words had hardly left my lips when a slight young soldier standing in the doorway; he was very suspicions. I was also firmly resolved that on no other day that I imagined myself in love with her. We were going to Lille for the day, and as we had our experiences during the years that had passed expostulated with him.

"Of course, I know that the poor boy really broke ground for a couple of paces and I followed him, his face was pale and drawn, and grey hairs upon my shoulder, and I turned and saw that it was well worth a declaration, and her husband, they can see you now with your pale face and great eyes sometimes end in courts-martial, and I warn you that you are in love?"

"I burst out laughing. 'To think that she has a friendship the very day you first came to school. I gave a large dinner party and reception. I was chosen, and I had decided that I would allow my turn.

"'Have you anyone among your conscripts whose field-officer talks of giving a common soldier to know, he is Georges de Férisset.'

"Yes," he said wearily.

"My regiment is quartered at Manbenge, and last arranged that the meeting should take place at Saint-Barbe. You recollect we struck up a breach of discipline.'

"I cannot get rid of the thought that I have committed suicide. I could not possibly have saved her "Mother."

"'I really cannot say,' I answered; 'the only newspapers have not been allowed to mention it."

"You do not recognise me?" he said, smiling.

He hesitated, and I did not press my question.

I was silent, and horror-struck at the sudden and preoccupied, evidently suffering mentally.

"You are worried by something?" I asked at morning dress.

"'I raised my hand to strike you,' he said, 'and, so unlike his old, cheery manner that I glanced at him, his action was so unexpected. And I know I have taken part in a tragedy. You have not heard my plan without arousing M. de Férisset's Minister?'

Several months passed, and I had heard nothing that I should have allowed myself to take away all idea of making conversation, for he was *distrait* my friend continued:

"Let us sit down and I will tell you what is private and nothing else.'

"Money or business, I suppose, or is it possible claims of honour, and, knowing my skill with foils, therefore dangerous, and I saw that it would not last.

"Before I could guess what was about to happen he was lucky in attaining such high rank so early that you will not find me a lenient judge if I have names, at least, coupled with hers.'

"'I, too, have only one whose name you are likely troubling me. Perhaps you will be able to advise June I was the senior officer and was in command unexpectedly.

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"We reached the place fixed upon at the same movement and had followed him, seized him by the head.

"He made no resistance, but his eyes fixed on my shoulders.

Last year I went down to Besançon to attend the Mad! How can you fight such a fellow? A pretty fellow I know anything of is young Myrian, son of soldier was in uniform, and one of my seconds name I know, I wonder?' my friend asked.

"'Son of the "beautiful Mme. de Férisset"?'

"No, I cannot say that I do, although you remind and I cannot refuse reparation to her son.'

We continued our walk, and at last he said:

"'She is a charming woman,' my companion and begged for an interview with the general to take official cognisance of your acts.'

"We must have presented a curious sight as we duel on Belgian soil,' I said. 'I have committed a months' time, and I congratulated him warmly, for he had received his promotion, when one evening, that nothing would have induced me to wound, him with anxiety.

"One short convulsion and all was over. He said; 'I never have been able to decide why I did committed a dreadful crime; that I am morally quietly, and I signed to my companion not to press to take my leave.

"'It would be worse than useless.'

"'Yes; the same.'

"How could I so far forget my rank as to allow close to me, raising his hand as though to strike me, I wondered, I wonder still, whether her son sacrificed obvious reasons chosen civilians for the post—the crowd of passers-by.

"I am Gustave Hammer, your old schoolfellow at Férisset, holding his weapon in his left hand, made him, our blades still crossing, the points level with me a military salute.

"My seconds and I arrived at F—— at the left. I have insulted this man, and I shall have his life because he knew the truth at last; because permission,' I asked, 'will you telegraph to the man whose vices and follies had lately became a say, is very *complaisant*. I have heard a dozen confidently expected to obtain his majority in a few curious look come into his eyes. Suddenly he fell.

A carriage passed—I do not think that Gustave passing us on their homeward way; here and there gloomy and cold, with a light rain steadily bowing, turned to the young man.

"'It was in uniform that I was insulted,' he said since my friend had left school to enter the military noise made me turn round. I saw the figure of a son in the army already. Why, it seems only the refreshment-room; it was ajar, and through the appointed time. It was a miserable morning—as I was walking in the Champs-Elysées, I met him responsible for this young life. Poor boy! poor satisfaction!'

"'If you will not give me the necessary lecture.

"I bowed, and one of my seconds called: '*En garde!*'

"He saluted and left the buffet without a word.

"'And what do you propose to do?' he asked at face as he said: 'She is my mother.'

"The ground was slippery with mud, and full of astonishment at your new surroundings."

"That evening our seconds—each of us had for undergo their month's training.

"Our blades crossed. I did not move, keeping my pale and was trembling violently. He came quite down.

"Our seconds placed us face to face, and M. de F——, a little village just across the frontier, a marriage of a friend. The ceremony was a brilliant *denoûement* of my friend's story. It was growing this woman's reputation in a public place?

"'There is no express prohibition——'

"'Well, well,' he said, holding out his hand, 'you belonged to a cavalry officer.

"'Yes, General, if you put it in that light.'

"'Don't interrupt me, sir!' he shouted; 'I don't account would I hurt so much is a hair of his falling.

"'I will not forget, sir,' I replied, as I saluted her.'

"'You would, then, desert?'

"'Of course not; such a possibility was never showed just above his temples.

"'You must be mad to dream of such a thing. Oh! it was a serious business, I assure you, but looking for my seat at table when a hand was laid as a soldier, it is my duty to apologise for such a adversary to touch me with the point of his weapon. I have no knowledge of this affair; let our couple of days later; swords were the weapons not declare my passion, for I, too, was in love with some time to spare before the train started, we saw it—and in one of the occupants I recognised was dead!"

"'It seems to me, sir, there is only one course penetrated his breast. I shall never, if I live to faced one another. A young man in the uniform was the door leading into the second-class dreamt of.'

"'Then we must cross the frontier and fight our much less to kill, him willingly, but, nevertheless, byword. They were laughing and talking gaily. Only a scratch, of course, but it would satisfy the care what the man's position is in society, it makes time as my adversary and his friends. The young he preferred death to the living shame of calling me."

"I did not reply to this, and presently he cooled the throat.

"'Let him go,' I said to the soldiers; and then, in his career. We spent most of the evening of a private of *chasseurs* and a man in ordinary eyes fixed on the young man's face, and I noticed a thing.

"'I am at your disposal; you know where I am up when he next came to Paris.

"When we arrived at Lille I went to headquarters myself to be mixed up in such an affair with a me of someone, I cannot tell whom."

"He was very angry, and gave me a severe of him save that I saw in the *Journal Officiel* that he had leapt upon the point of my rapier, which must go your own way. Remember, however, that were. What could have possessed me that morning one, and on the evening of the wedding-day my host be a hundred, forget the smile upon his face as he late; the audiences of the cafés-concerts were be so easy as I had anticipated to carry out my to be found.'

G. W. Household.

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THE ACCIDENT ON THE GRINDEWALD.

Key to Jumbled Story No 13.

56 Monsieur Salvator Martigny, painter, sculptor,
108 artist, sat alone in his salon.
5 He was waiting for his wife.
3 On his face was the pleased expression of one
57 who has done something magnanimous. He seemed
2 happy, but somewhat anxious.
43 Occasionally he put out his hand, and opened a
64 casket containing a superb tiara of diamonds.
59 "I trust," he would say, "that madame will find
119 my peace offering acceptable."
100 It was, indeed, to be hoped that madame would
63 do so. She had left his house in the morning in a
10 storm, a whirlwind of words.
65 Now, he was waiting for her return.
61 "She will not be long," he said continually to
69 himself "Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Half-past——"
11 The door opened, and his man came in, bearing a
15 tray in his hand, with a note upon it.
120 It was written in his wife's hand-writing.
90 Monsieur Martigny received it eagerly, and
32 opened it with trembling fingers. There was no
101 date or address.
121 "I left your house this morning for ever. If you
62 hate me, I can find lovers. In future, you may
48 make your own arrangements."
124 Monsieur Martigny read the words many times.
20 His face was very white. He gazed round the room
34 with a despairing look, noting every detail. Each
67 object reminded him of some happy moment he had
50 spent with his wife. Finally, his eyes rested on the
12 casket of jewels that he had prepared as a surprise
75 and a peace-offering.
54 With a groan he slowly crossed the room, and
17 drew a revolver from a cabinet. He placed it
99 against his head.
26 Then he drew the trigger.
27 His hand trembled, and the bullet did not reach
84 his brain.
66 His man, who had but a moment before left the
30 room, after bringing the note, hearing the report of
103 the revolver, rushed in again.
95 He found his master lying unconscious on the
81 floor, while the blood streamed from a horrible
44 wound in the lower part of his face.
49 When, three weeks later, Monsieur Martigny
92 recovered consciousness he renounced his art, his
33 life, everyone that he had ever known, and set out
42 to wander over the face of the earth.
38 Three years later he found himself in Switzerland.
70 One morning he was wandering in the Grindewald,
13 when he encountered a group of peasants who were
47 anxious to enlist as guides. Without pausing to
60 reason, he stepped forward and joined their number.
45 He loved the free life of the mountaineers, the
72 air suited him; above all, it would be something to
122 do. It was an experience, which, he found, he could
68 almost enjoy. He saw many people whom he had
52 known in his old life. No one recognised him; who
91 could have done so in the broken-hearted, grief-
7 laden man, whose mouth, and jaws, and nose
24 were so horribly mutilated?
1 On a bright morning, early in autumn, he was
standing on one of the Grindewald roads, waiting 35
for tourists, when a *calèche*, drawn by superb horses, 105
turned at a trot from over the bridge, and came 8
towards him. 18
He recognised immediately one of the occupants 16
as M. Dupois. 106
And madame his wife, at his side? 79
The driver of the *calèche* had slackened his pace 98
to mount the ascent. The guide approached his 14
side, and addressed himself to the gentleman. 96
"Would monsieur like to make an excursion 104
which few tourists know?" 4
"What? An excursion which few tourists know? 74
What say you, little one, shall we trust ourselves to 77
this fellow?" 73
Madame smiled and nodded. 25
Shortly afterwards the three set out together. 76
They climbed the steep mountain sides, the strange 86
guide in front, with bent shoulders, and his head 88
on his breast. Occasionally, he raised his hand to 9
his eyes. 28
A fierce struggle was raging within him. This 6
man and woman, who had robbed him of everything 51
that he loved in life, were in his power. 89
"Mother of God," he cried, "surely you have 41
delivered them into my hands?" 53
They climbed the rocky slopes to the foot of the 80
glacier. On the edge they paused for a moment to 112
rest. 40
"It would be wise, monsieur," said the guide, "if 107
we were now to attach ourselves." 112
He placed his pick against a rock, and taking his 113
rope from his shoulders, he approached Monsieur 46
Dupois, and fastened it securely round him. Then 31
he came to madame, and for a moment, during the 21
operation, his arms encirled her body. 36
He could detect the faint scent that came from 83
her hair. It seemed to stifle him. Ah, how well he 23
knew it. 114
Finally, he fastened the rope round his own 115
waist. 123
"Forward!" he cried, and his voice was firm and 118
steady. 58
Slowly, and carefully, each step planned before- 85
hand, they ascended the glacier. They encountered 93
many dangers; madame's head grew dizzy; and 22
finally she fell almost senseless into the guide's arms. 55
For a moment he gazed silently down on the 110
woman in his arms. Then he shook her roughly. 82
"Wake up," he cried. "The time has come. 109
Listen. I am Salvator Martigny. Do you know 116
me now? I am your husband." 78
His wild laugh echoed down the mountain side. 19
He stopped in the middle, and turned on the 39
frightened man. 117
"You scoundrel," he cried. 97
Then suddenly, drawing the rope in close, and 102
holding his wife to his breast, he sprang into the air. 76
* * * * * 37
Afterwards, three mutilated bodies in a confused 29
mass, tied together by a rope, were found by the 87
peasants at the foot of the abyss. 94

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By George Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER XXXI.

In the Railway Accident.

Two ghastly white faces, but Lucy's was the whiter, and her eyes were the first to sink before the firm, cold gaze which looked unshrinkingly at hers. The look was clear and crystalline, while that which was directed back flowed with jealous hatred and dislike.

As Lucy's lids fell, and she turned her head slightly to where her aunt sat watching her, waiting for the *dénouement* of this unfortunate meeting, Olive turned her eyes upon her husband, and saw that a couple of red, consumptive-looking spots had appeared in his pale cheeks; and when at last she caught his shrinking gaze she could plainly read how nervous and agitated he seemed. Twice over he shrank from her calm, limpid eyes, misreading the look she directed at him; while, frowning and angry, Emsworth sat back in his corner, glancing from time to time at Murray, trying to silently question him, the first inquiry being, "Whatever shall we do?" the next, "Hadn't we better make them change places with us?" while those which followed succeeded one another so fast that they became confused, and the brain which engendered them was in a whirl.

But the Doctor, after the first quick shock of the encounter, in which was a pang of pity for Olive that she should be called upon to occupy so terribly painful a position, sat calm and unmoved. It was his professional training that had taught him to master every emotion, and, in failing, to mask them, as he did here. His face looked a little hard, but his voice sounded cool and measured as usual when he broke silence:

"Would you like to glance at *Punch*, Lady Braetoun?" he said quietly; and as he leant forward to hand the paper, which was gladly taken, and held as if being skimmed over, he turned to Braetoun to engage him in conversation about the country through which they passed.

"If you care to read," he said, after a time, "I have two of the reviews, with good-sized print."

"Got something here," said Braetoun, in a harsh, petulant way, for he had somewhat recovered his composure after going through a long series of mental calculations regarding the *rencontre*, the result being that he concluded that Lucy had contrived the meeting by bribing the guard.

"Why, she must have followed us down, and been in Brighton, perhaps, ever so long," he argued; "and I've been pushed about in that cursed chair all the time and never known. Poor little lassie! it was very good of her."

He took out the "something" he had mentioned, and began to open and turn the paper.

"Shall I do it, dear?" said Olive quickly; and letting her own paper fall on her lap, she took and opened the sporting journal her husband was battling with rather feebly, and offered it to him with a gentle, appealing smile.

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"Oh, I could have done it," he said petulantly. "I'm not such an invalid as that."

He sank back, holding the paper before him, and Olive resumed her own, while her father shut himself in his corner of the carriage behind the *Times*, Murray calmly leaning back and cutting the leaves of a review.

Aunt Duncan, whose florid face behind her veil was covered with a thick dew, took refuge in a mock sleep, crushing the flowers of her bonnet a good deal as she leant back in her corner, but from time to time she raised one lid as slightly as she could to watch her niece, who sat quivering with her emotion—a mingling of fear, despair, and delight—gazing through the window at the landscape which seemed to sweep round as they dashed on. All the misery and regret at being torn away from Brighton had passed away, and by degrees she yielded more and more to the ever mastering feeling that she was once more side by side with the man she loved, whose garments touched hers from time to time, and the wild, angry glare in her beautiful eyes gradually gave place to a look of swimming tenderness. Olive was almost facing her, fighting hard to ignore her presence; but there was no longer any struggle going on in Lucy's breast. It was no ignoring of the wife's presence, for ten miles of the journey had not been hurried through before Olive did not seem to exist. Roderick Braetoun was with her once more, the only man for whom her heart had ever truly beat, and the feeling was upon her, "Oh, that the journey might be prolonged for hours upon hours, instead of the pace increasing as it did."

Poor Rod! he loved her still, though he had been torn from her, and all present had combined to thrust her away; he must love her, and the pale, handsome woman before her could be nothing to him, or he would not have spoken to her so harshly as he did. He was hers—hers alone, and she sat back waiting, feeling assured that the moment the train dashed into a tunnel and darkness enshrouded them, his hand would seek hers, to hold it with a long, loving pressure, to assure her that he was not changed by his long weary illness. But a minute later she could hardly repress a sigh, for she felt, more than saw, that the carriage was well lighted, and the hope slowly died away.

So quick: hurrying on at such a terrible rate. Only one hour and a quarter, and they would be in town. A sigh rose to Lucy's lips, and she longed intensely to turn and look only once at the pale face so close to hers, but she dared not stir, only sit gazing fixedly out of the window, knowing as she did that at the slightest movement every pair of eyes would be turned upon her.

So swift to her, so slow and agonising to Olive, who sat there glancing from time to time at her husband, as if to assure herself that he was still present, and not slowly gliding away from her once more.

He was reading, or assuming to read, his paper, and she

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could not see his eyes, only his white forehead, already so full of lines. And in those brief glances her heart sank, for it gradually came home to her that in spite of all—her tender affection, her ceaseless efforts to save him from death—now that health and strength were once more well in view, he was stealing away from her into that which was worse to her than death, and her misery seemed greater than she could bear.

There were moments when she was ready to cry mentally: "Why did he not die? It would have been better so." Why had she prayed to Murray to keep on in that nearly ceaseless battle with the grim shadow which hovered over him so long? And the answer came: "Because I was his wife—the one who had vowed to love him, and who would have given her life that he might live."

There was no sign, no look from one to the other, of those who sat facing her, but she knew how beautiful the little figure in the corner was, and how weak her husband. There was no sign, but Olive felt it in her misery-stricken breast, and she sat there gradually growing colder and more rigid, still wearing that stony mask, and holding before her dim eyes the leaves of the comic journal, with its pages dotted with humorous pictures of life.

There were moments—long-drawn, anguished moments—when she felt that she must shriek aloud, or burst into a passionate fit of sobbing; and just as she was suffering most keenly, she gave a violent start, and a painful smile dawned upon her quivering lips, for Braetoun suddenly exclaimed in a petulant way:

"They print these things so atrociously badly. Here, Olive, read this column about the Earlswood Meeting."

Even that was a relief.

"Yes, dear," she said, in what she meant to be a cheerful tone; and she took the paper, as a deep growl came from the corner of the carriage on her right.

"Did you speak, sir?" said Braetoun sharply; and Olive laid her hand upon his knee.

"Eh? speak?" said Emsworth, lowering the paper, of which he had not been able to read a word. "No, I didn't speak," and the broad sheet was raised again.

"Oh: thought you did," said Braetoun contemptuously; and he sank back, while Olive began to read hastily the long—to her—maddening account of the series of races, while, for her part, she did not grasp the import of a sentence.

"Louder, please," said Braetoun sharply; and his wife read on, the tones of her voice, whose tremulous manner sent a thrill of pity and despair through Murray as she struggled on, ever ready to break down and sob, but fighting her brave fight against despair to the very end.

She read on. It was the account now of a hardly-contested race, and her voice grew tinged with the excitement she felt, as it gradually dawned upon her that one of the horses competing was her husband's mare, Bella Donna. But she hardly dared glance at him for fear she should miss a line. She was conscious, though, that he was listening eagerly, with his pale face flushing, and that the subject she was reading had suddenly taken the attention of her father and of Murray, who, though keeping their eyes upon their papers, were listening attentively. Worse still, the occupant of the opposite corner had suddenly changed her position, and, though keeping her face averted, was evidently devouring every word.

Still Olive read on, trembling and eager now herself, lest the news that had so interested her husband should be that of misfortune and disaster. For another horse was the favourite, and Bella Donna was described as being at first far behind.

Had she dared she would have cast down the paper, but as she read Braetoun leant more and more forward, eager for every word. Then a change came over the account, one by one those in front began to drop to the rear, and Olive grew confused by the sporting reporter's technical account till near the end of the race, when the language grew unmistakable, for she read that amidst a tremendous burst of cheering, Bella Donna had won by a head, and the bookmakers were heavily hit.

"Hah!" ejaculated Braetoun, sinking back in his seat and closing his eyes, when Murray dropped his book and leant towards him, while Lucy lost her power over self for a moment and turned, too, with a frightened look in her eyes.

"All right, Doctor, nothing wrong," said Braetoun, a little hoarsely; "man doesn't die of good news."

A quick exchange of glances passed between Olive and Lucy, and then the latter returned to her old position, and sat gazing out with a feeling of elation that made her pulses beat heavily.

"Then you've been running your mare in another race," said Emsworth sharply.

"Well, suppose I have?" said Braetoun resentfully.

"And you've won?"

"Didn't you hear? Aren't you glad?"

"No, I'm not glad," said Emsworth coldly. "I should have thought you had been too ill to think of such things."

"So I have," replied Braetoun, "but I happened to have a good mare, and a good servant who looks after my interests. There," he continued, "we needn't quarrel about a confounded good piece of luck. It will put a couple of thou. in my pocket, and I want it badly enough."

"But can you trust a man to look after such business as that?"

"Seems like it."

"But suppose your horse had lost?"

"So much the worse for me, old man. But I haven't lost. Come, don't make such a fuss about it. My trainer wrote to me and asked if he might enter the mare, for she would have a good chance, and she was only eating her head off in the stable; so I got Olive here to write back, and you see she brought me luck. Hallo! Stopping?"

It was only at the one station—Clapham Junction, and a faint sigh came from the right-hand corner, almost inaudible, but it reached Olive's ears and made them tingle.

Then on once again, another pause, and they were directly after, as it seemed to Lucy, at Victoria.

Emsworth had let down the window, and was looking along the platform for his servant, and the Doctor was gathering together his books; while Olive sat watching her husband, and thrilling with trembling expectancy of she knew not what.

Aunt Duncan seemed to wake up, but she did not speak to her niece, who sat there, upright now, waiting, too, and with her heart beginning to sink with a feeling of misery which she could not control.

"Carriage is close at hand," said Emsworth, as the train stopped. "I'll get a couple of porters to carry you, Braetoun."

"Don't," he said; "that news has roused me. If you and the Doctor each give me an arm, I dare say I can walk."

"But——" began Emsworth.

"Let him try," said Murray, who had stepped out after Emsworth, and stood with him at the carriage door.

Olive held out her hand to her husband, but he did not take it.

"Get out first," he said; "their help will be better;" and he leant forward a little, with his hands resting on the padded arms of the carriage.

There was nothing for Olive to do but obey; and as her back was turned, she screened effectually from the Doctor's jealously watching eyes, as he handed her out, that which took place within. For in an instant Braetoun's hand had grasped and warmly pressed Lucy's little trembling fingers, holding them tightly as the pressure was spasmodically returned.

The next moment the convalescent was raising himself to his feet, and then grasped the Doctor's and Emsworth's hands as they helped him out, and then supported him

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across the platform to the carriage where Nurse Jennett stood waiting with her bag.

"Oh, Baby—Baby!" whispered Aunt Duncan, "what have you done?"

"Don't—don't speak to me, Auntie, pray—pray, or I shall make a scene," she panted. "You don't know—you don't know what you've done. I was so wretched I thought I should die, while now—oh, Auntie—Auntie, once more—once more! He's mine—he's mine!"

"Yes," said Aunt Duncan bitterly, "Bella Donna has won."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Home, Sweet Home.

Chester Square was entered by Emsworth's high-stepping horses before the cab had deposited Aunt Duncan and her niece in Great Russell Street, and Braetoun bore the moving easily. Murray accompanied his patient, and saw that all went well.

"Back home, dearest," said Olive, as soon as her husband was resting back in an easy chair.

"Yes, back home," he said. "You'll stop to dinner, Mr. Emsworth?"

"No, thank you; I only wanted to see you safe.—He ought to go to bed soon, oughtn't he, Doctor?"

"There is no hurry," said Murray quietly. "He will act according to how he feels. We ought to congratulate him upon bearing the journey so well."

"And on my turf success," said Braetoun laughingly. "Oh, I could bear it. I'd have borne anything to get away from the sad sea waves."

"Humph!" ejaculated Emsworth, and then to himself: "A planned business, curse him! but they bungled it a bit. What's to be the next move, I wonder?—There, I'm off now. Will you come down to the door with me, my dear?"

"Yes, father," said Olive, "but——"

"Oh, go down and see the old man off," said Braetoun banteringly; "he wants to give you a bit of advice, I dare say."

Olive gave him a reproachful look, and followed her father down.

"Ah!" said Murray, "I wanted to be alone with you for a few minutes before I went, Braetoun."

"Eh? Want to put something on my mare for the next race?"

"No, but I want to see you run the rest of your earthly race like a man—like the lad promised who was my old form companion."

"Look here, I'm not in a humour to listen to preaching," said Braetoun sourly.

"Very well, then, I will appeal to you through your body if I cannot through your brain."

"There, there; that will do," cried Braetoun peevishly. "I'm tired out, and there's nothing the matter now. I only want some food and a good sleep."

"Yes, and you will have both soon."

"All right; now leave me alone. I know what you're thinking."

"I suppose so. But look here, Braetoun, it is my duty to tell you once for all that any undue excitement may prove serious. You must now lead a quiet, domestic life. You know well enough what you must do."

"I know what you have told me," said Braetoun contemptuously.

"Yes," said Murray sternly, "and you know it is the honest truth. Now be advised. I do not wish to boast, but I have saved your life, one which I pray Heaven may now, for your wife's sake, become happy and peaceful."

"All right, pray away, but don't pray before me, nor preach either, and please leave my wife out of it. She has nothing to do with your medicine. I dare say I can take care of myself, but if I fall ill, you can come and doctor me, and set me right again."

"If I can," said Murray meaningly.

"Oh, you can; and you'd better look in from time to time, and see how I am. You'll like that."

The last words were uttered so meaningly that Murray stood looking at him sternly.

"Yes," he said at last, "I should like to do all I could for the man I have striven for again and again. But you must be careful, Braetoun, for your wife's sake."

There was a quick gesture, and an ugly sneer in the tones of Braetoun's voice as he said:

"Oh, all right, I'll take care; but that accident did me good, and I'm going to be stronger than ever. Antagonism of disease, don't you fellows call it? One has killed the other. There, come in often."

Murray took his leave calmly enough directly after, when Olive re-entered the room, for the sad, limpid, and weary look in the young wife's eyes seemed to chase away all that was base in his nature. There was a manly, chivalrous pressure in his hand, a look of reverence in his eyes, and a feeling of tender pity in his breast.

"Good-bye," he said cheerfully. "Don't be alarmed, Lady Braetoun; he has borne the journey well."

"You think so?" she said piteously.

"Think? I am sure. He will soon be himself again." And what a struggle it was to say those words!

"But you will come in and see him again soon?"

"Oh, yes," said Braetoun, "he shall come in and see me again soon. I say, Murray, what a bill you will have!"

"Yes, a heavier one than you can grasp," said Murray cheerfully, "and I'll drop in and see you to-morrow some time."

He took his leave while Braetoun sat watching his wife, ready to attack her first and disarm her, should she utter a reproach, and he did attack, though there was no need, for she would not have spoken.

"Oh, yes, he shall come and watch over me; don't be afraid. Capital company, the Doctor."

Then to himself:

"I'm not blind. Enough to make any man go wrong. Illness is bad enough. But never mind; Bella Donna has won. Well done, old Vinniss! What a comfort it is to feel independent once again!"

He was sitting back in an easy chair, and Olive stood by the window as if looking out, but really seeing the scene in the railway carriage once more. She was longing to speak, but could not trust herself for fear she should break down. The tension of that afternoon had been more than she could bear.

She had been hoping it had all been a sudden surprise, an accident, she believed; but all the same a terrible fear had come upon her of what the future was to be. As to Braetoun's strange words, they made no impression. He was irritable and weary, and she had often listened to petty, childish remarks from him during his illness, words which had sent her from the room in tears; but of late they had not made any impression to signify, and she had on this occasion hardly heeded them, for her brain was filled with the events of that day.

And now, like a sudden flash of light, came a thought which swept away the idea of the meeting being accidental. Had it been planned?

She shuddered, and dismissed the idea at once. She was wrong, she told herself, and she was frightening herself with fancies that had no basis. The past was dead, and he had at times been loving, gentle, and reconnaissant to her. All she had to do was to show him that, spite of all, her love was unchanged.

Feeling relieved now, she turned to where he was seated, reproaching herself for her silence, and, laying her hand upon his shoulder, she bent down, and found that he was sleeping heavily.

"Poor fellow! What he has suffered!" she said, with the tears rising to her eyes, and brimming over; "but he is better, and we are going to be happy once more. Tired

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out, Frederick?" she whispered; and she pressed her lips to his forehead.

The next moment her heart began to beat fast, and a sigh of content escaped her lips, for he passed his arms about her, and muttered softly:

"Ah, Baby! You once more!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Nurse Jennett Plays Her Game.

Murray kept his word, and came next day to see how the journey had been borne, renewing the previous conversation.

"Well, I really am what they call repentant now, old man. This last illness is a sickener—no joke meant. I'm going to settle down now to being quite the country gentleman."

"For how long? Till the next fit comes on?"

"No; I am going to have no more fits. I'm going to be as steady as a judge. That's not saying much, though."

"Well, I've warned you till I'm tired of speaking. You know as well as I do that your constitution will not stand the strain. You must give up all excitement—especially racing."

"Oh, hang it, no! Well, there, if I must, I must. But I shall keep on the little mare—I can't sell her—and just enter her for some little plate now and then."

Murray looked at him with a bitter contempt in his eyes.

"I have warned you once more, and I have done with you. If you like to be careful you may live for years in peace and happiness. If you persist in being the fast man about town you will die."

"But I shall have seen life," said Braetoun, with a peculiar, mocking look.

"And have the misery of the knowledge that you have broken a true woman's heart."

"Don't preach, man; and suppose we leave morals out of the question. I dare say I understand my wife now, and she understands me."

Murray shrugged his shoulders.

"There, I don't want to boast," he said, "but I have saved your life again."

"Splendidly."

"But this is the last time I will attend you. Your troubles are wilfully brought on, and so you must suffer for them."

"Bah! If I'm unlucky enough to be taken bad again you'll come, as you always have."

"You are mistaken, Braetoun, I shall not."

"Oh, yes, you will. The wife will come and beg of you, and you can't refuse her anything."

Murray looked at him searchingly, and there was a mocking look in his patient's eyes which startled him; but the idea which flashed into his brain passed away directly, for, in spite of his words, Braetoun's manner contradicted the possibility of his meaning anything serious.

"You really have pulled me round again wonderfully, old fellow," continued Braetoun lightly, "and I'm precious glad to get back home. I say, it was precious rough on poor Olive for her to have to come and nurse me there, but she has been a perfect angel over it all. Never once referred to it, and no wife could have behaved better."

"No wife could have behaved better," said Murray, repeating his words. "Try and recollect that."

"Of course, I will. Don't I tell you I'm going to be a model husband now? I was sick of lying shut up in that miserable little hole. It was so awkward, too, for Olive."

"Very," said Murray, looking at him intently.

"What are you thinking about?"

"I was only wondering what kind of brain yours must be to take all these things so lightly."

"Yes; that's what I often wonder, myself. 'Tis my nature to, as old Dr. Watts would have said. I say, old fellow, we can't all be such good men as you, eh?"

There was a sneer again in this, but Murray did not wince. He passed it over, and rose to go.

"Off?"

"Yes, I am going."

"Won't you stop and see the wife first? She has gone on to see the mater and tell her I'm comfortably settled down, and she may come and see me as often as she likes without the doctor ordering her off."

"No; I told Lady Braetoun yesterday I should not call again, and bade her good-bye."

"Nonsense! You'll come again soon, I know," said Braetoun, half mockingly. "But, I say, how long am I to keep that old cat here? Surely I don't want a nurse, now?"

"I advise you to keep her here for nearly another month. She will be very useful, and you are not so strong as you think."

"Oh, I say, don't begin croaking again."

"Your strength is only on the surface, as you would soon find if you exerted yourself in the slightest degree."

There was a tap at the door just then, and Braetoun cried, "Come in," the nurse herself entering directly.

"What do you want?" said Braetoun roughly.

"Only to ask Doctor Murray if he has any orders to give me, my lord."

"What, about boiled soles, and chicken broth, rice pudding, and that sort of thing?"

The nurse shrugged her shoulders and wrinkled her forehead.

"Hang it all! Don't do that," cried Braetoun, with a sudden burst of petulancy. "You're not a Frenchwoman."

"No," said Murray quietly, "I have no further instructions to give you. You know the dieting that should be followed better than I can tell you. I leave Lord Braetoun in your hands now, and I strongly advise that you stay with him for at least a month."

"His lordship will, I hope, bear that in mind," said the nurse quietly, "if I seem too exacting, knowing as he will that I have Doctor Murray's authority for all I do."

"Oh, yes, I shall bear it all in mind, and be as patient as a lamb, so long as I feel certain that it's all right."

"It will be quite right," said Murray gravely. "I fully trust Nurse Jennett's judgment in such a case as yours. There, I am glad you are so far recovered, so now good-day. Thank you, nurse, for your kind attention and the carefully exact way in which you have seconded my efforts. I hope to have you often to help me in the future. Good-bye for the present. Send me a line when you are free again."

"Yes, sir, certainly I will," she said quietly; but there was a strange lurid look in her eyes as she fixed them upon him sharply, and she shivered slightly as he left the room.

"What the dickens does he mean by that?" said Braetoun, angrily. "He surely has not gone. Here, nurse, go to the window and look out. He can't go away like this. No; go to the door and call him back."

But at that moment the front door was heard to close.

"Here, quick, the window. Why, that's the wheels of his brougham."

The nurse ran to the window and looked out.

"No, my lord," she said, "it is another carriage drawing up, with a lady inside."

"My mother?"

"No, my lord," said the woman, looking at him with a peculiarly malicious gleam in her half-closed eyes; "her ladyship has returned, and Doctor Murray has gone to the carriage door, raised his hat, and taken her hand."

Braetoun started as if a sharp weapon had been thrust into his breast, and he turned upon the woman fiercely.

(To be continued.)

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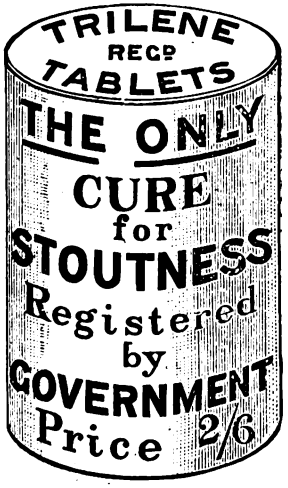

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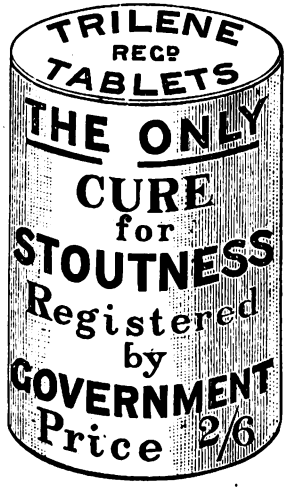

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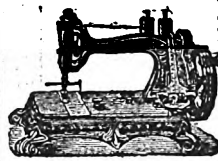

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 408. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 24TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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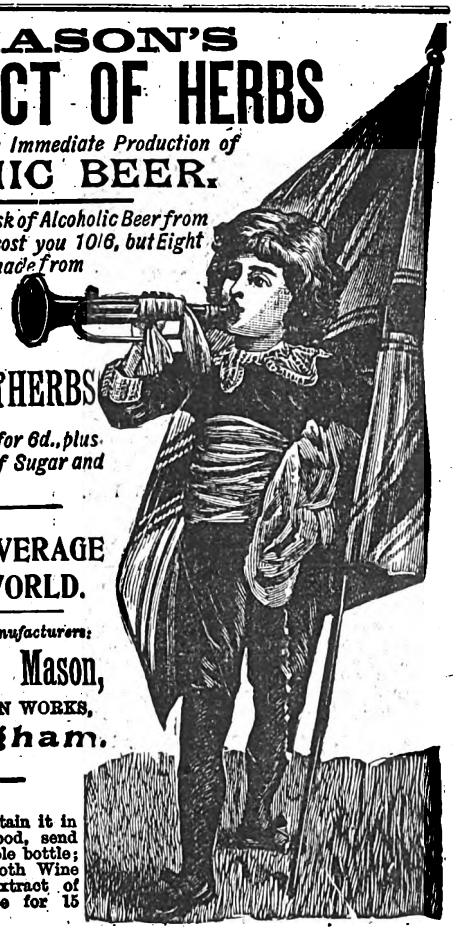

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No. 43

Oct. 24, 1896.

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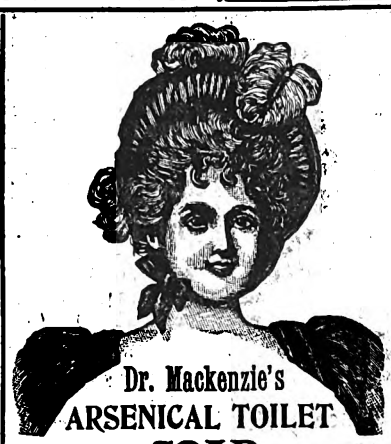

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Short Stories

EDITED BY ARTHUR PEARSON

No. 408.] For the Week ending October 24th, 1896. [1d.

The White Stone.

BETWEEN Odense and Middelfrat the Danish highway used to pass, years ago, through a wild but fertile region. In the parish of Vissenbjerg it entered an old forest of beech and oak, where the branches so roofed over the road that even in the brightest daylight the traveller found himself in the densest gloom. Deer would spring out through the ferns and raspberry vines, and blackbirds dart back and forth among the thick foliage.

For a few minutes at midday a single ray of sunlight found its way through the leaves, and cast a trembling glimmer upon the green moss which lined the wayside, but it would soon pass, and the road be as dark and gloomy as before.

The whole region, and especially this forest, stood in bad repute. No one cared to journey over the Vissenbjerg road at night. Travellers waited until morning, and then hurried through the forest in as large companies as possible.

Many were the stories of murder and assault and robbery which had taken place in there. Were these stories true or exaggerated? Who could say? But at any rate they were told, and the people believed them.

At one place the road wound round between two banks. In one of these banks it was said that the highwaymen had dug a cave where they lay in wait for victims. That no one might escape them a cord was stretched across the way, which sounded a bell in the cave when anyone passed.

Towards the village of Skalbjerg the forest became thinner; trees gave place to undergrowth; the landscape showed open fields and ploughed land, and was dotted here and there with cottages and farmhouses.

Of these latter, the largest and finest was that of Terkel Dam. He owned a large part of the Vissenbjerg forest, and had many cattle pasturing on its outskirts, tended by a young girl whose name was Karen.

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She was a little, insignificant person, was Karen, thin and ill-featured, and she was lame. When the other girls had driven home their cattle in the evening and had come together to sing their gay songs, Karen kept at a distance. She seldom spoke, and seemed to care little for the people around her. And they paid little attention to her.

Sometimes of a pleasant summer evening, when they heard a soft, mournful song sung out in the forest, the other girls stopped for a moment and listened. "It's the lame Karen singing," said one.

Then they went on again. She felt herself in some way inferior to other people, but her desires were few; she was contented, yet she always seemed sad; no one had ever seen her laugh.

"It all comes from the day when she fell from the rock and hurt her foot," said the grandmother. "God must have taken away all gladness from her then."

But Karen shook her head. Silence and timidity were her nature, and so she liked best to be by herself.

And yet Karen loved her master's son. She, the lowliest of all the servants, a poor lame creature, had dared to love a fine young fellow like Ebbe; Ebbe, who might have any girl he pleased. What presumption! what simple mindedness! In spring she brought him the first flowers that came forth after the snow had gone, in strawberry time a dish of the finest berries always stood by his plate. Ebbe ate them, the others laughed, and Karen said nothing.

One day, as she placed a dish of the fruit before him on the table and then went away, Terkel smiled and rubbed his hands, and looking over his shoulder, said:

"You two might make a couple. What think you, my son?"

Ebbe laughed.

"She's faithful and industrious, the little wench, but she limps so," and there the matter dropped.

That year there were rough times out in the forest. Several travellers were robbed, and there was much talk of a horse dealer, who had on his person a large sum of money, and who had not been seen from the time that he started off down the Vissenbjerg road. His friends

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had searched everywhere, and had sent men out into the forest, but in vain; they got no trace of the horse dealer.

One day a solitary rider approached the passage-way between the banks. Karen lay resting in the bushes not far away. She heard a bell tinkle and then saw three men with heavy cudgels in their hands rush out and cast the rider from his horse. In her excitement she ran hurriedly to the village and told all that she had seen.

An alarm was given. The sheriff's deputy gathered together all the strong men of the parish and hastened down the road. They succeeded in capturing two men who had just finished burying the murdered horseman among the bushes. They were two soldiers, recruiters, who for some time had been making trouble and disturbances wherever they had showed themselves in the country round about. The third robber had escaped.

The deputy took Karen to his office. She stood trembling and clutching the folds of her dress as he closely questioned her, having first commanded her, in the name of God, to tell the whole truth as to what she had witnessed. But she knew nothing more than she had told at first.

"You are sure that there were three men?" Yes, she was sure.

"And you were with your cattle out there by the clearing?"

"I had been there since early in the morning."

"Now tell me the names of all those whom you had seen go by."

She did so. Among them was an old man who had been collecting brushwood by the road. He, too, was summoned and made to name those whom he had seen go by. They were all brought to the deputy, who went from one to the other, with the girl and old man. He remained standing for a moment before each, and asked:

"Was this the other robber?"

Karen shook her head each time he questioned. At length they stood before her own master, the rich Terkel Dam; he was among those whom the brush gatherer had seen pass, and he had been summoned with the rest. Terkel stood and rattled the cover of his pipe. "Look sharp now and see if you can recognise me," he said with a laugh. But again Karen shook her head, and there was nothing more that the deputy could do.

The two soldiers were afterwards tried and sentenced. They were to be taken out to the hill behind the church and there executed.

The morning that they were carried through the village Karen stood among the others to watch the executioner's waggon pass. On the way, one of the robbers reached down and picked up a great white stone. This he cast in the direction of Terkel Dam's farm gate, calling out so loudly that all could hear:

"By this remember that when my white stone becomes black he shall get his due, who sits there grinning at us."

Soon after, when they had come to the hill and he lay with his bare neck upon the block, he laughed and called to the executioner:

"Slash carefully with your sword, you wretch, so that you get no nick in it! You'll certainly want to use it again for the murder on the Vissenbjerg road."

"When will that be?" questioned the judge.

"When the little wench there is no longer afraid to tell what she knows," he answered.

The sentence was carried out and the people talked about the affair for many a day; but no one could imagine what the poor rascal had in mind when he cast the white stone towards Terkel's farm.

At Michaelmas Karen was dismissed from service. There was so much talk about her, and the people of the parish charged her with trying to deceive and vex them by claiming that there were three robbers, when in reality there could only have been two.

The afternoon that she should go away she stood crying, in front of the house, a little bundle of clothes under her arm. Ebbe carried out to her a roll of frieze.

"You shall have this for your faithful service," he said.

"May I kiss your hand for thanks?" she begged.

"Where do you think of going?"

"That I don't know, and I don't care much if only I may find another herd of cattle to watch and another forest to hide myself in."

"Why do you care so much about staying here?"

"Because here I can see you," she answered without lifting her eyes.

"You have brought it all upon yourself," he said, "by speaking falsely in regard to the robbers; you said that there were three when there were only two."

Karen stood silent awhile; then, "I will tell you how it was; I couldn't name the third because it was—your own father."

The farmer's son turned pale.

"Let's go into the house," he said, taking Karen by the hand.

It was a little while before supper time; the men had not yet come in from their work. Terkel sat alone in the room. He stared at his son and asked why they came together.

"We have news for you," said Ebbe. "Karen and I are betrothed."

"In that case there will be two to go away," said Terkel; "you'll not live here with me, understand."

"Now wait, will you, and let me tell you how you owe it to her that you are sitting here in this room at the present moment."

"What do you mean?"

"She did see who the third robber was, down in the Vissenbjerg road, but she wouldn't tell his name."

Terkel shrunk back; he fell heavily against the wall, but after a few minutes he lifted himself up and said in a broken voice:

"Let everything be as you wish, and now you will take the farm and manage it and the household."

From that evening Terkel left everything to the young couple. He would feed and watch the fowls out in the barnyard, but this was about all he did, and he said little.

Every day he went and looked at the white stone by the farm gate, and he would never let it be removed.

"I think that it's becoming black, oh, so black!" said he, looking round to see if anyone was watching. Then he would wash the dust and mud from the stone, making it white again. And every evening, just before bedtime, Karen would take down the hymn-book and read from it to the old man.

The next summer, when the committee went round from farm to farm, begging pieces of brass and copper for the new church bell, they came in turn to Terkel. He stood and bethought himself.

"Why should you go begging at every house?" said he. "I will give it all."

He went into his bed-room and brought out a great

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bag of money which should be used in purchasing the new bell. The men broke out into exclamations of gratitude and praise for Terkel, but he had turned to see if Karen had witnessed what he did.

Accompanying the committee were the choir boys from the charity school, in white gowns, who stood before each house and sang a verse of some hymn. Before Terkel's they sang a whole hymn. He was deeply moved at his own generosity, but still he noticed that they sang the hymn all through.

"They only gave my neighbour one verse. I got four. However, that was a lot of money that I gave for the bell."

Karen stood with her hand in his. She kissed his hand and said:

"Father! Father! I believe that God has heard the prayer that I've been praying so long. Now you're certainly upon the right way."

"I must hasten to go that way," said he, "and you have helped me, oh, so much!"

That evening she filled the whole house with song, and after the lights had been put out and they were gone to bed Ebbe took her hand in his and said:

"I don't understand. What a great change has taken place in you! And you are more beautiful than I have ever seen you before."

"But yet I limp," she answered.

So time passed on. There came good and bad years. Karen did her duty and was a blessing to everyone. She was a good, pious, sensible woman, who helped her neighbours, shared what she had with the poor, and went every Sunday, no matter what the weather was, up to the Vissenbjerg church.

"That's a household pleasing to the Lord," declared the pastor, and so thought everyone. Terkel continued to pay his visits to the white stone; and when he thought that no one was looking he would clean it with great care.

But he was growing old; once a corpulent man, he had now become thin; he was bowed over; and it was with great difficulty that he could climb up the stairs to his chamber.

One evening he came in looking very happy.

"To-day they have finished hanging the new bell up in the church. Every time that it swings now it will ring out to God for me."

From the beginning of early spring he had to keep to his bed. When the leaves began to turn yellow and fall he whispered to himself:

"I've lain here and watched the swallows out of my window a whole summer through; a last summer, I think."

Karen nursed him and scarcely left his bedside.

One summer day as she came in with a bowl of gruel he lay gasping for breath and could scarcely speak so that one could understand him.

"The white stone out there will soon become black," he was mumbling. Karen bent down over him; she spoke gently, but no one could have heard what she said. At first the old man shook his head; then he shut his eyes and could not answer. She made him fold his hands while she sang softly a hymn of which he was very fond. Then suddenly she burst into tears, lifting his arms around her neck, and whispered:

"May I? Say yes, oh! say yes!"

He shook his head; but she begged again, more earnestly than before, and knelt down by the bed, no letting go his hand.

"You shall not speak about it again," he gasped. "I said no, and it must be as I said."

She sat there discouraged, with bowed head. Out of doors the wind was blowing the leaves from the trees and whirling them about in great flocks. Terkel looked up. Karen sat at the foot of the bed, her hands folded over the hymnbook.

"Talk to me a little," he whispered; "you sit there so silent and never say a word."

"You won't listen to what I say."

"Yes, I will, but you want what can't be. How does it concern the people what took place down there on the Vissenbjerg road? I must confess my sins before the Lord will forgive me, you say, but I'll lose the respect and esteem of the whole parish. What will people say when I come out among them again? for I can live a little while longer, I should think."

She did not answer; the tears were trickling down her cheeks.

"Are you angry?" he asked after a few moments. "Talk to me; I can't bear that you should sit there and not speak,"—but she interrupted him. "Must it be so? In God's name do what is right, what is best!"

A long time passed before he laid his fumbling hand on her head and said: "It shall be as you wish; it shall be so." She gave a cry of joy, ran out of the room and directed that a messenger be sent at once to the village for the pastor; she herself would follow with the waggon to fetch him.

It became evening, and it was late and dark before they returned. In the chamber there three great candles had been lit before Terkel's bed. He lay, twisting his thumbs and talking to himself, without regarding what went on about him. Once he opened his eyes, looked round and whispered:

"Let someone be sent to the church—I want the new bell rung—my bell. Listen! now it's ringing to God for me—He can hear it, can God—it's for me—for me alone—for I bought it! Will she come soon with the man?"

It was just about bedtime when the dogs began to bark and the waggon rolled into the farmyard. Karen followed the pastor up into Terkel's chamber. Ebbe would have accompanied them, but she pushed him gently back.

What took place there in the sick man's room no human being besides those three ever knew. The people outside heard a voice which was slow and solemn, and one which was soft and pleading, and then they could distinguish whimpering and sobbing sounds. Afterwards it became still, and it seemed as though there was no life in there—and, indeed, death was present.

"How is he now?" questioned Ebbe, as Karen at length opened the door to let the parson out.

"He's better now than he's been for a long time," answered the pastor, "for now he's dead, gone to sleep in God's name. A great sinner lies in there; but the one who has wished him well and watched and prayed and delivered a soul from the error of its ways, that one is Karen, your good wife; blessed shall she be therefore in the sight of God and men!"

The stone out by the farm gate lay there for many a year. Every spring, at Whitsuntide, they gave it a coat of white wash and took good care that it was always white and free from spots.

R. T. Mumby.

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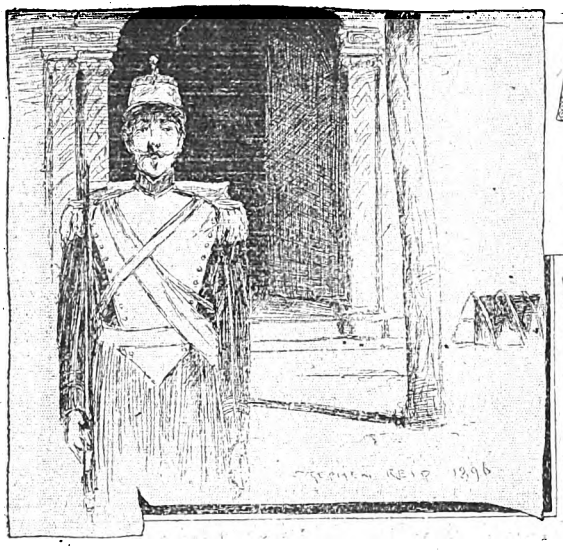

A COURT-MARTIAL

A HUGE grey building in a straight street on the other side of the Garonne. Wondering urchins stop before the high door, surmounted by a flag, which is guarded day and night by a melancholy sentinel. It is always a curious spectacle—soldiers coming, or going, or drilling. The wide court, planted with sickly trees, suggests more the thought of a prison than of a barrack.

On this June afternoon, especially, a great sadness seemed to rest on the sun-baked walls. The soldiers wandered back and forth in silent groups, and from time to time cast glances up at the grated first floor window, behind which the court-martial was assembled.

Ten minutes before, the Colonel, president of the council, had appeared in the high stone casement, and a shudder still ran through all these men at the thought of the apparition; not one of them but had trembled before this human image of military justice.

But the accused, who was about to be judged up there, was not so very great a criminal after all. His crime was a week's desertion in time of peace. They all knew he would get off with half-a-year's imprisonment, but still they were sorry, as every man in his company liked Joseph Brinquant, a gay, good-humoured, witty Montaubian.

The council-hall opened into the court on one side, and on the other into an immense garden. Formerly, the enormous building was the convent of the Abbés of Montauriol; there was still something monastical about the high walls, and the great Christ carved in yellow wood took on, in the semi-darkness, the aspect of an implacable judge.

The members of the council were seated round an oblong, green-covered table. In the centre was Colonel Vigier, between two commanders-in-chief; then came a captain, a lieutenant and a non-commissioned officer. On the side for the defence was a lawyer from the Toulouse bar, and for this occasion Captain Mainjean was fulfilling the duties of prosecutor.

As for the accused himself, he was scarcely visible. Poor Joseph Brinquant was huddled together on his seat, as though to hide from the others' gaze; and short, nervous spasms contracted his pale face, while his eyes wandered from Captain Mainjean to Colonel Vigier with an expression of poignant anguish.

Very dissimilar were the three actors in this drama of military life. The Colonel was a red-haired Colossus, in epaulettes. His face, tanned and hardened by the campaigns of twenty-five years and a life in the open air, would have been forbidding but for the kind, gentle, peaceful look in the blue eyes. Captain Mainjean, on the contrary, was quite the type of the modern officer. His delicately-shaped head, grey eyes, and yellow hair gave him a somewhat effeminate appearance, but his sensitive nostrils and nervous mouth denoted ambition and a strong will. With folded arms he waited, and Joseph Brinquant, a dark, spare, wiry southerner, found the suspense that weighed upon him almost unendurable.

At last the Colonel said:

"It is for Captain Mainjean to speak."

Captain Mainjean rose and commenced:

"Gentlemen, I will briefly state the facts which bring before this tribunal Joseph Brinquant, born at Montauban, the 8th October, 1869; at present a private soldier.

"The accused has been in the service sixteen months; his record is excellent. All that I find against him is twenty-four hours in guard-house for a slight offence. His chiefs and comrades all declare that up to last month Brinquant was always exact in his duties, and of a merry and sociable mood. His father, a well-to-do farmer in Capeville, makes him a liberal allowance, and Brinquant has always shown himself generous to a fault; so he could honourably and happily have served out his term if he had not allowed himself to be overcome by the most unfortunate of passions.

"It was recently noticed that Brinquant, usually so laughing and communicative, was becoming gloomy and morose. He avoided mingling with his comrades. They thought he must be ill, but to all their friendly inquiries he gave evasive replies. At last, one evening, he asked for and obtained leave of absence for the night, and the next morning he was marked absent at roll-call.

"Brinquant had disappeared.

"Chance soon put the captain commanding the first company on the deserter's track. An old clothes dealer in Toulouse, one Emile Badin, of Sainte Sever Street, declared that the previous evening a private of the regiment had presented himself at his shop. It was Brinquant, who came to exchange his uniform for citizen's clothes. Badin had no idea he was lending himself to anything more serious than a love-adventure. Brinquant, he argued, was free for the day and would be

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sure to return for his military effects at night. But seeing that his customer did not reappear, the man became frightened, and dreading inculpation in some unpleasant affair, he went at once to the captain of the first company and made a deposition of the facts.

"After that it was easy to trace the fugitive. A railway official recognised Brinquant from the description he had received of him. In the night, a traveller, accompanied by a woman, had purchased two first-class tickets to Narbonne. The employé noticed this man particularly, on account of the strangeness of his demeanour; his sharp speech and brusque movements betrayed some inward, nervous fear. One of the station officials exclaimed, as he saw the woman:

"'Why, look! It is Concepcion running off with a lover.'"

Captain Mainjean paused here for a moment. The accused drew a long, heavy sigh.

"At Narbonne," continued the Captain, "it was learned that the fugitives had gone in the direction of Port-Bon, but at the Spanish frontier all traces of them were lost. In the extradition treaty which exists between France and Spain the case of desertion from the army is not provided for, so that at this point military authority was disarmed.

"None thought ever to see Joseph Brinquant again, when, one morning, he came to this place and constituted himself prisoner. He frankly avowed his misdeed: for love of a music-hall singer he had not hesitated to dishonour himself by flight to a foreign land. Hardly was he out of France, though, when remorse took possession of this man who had, for a moment, been blinded by passion. He could realise what it would be to be condemned to exile—the most cruel of all exiles. For many long years, until lapse of time should bring impunity, he could not return to his native land. For long years he must shun his compatriots, must blush before them and hang his head in shame when they talked of France. Better submit at once to whatever punishment he had incurred; that is why Joseph Brinquant came of his own free will to await this court-martial before which he appears to-day.

"Perhaps, you will think, gentlemen, that a repentance so prompt deserves indulgence. I beg of you to resist this movement, and hope that you will not be tempted to mitigate the punishment that is due to this man. I urge the full enforcement of the law against him as a deserter. Especially at this present time should the military code be inflexible. When the army is on the eve of the most redoubtable events, it should be maintained, from high to low, in absolute fidelity to the flag. Every man to-day is a soldier and every soldier a citizen. He must acquire in the service a habit of discipline, of obedience, of devotion. It is too easy, in truth, to excuse a fault by attributing it to blind passion. Altogether too prevalent is the habit of making light of this sort of crime.

"Now, in this case, I ask you to make an example without allowing yourselves to be influenced by the excellence of the prisoner's antecedents. He followed the woman he loved, you will urge. But what a woman she was; the police-records before you are enough to enlighten you on that point. He returned and constituted himself prisoner of his own accord? Can you be sure of what motives he obeyed in doing so? The woman drove him from her, or, perhaps, Brinquant's family, in shame at his conduct, refused any longer to meet his needs. You must not overlook the fact that there are times when pity would be culpable; to excuse is to encourage it. Now that all are constrained to military service it would be strange, indeed, if this deserter were to escape full punishment under the pretext that he yielded to his passion for a creature unworthy of his love!"

Captain Mainjean continued.

The members of the council had listened to Captain Mainjean in the most profound silence. Some among them were astonished at the implacable severity of his words. He was known in the regiment for an excellent officer, conscientious, industrious and prompt in his duty, but all thought him kind and compassionate to human failings.

Why, then, should he suddenly show himself so pitiless towards this poor private? Certainly this peasant's son, mad with love for a music-hall singer, did not seem so utterly unworthy of pardon.

The prisoner's counsel was about to begin to speak, when Captain Mainjean raised his hand, and in a voice somewhat altered by emotion, said:

"I beg the council to accord me a few minutes' more attention."

The Colonel inclined his head in assent, and Captain Mainjean continued

"Gentlemen, it is by a very fortuitous circumstance that I am performing the functions of public prosecutor to-day; our respected comrade, M. de Beaupré, being, unfortunately, indisposed, it has fallen to me to replace him.

"I have given you my opinion as to the merits of this case. I now request your permission to relate to you an analogous one; when you have heard, your conscience will decide."

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There was a slight murmur here. The Captain had apparently finished his speech; what more could he have to add? And it was strange, but Captain Mainjean was no longer the same man; he had turned very pale, and he spoke as though he were labouring under repressed emotion.

The accused alone appeared entirely unmoved by external things, and was as though crushed by the prosecutor's words. His head buried in his hands, he was motionless, except for an occasional shiver that ran through his frame.

"Ten years ago," went on Captain Mainjean, "the sixty-fifth was garrisoned at Bayonne. One fine day, the annual graduation of officers at Saint-Cyr brought to the garrison a gay young second-lieutenant—altogether too gay, he was, and fond of life—who lost no time in making himself the talk of the town by his escapades.

"One evening, a little more harebrained than usual, the lieutenant induced several of his comrades to accompany him to a music-hall in Thiers Street. A little singer was appearing there who was all the rage at that time—one of those Moorish types so common on the Spanish frontier. The lieutenant and his friends applauded wildly, and threw the girl flowers and bonbons, to the intense disapproval of the peaceable citizens who filled the hall. So that there was nothing at all surprising to the officers in the lieutenant leaving them at the end of the performance with the words:

"'I am going to make her acquaintance, gentlemen.'

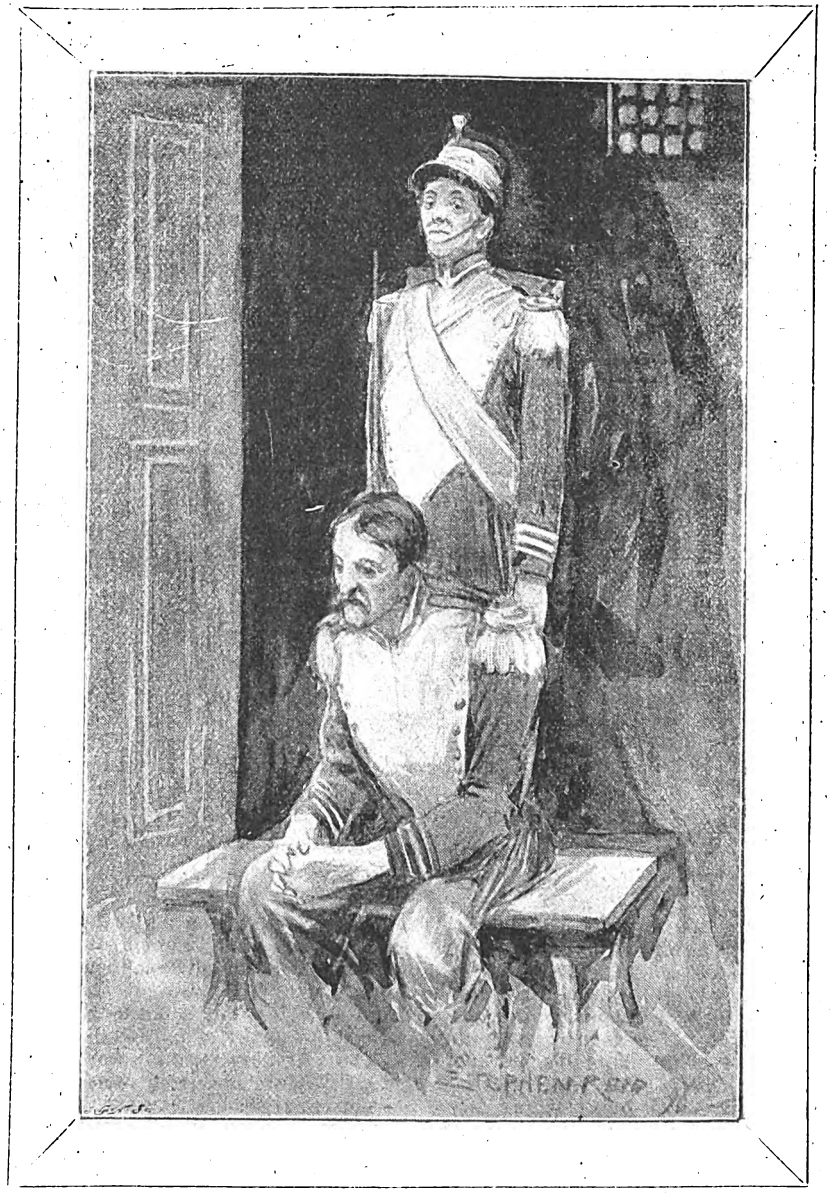
"But more than surprise, actual dismay was felt, when this caprice of a night turned out to be a serious affair. The lieutenant was now never absent from the singer's side; together they were everywhere to be seen—at the theatre, the races, in the street, at Biarritz. Things went so far that the captain of the company summoned the young man to him and paternally remonstrated with him.

"You must know, gentlemen, that this reckless young fellow belonged to a family of soldiers. His father, a former cavalry colonel, possessed nothing in the world but his pension and the thousand francs his Commander's Cross brought him: his brother was sailing the China seas as lieutenant in the navy, while he——"

Here came a short pause. Captain Mainjean spoke now with the greatest difficulty.

"The captain said all he could; it was in vain. But yet, with it all, the young lieutenant was not at heart a bad fellow. He was simply blinded by love for this woman, as Joseph Brinquant, the deserter, was for another. He believed implicitly in this Navarrese girl as Joseph Brinquant believed in Concepcion.

"I will be brief; it is terribly painful for me to recall these memories. What was to be expected happened.



The accused alone appeared entirely unmoved by external things.

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The lieutenant, fresh from Saint-Cyr though he was, deserted shamefully, just as private Brinquant did. He crossed the frontier and followed the girl to Vittoria. You know what would have to follow; at the end of a week to be marked absent without leave, then written down a deserter, then the court-martial, condemnation, and the rest.

"Ah! what a noble man that captain was! He had guessed it all. Without a word to anyone he got on the train for Spain. And when he found the runaway, there were no long speeches, or recriminations; he just spoke tenderly to the young man of his father who would die of shame, of the brother who would be forced to tear the nobly-earned stripes from his arms, of his whole honourable family given over to a future of disgrace. As he listened to his chief the lieutenant bowed his head lower and lower—at last he burst into tears, and with those tears went forth from him all his guilty thoughts, his unhallowed infatuation; with those tears was extinguished all his wretched love. He came back humbly, docilely, ready to do anything to make amends for his fault.

"Ah! I assure you, his heart has ever since cherished a sincere worship for the simple, brave man who drew him back from that abyss! Gentlemen, you all know the captain I have been speaking of; he is a colonel now, and sits opposite me to-day as president of this court-martial!"

Loud murmurs burst forth. Colonel Vigier's face was ashy pale, and he pulled continually at his long moustache, stammering huskily:

"Captain! Captain!"

But soon silence was restored. A deep emotion fell over these men, all familiar with danger, and hardened by war and life's trials as they were.

Captain Mainjean then proudly raised his head, and warmly, energetically, continued:

"Gentlemen, I have invoked the full severity of the law against the deserter, Joseph Brinquant; that was my duty.

"I now make an appeal for your clemency in his case; that is my right. I, myself, am the lieutenant of Bayonne. Like the prisoner I passed the frontier; only which of us two is the guiltier, if you please? I, son and brother of soldiers, fresh from the military training of Saint-Cyr, never having had examples of aught but patriotism and loyalty before me in my life; or this simple child of the soil, a farmer's son, scarcely able to read or write, whose idea of country is narrowed down to that corner of earth on which the village church steeple rears itself? Judge with your conscience, but decide with your heart, for if the accused be guilty, what then am I?"

After a few seconds' deliberation the council rendered a verdict of acquittal.

ALBERT DELPIT.

** HAVE YOU **

FORGOTTEN ANYTHING?

Memory is a treacherous thing, and it is safer to make a note of those little trifles which go towards making life pleasant.

Jot this down in your Diary:

MONDAY..... To call at 17 and 18, Henrietta Street for the patterns I promised to purchase for the wife.

TUESDAY..... To look in at the newsagent's for the current "HOME NOTES" and "HOME COOKERY" published to-day. Must set aside a 1d. for each of them. "S.S." for myself.

WEDNESDAY. Have promised to get home in time for dinner; the wife having promised to try a few new dishes from the cookery paper bought yesterday.

THURSDAY.... Intend to dine at the club. The wife's busy making the children new frocks from "FASHIONS FOR CHILDREN." By-the-bye, to-day's the 15th of the month, must put 1½d. in my waistcoat pocket to remind me to buy the new Number for her.

FRIDAY..... Will be able to buy "P.W." on my way home to-night. Another 1d.

SATURDAY..... Am paid to-day. Have promised to take home "MELODY" and "PEARSON'S MAGAZINE." I make it a rule to spend 1s. on my wife in some little present every Saturday. What better than these?

SUNDAY..... A quiet smoke and a chance of reading "P.W." and "SHORT STORIES" in peace.

AND

HERE AM I,

A WELL READ MAN, WITH A GOOD WIFE, A WELL-MANAGED HOUSEHOLD AND PRETTILY DRESSED CHILDREN. ALL FOR 1s. 7d.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 17.

ON pages 527 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *October 26th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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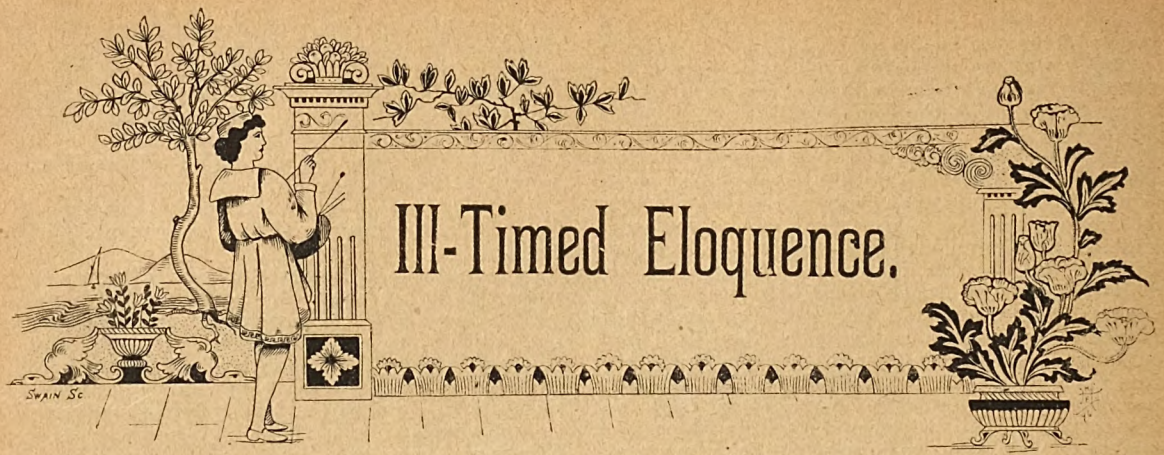

Ill-Timed Eloquence.

Place aux dames, so let me introduce Miss Delia O'Donnell to you first.

She was distinctly Irish, as brogue, cognomen and her abundant "gift of the gab" all combined to testify. Needless to say she was pretty, with cheeks like damask roses, dark brown hair and sparkling eyes. She was very small in face, form, and feature, and had a piping, though shrill, little voice, like a bird's.

He, Cyril Crowther, was distinctly English, with fair hair and blue eyes, and the somewhat vacant expression that is occasionally to be seen on the face of the gilded youth of the nation that considers itself the savouring of the earth.

They met in London at a crowded dance. They had neither of them been having a very good time; she was a stranger and knew few people, and he always looked upon parties as martyrdom, for he was afflicted with a painful stammer.

He had tried to make conversation with girl after girl and the only result had been signal failure. He had given it up as a bad job and had determined upon an early departure when he found himself near Miss Delia O'Donnell and could not resist asking to be introduced to her.

"M—m—m—may——" he began in trepidation.

"The pleasure of the next dance?" she briskly interrupted him. "Oh, certainly, I shall be delighted. Is not the floor splendid? Felt bound, you see, to plunge upon the well worn topic! Not as well worn in this case, though, as might be, far too covered with non-dancing dowagers who most decidedly have worn very badly, and who, 'pon me honour, admit of no room for plunging. Do you know the hostess? I have never set eyes on her. When I arrived, the daughter was the only one available to shake hands with. Quaint affairs, these large London dances! Either the hosts seem too good for their guests, or the company seem above their entertainers. Ah! ye don't know what hospitality is over here, like we do in Paddy-land. Sure, I never told you I come from Ireland. Fenian troubles over there? Ah! now, what do you take us for? We are not always in danger of our skins! What an amusing idea! Just like you English people!"

Mr. Cyril Crowther was delighted. He whirled her off amongst the dancers, never having needed to say a single word, and yet possessed of the pleasing sensation that he had been conversing volubly.

Dance after dance found the two partners, and Cyril Crowther never enjoyed himself better. He only needed to gulp forth a disjointed word and Miss O'Donnell would seize upon it, regard it as a brilliant thought and dilate on it for minutes without ceasing.

"She need never discover the fact of my stammering," thought Crowther, with enchantment.

There was only one thing which would have been counted a drawback by most people, the idea hit upon by Miss O'Donnell was invariably quite opposed in meaning to the remark he had struggled to bring forth.

"Never mind," Crowther took comfort, "she gives me credit for much sharper sayings than I should ever manage to give utterance to."

When the dance all too soon was over, he found himself to be of the very decided opinion that he had never met so charming a young woman as Miss O'Donnell before.

With a contented sigh he reflected that she had spoken of going to Lady Crushaway's reception the following afternoon. He would be able to see her there. But the day after, alas! she had told him she was returning to Ireland, so when could he hope to meet her again, especially as his leave was at an end and his passage booked by the next P. and O. steamer for India.

"Gather the roses while ye may!" Old Time was literally flying, but Mr. Crowther had to content himself by merely gazing at those that bloomed on Delia's cheek the next afternoon at the reception. He was as taken with her as ever. She talked on as rapidly as possible, and her listener did not even trouble to intersperse her conversation with his solitary stuttering words.

One idea took possession of him—this gay, vivacious little creature would surely prove to a stammering man a paragon of a wife. But though his thoughts were filled with this subject it was not till some hours after the reception that he managed to make up his mind. Yes, he had no doubt of it, he loved her distractedly and life would be unbearable unless she consented to become his wife. But how to put the question to her—that was the first and most important problem to be solved. He did not know where she was staying, so could not venture to call on her next day, and she left by the night mail for Ireland. There was nothing for it but to put in an appearance at Euston in the evening and lay open his heart to her there.

Cyril Crowther spent an almost sleepless night. Would Miss O'Donnell be alone at the station or would some tiresome individual come to see her off? And what should he say to her? She had a habit of guessing at his words, but then as she usually hit upon

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a totally wrong meaning, this time it would be necessary for him to speak fully and to speak out. Stammering would surely desert him at that last momentous moment. love would give wings to his halting words, and in fervid eloquence all his hopes and longings would be breathed forth! He tossed about in bed rehearsing his proposal. "Delia, I love you ardently, will you be mine? You are an angel and I dare not aspire to your affection, I only trust that in your gentle pity you will bend graciously to me and install yourself my sovereign, Delia, my Queen!"

His fervour almost brought the moisture to his eyes, and soon after he fell into a short, troubled sleep.

Two hours before the train left he might have been seen wandering round Euston, while the time crept wearily by. But at last, after interminable waiting, he found it was going only too fast. Twenty minutes was all that remained of it, and Miss O'Donnell was not there yet. A quarter of an hour and still she did not come. Ten minutes he paced frantically up and down. Nine, eight, seven — A hansom drove up and a lady sprang out.

"You here, Mr. Crowther? This is most charming. Going on by a later train? Porter, porter, here; these two boxes. Engaged, you say? Sure, you look as though ye should have been married as well years and years ago. Ah! now, Mr. Crowther, don't trouble about my things, ah, now, don't. Kingston boat? Yes, of course, that is the one I am crossing by. Oh! you did not mean that, ye meant——"

Cyril looked at the clock in desperation. Less than five minutes now, and no chance of a word till boxes were labelled, ticket and seat taken. He tried to transact the business with haste, but nothing could prevent Miss O'Donnell from lavishing words upon everyone. She was at last safe in the carriage, but seemed as though she were going to continue into eternity a one-sided conversation with the porter. Despair lent the anguished lover boldness. He swept the unoffending official aside, at the same time thrusting a florin into his hand. Now or never was the moment. "I love you," were to be his first words.

"Er—er—I——"

"Oh! do you really often travel down this line? I know nothing of it, nothing in fact of England. It is a more wooded country than Ireland, but I would not exchange my Emerald Island for any other land in the world for all that."

As she rippled on in her light, chirping tones it occurred to Crowther that he was really wasting time. It would be quite sufficient in the stress of the moment to say, "Will you be my wife?"

"W—w—ill——"

"Really, now! I *am* distressed to hear it. 'Pon me word! the first thing that struck me this evening was how seedy you were looking. I shall sympathise with you still more deeply in a few hours when I shall be bitterly paying the price of gallivanting. I need hardly, I suppose, enter into further explanation; but I'm blessed if England ever sees me over again. I don't know which are worse, the odorous steamers or the screeching trains, in which I am always in terror of my life of being crushed to smithereens!"

In her volley, Cyril Crowther's "you" and "be" were quite unheard. Miss O'Donnell only paused in time for him to give proud utterance to "my wife."

"Your wife? Ah! now ye don't mean to tell me that you're married, and you looking such a boy! But you naughty London men are all alike. Sure, and it's my heart ye might have broken, sinner. What right had you, a married man, to have danced with me all one night?"

Beads of perspiration broke forth on Cyril's brow. The guard was taking a final promenade up the platform, the carriage doors were all securely shut, in another instant the whistle would be sounding and the train be off. That she could at that last moment so cruelly misjudge him seemed all too hard. The whistle rang out.

"D—D—Delia!" he cried.

"An' it's Delia you'd be calling me!" for once having heard what he really meant. "No, sir, I am not accustomed to such liberties from married men."

He must write and explain; it was his only chance. But he did not know her address, and what means were there for him to find it out.

"Ad—dress," he shouted, pursuing at full speed the retreating train.

"Your wife's address? No, thank you, I don't want it. Good-bye."

The train was gone! With it went his hopes of the morning. "Love's sweet young dream," that was to have illumined his life.

"Chap looks a bit green, poor fellow!" was the porter's comment as he staggered slowly off.

* * * * *

He is toiling beneath the suns of India now, I have no doubt, and from all accounts Delia O'Donnell has missed a chance, for she has never married and does not seem likely to, though whether this fact lies in a scarcity of male population in the vicinity of her Irish home, or is caused by her masculine compatriots desiring wives who would allow them a word in edgeways, I have never been able to find out. One picture alone rises before me—their meeting once again when world-worn and grey headed. She, as talkative as ever, having kept in practice by conversing to the pigs and cows. He, quite cured of stammering, with his old timidity replaced by the determination that is said to be an attribute of the British race. A buxom matron is at his side followed by a bevy of bashful youths and blushing maidens. He steps aside, and leaving them grasps Delia by the hand.

"Thirty years ago I was *not* married, Miss O'Donnell, and I tried to make you a proposal, but you never gave me time!"

SEREN DIVA.

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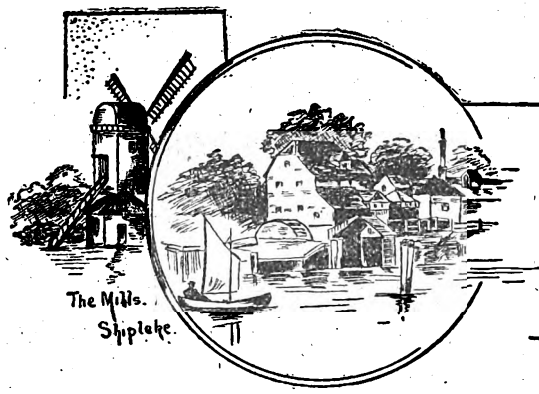

THE TWO FINGERS.

At the extremity of a little country town at no great distance from Tours, on the high coach-road from Paris to Bordeaux, there stood, about thirty years ago, a pretty wayside inn, with white walls and a swinging sign bearing the effigy of *Le Grand Roi*, otherwise Henry IV.

It was during a November evening, in the year 1818, when the wind was sighing and surging without, and the rain splashing down with uncompromising resolution, that the worthy landlord of *Le Grand Roi*, the honest, but somewhat imperious M. Ebrard, his three children, and one of his neighbours, who had taken shelter from the inclemency of the weather at his comfortable hearth, were seated round an enormous fire of pine logs, talking over the local gossip, and enjoying themselves as those only can do who feel a sensation of security from the inflictions of such a storm.

"Just hear the rain!" exclaimed M. Ebrard, after an instant, during which all the party had been silenced by a louder and wilder blast than any by which it had been preceded. "This is the third day that it has been pouring down, without a prospect of any change for the better."

Suddenly as he was talking two distinct blows were heard on the house door, given apparently with the handle of a riding-whip. The men removed their pipes from their mouths and listened.

"Who on earth can this be?" exclaimed the landlord, "it can't be a traveller, unless the diligence is behind its time; and besides——"

Again two loud knocks echoed through the kitchen; and M. Ebrard, somewhat reluctantly, took up the lamp, and then, without attempting to open it, he demanded, in a harsh impatient voice, who was there?

"A traveller," was the reply; "are you going to keep me in the rain for another hour?"

"What do you want?" was the next interrogation.

"What do I want? Why, some supper and a bed, of course, if I am not quite drowned before you let me in."

"There, there, don't be angry, monsieur, whoever you are," grumbled the host. As he spoke he drew back the ponderous bolt and raised his lamp to a level with the stranger's face. The investigation apparently terminated satisfactorily, for his manner changed at once; he bowed respectfully, shouldered a trunk which stood upon the threshold, reclosed the door, and preceded the new-comer into the kitchen.

A fine-looking young man threw off his large wrapping cloak, which was dripping with mud or rain, made one bound towards the blazing fire, and seated himself upon the bench, saying in a clear, joyous voice as he did so: "This is charming, this is delicious, mine host! Had you expected me I could not have wished a pleasanter welcome. And now I must ask you to hasten my supper, for I want to get off by the *patache* to Monsett to-morrow at daybreak; I should like to go to bed as early as I can."

"All will be ready in ten minutes," said Ebrard. "But you will excuse me if I venture to remind you that you might have gone on there by the diligence, as it passes through the town, instead of stopping here only to start again at dawn."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the stranger; "you are either very curious or very timid, monsieur *mon hôte*, for you have not as yet got rid of your distrust. In order to tranquillise you, therefore, I will explain this much. My family reside in a country house at a short distance from the town, and by continuing my journey in the diligence I should have arrived in the middle of the night—an arrangement I was particularly anxious to avoid; whereas, by taking the boat at six o'clock to-morrow morning, I shall reach home by dinner-time. Have I now succeeded in satisfying you as to my honesty of purpose?"

"Oh, monsieur!" was the somewhat embarrassed reply of the landlord as he met the sly smile of the young man; "you have quite misunderstood me. One look into your frank and handsome face was enough."

The supper was soon served, and in less than twenty minutes had disappeared; and then the worthy landlord lit a candle and conducted his guest to his chamber.

M. le Sous-Lieutenant Adolphe de Rosval hastily divested himself of his clothes, and, without extinguishing his light, threw himself on his bed.

In the meanwhile, a second traveller had taken up his rest at *Le Grand Roi*. He was a man of between forty and fifty years of age, tall and powerful, with broad shoulders and ample chest; his grizzled hair was brushed low upon his forehead, and there was a sinister expression in his eyes; but his features were well formed, and his manner self-possessed and easy.

"I imagine," he said, when the greetings with his host were over, "that I must be your only *pratique* to-night, for the weather will have kept all comfort-loving people under their own roofs."

"Pardon me, monsieur," was the reply; "the room next to your own is already occupied by a young man who arrived little more than an hour ago; but there is no fear that he will disturb you, for he appears to be a perfect gentleman, and is moreover so tired, and so anxious to get on, that he leaves us at daybreak to-morrow."

The brow of the stranger darkened, and he made no reply.

"Be careful," he said, a few minutes afterwards,

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"to call me in the morning at seven o'clock, for I must be at Tours by midday. Ah! by-the-bye, I shall require a saddle horse—let one be ready for me, as my time is precious."

Saying which the new comer ascended the stairs to his room.

Adolphe was, as we have stated, already in bed, with the candle still burning upon his table. He had, as yet, been unable to sleep; his brain was too busy. His newly-acquired rank and the anticipated meeting with his parents and his sisters had made him wakeful; so that when he heard the heavy tread of a man's foot traversing the passage, and passing the door of his room, he was conscious of every sound. Suddenly a thought struck him; and springing to the floor, he took a key from his waistcoat pocket, opened his trunk, and seizing his uniform sword, which lay upon the top, placed it under his pillow.

Midnight struck from the old clock in the kitchen, and all was profoundly silent in the house, but still Adolphe remained sleepless; when suddenly he was startled by a sound, which appeared to him like that of a key slowly turned in the lock. He listened attentively; but as it was not repeated, he concluded that he had been the sport of his own over-excited nerves, and drawing the bedclothes closer about him, he determined to profit by the few hours which were left, and endeavour to obtain some rest.

He had scarcely begun to sleep, however, when he was a second time disturbed, and on this occasion, he was at once convinced that he had made no mistake. Someone was endeavouring to enter his room. The candle had burnt out; but grasping his sword, he noiselessly groped his way to the door, and stood motionless beside it. About five minutes afterwards, the noise ceased, and he began to hope that the would-be intruder had abandoned all hope of invading his privacy, whatever might have been his motive for seeking to do so. He had carefully locked the door of his room, and had little fear that the fastening could be forced; but accidentally casting his eyes on the floor, he saw by the light of the moon which gleamed full upon the windows of his room, and which, rendered more vivid by its contrast from the subsided storm, was pouring out its chastened radiance from a now cloudless sky, that a hand has been introduced between the boards of his chamber and the bottom of the door, and was seeking to lift it from its hinges.

This was too much; and steadily raising his sword above his head, he struck downwards with all his force upon the hand thus traitorously employed. A smothered groan fell upon his ear, and a sound of stealthy steps retreating along the passage, and ere long all was still—but two bleeding figures remained on the floor!

Adolphe rushed to the fire-place; a few warm fragments of wood enabled him to light a second candle which stood upon the chimney-piece, and he then proceeded to examine the hideous trophy of his victory. For a moment he shrank from touching the first "fleshing" of his maiden-sword, but he rapidly overcame the weakness, and picking up the severed fingers, he carefully washed away the blood, and folded them up in his handkerchief.

"On the honour of a *sous-lieutenant*," he murmured to himself, "that was a lucky stroke, and really for a robber, the fingers are passably slender, and the nails tolerably clean. Well, I suppose that all is over for to-night; so, as I am shivering with cold, I had better go to my bed again."

Adolphe was young and fearless; and in a quarter of an hour he was sound asleep.

Day was breaking when the landlord awoke our hero, who accepted with considerable satisfaction a cup of excellent coffee. As he did so he instinctively glanced at the hands of M. Ebrard, and had no sooner ascertained that they were intact than he began to relate to him his nocturnal adventure, and to point to the blood upon the floor of the chamber and to the ghastly parcel on the chair.

The honest landlord turned ashy white as he listened, and clung to the arm of Adolphe for support; but he had no sooner rallied than he rushed towards the room of his elder guest. The door was open, he drew back the curtains of the bed and found it empty; traces of blood were distinguishable in the direction of the window, which was also open; he looked out; the heavy impress of a man's foot was visible on the soft soil of the garden which abutted on the high road; and thus M. Ebrard, excited as he was, soon convinced himself that the mutilated robber could be no other than the stately traveller who had honoured his poor house on the preceding night.

His indignation and horror were extreme; and he had no sooner seen Adolphe depart than he hurried off to acquaint the police with what had occurred; not forgetting to relieve his mind by the way by communicating to every acquaintance whom he met the particulars of the tragedy which had desecrated the hitherto respectable auberge of *Le Grand Roi*.

Adolphe de Rosval reached his home about midday; as he was not expected, and accompanied his first greetings with the welcome intelligence of his new honours, his appearance was hailed with the most vehement joy. His fond mother wept as she held him to her heart, and his sisters clung to him with mingled tenderness and pride.

"Only think, mamma, he is an officer already! Is it not charming? What will papa say?"

"But where is my father?" asked the young man—"*his* welcome is still wanting."

"You know he is often from home," said Madame de Rosval; "and we are as little as ever in his confidence. He left us three days ago, but we expect him home to-day."

"And is he still as low-spirited and silent as when I saw him last?" inquired Adolphe.

"Unfortunately, yes," replied the gentle matron. "I fear that he has involved himself in speculation beyond our means; and that the idea of having compromised the future welfare of his children presses heavily upon him; but your unlooked-for return, Adolphe, and your happy tidings will, I trust, restore him to cheerfulness."

As soon as the family circle had become somewhat composed, and that one person was at length permitted to speak at a time, Adolphe was overwhelmed with questions, every member of the party being anxious to learn all that he had done since their last parting.

"It is at all events, a blessing," said his mother, as she fondly passed her hand over his hair, "that you have performed your journey without any accident, my son, however monotonous you may have found it."

"Nay, *ma bonne mère*," smiled Adolphe, "it was not altogether so monotonous as you may imagine; for I at least met with one adventure strange enough to bear telling."

"An adventure, and a strange one?" exclaimed his sisters simultaneously; "oh, Adolphe, let us hear it."

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He complied with their request, and no cheek around him grew paler than his own as he recalled the extraordinary event of the previous night.

"And, by the way," he added, when he had brought his narrative to a close, "I must not forget to tell you that I carried away with me the undeniable proofs of my victory—here they are," and as he spoke he drew a handkerchief from his pocket in which something was evidently folded.

At that very instant the door of the room opened, and a man entered, large in stature, but pale and weak, and with his clothes saturated with rain. He could scarcely stagger to a chair before he sank down like one whose vital powers were utterly exhausted; and in a moment the whole family were crowded about him.

"My father! my dear father!" exclaimed Adolphe; "weary as you evidently are, how thankful I am that you have returned. I have news for you that will, I know, be welcome."

As he spoke the young man extended his hand, but the action met with no response; and as he glanced towards that which was so strangely withheld, he remarked that it was enveloped in a bloodstained linen.

"What!" he asked anxiously, "are you suffering from more than fatigue? Have you been wounded?"

"Yes," was the faint reply; "as I was coming through the forest, four leagues from this, I was attacked by brigands. I had heard that they were in the neighbourhood, but I believed it to be an idle rumour. I endeavoured to defend myself; and in the fray one of the ruffians struck off two of my fingers. I am faint from loss of blood; give me wine, and I shall soon be better."

Madame de Rosval hurried to the sideboard, and with a trembling hand and swimming eyes brought the required refreshment, while the two elder girls wound their arms about their father's neck, and wept piteously. Adolphe stood motionless, like one in a frightful dream; but little Rosalie, the pet and plaything of the family, too young to comprehend the sorrow on which she looked, and full of curiosity to see what her soldier brother had really brought home, busied herself in unfolding the handkerchief which had fallen from his hand on the entrance of his father, and she had no sooner succeeded than, clapping her chubby hands in childish delight, she called out, almost breathlessly:

"Mamma! Mamma! Adolphe has got the two fingers he cut off at the inn; give them to poor papa, and then he will be quite well again."

* * * * *

In another hour M. de Rosval was in the hands of justice. The landlord of *Le Grand Roi* had been so active in his exertions to redeem the honour of his house, that the gendarmes had tracked the culprit by the traces of his blood; and in the extremity of their anguish his family had forgotten to urge upon him a second flight.

On the 20th of December, the assize court of Tours was filled to overflowing. The event was one productive of unusual excitement; the idle and unfeeling were on the tip-toe of expectation; a drama of real life, and involving real suffering, was to be conducted before their very eyes. A father was about to be tried for the attempted murder of his son; and, moreover, the prisoner was no common criminal, but a man of old and honoured family. No wonder that the whole city was convulsed with curiosity and animation!

The court had assembled; the prisoner was ushered to his seat; the jury was duly sworn, and the proceedings commenced.

Pale, agitated, and painfully excited, Adolphe de Rosval replied to the summons of the *greffier*, and prepared to give his evidence. He was closely wrapped in a large military cloak, but raised his right hand steadily, and repeated the oath in a clear and audible voice.

"What is your name?" demanded the President.

"Adolphe Ernest Leon de Rosval."

"Your profession?"

"Pupil of St. Cyr; sub-lieutenant of the — regiment of the line."

"Your age?"

"Nineteen."

Then followed the whole detail of the nocturnal attempt upon his life; or, as he persisted in believing it to be, upon his property; but he was, as a necessary consequence of his position throughout the adventure, unable to establish the identity of the culprit. Not once had he ventured to turn his eyes towards the *banc d'infamie* on which his wretched father was seated between two gendarmes; and the President, touched by the painfulness of his position, gave him permission to withdraw.

Jean Antoine Ebrard, the landlord of *Le Grand Roi*, was the next witness to be called. He had died suddenly of heart disease three weeks before.

The circumstantial evidence against M. de Rosval was overwhelming, but still failed to establish the identity of the culprit. The evidence of the landlord or his stepdaughter must have condemned him; but the one was dead, and the other had positively sworn that she had never seen him before.

After the counsel for the prosecution (*procureur du roi*) had addressed the court, the counsel for the prisoner made an able speech, in which he strenuously endeavoured to prove an *alibi*. He stated that it was impossible to prove that the prisoner at the bar had slept at the auberge of *Le Grand Roi* on the night of the mysterious event which had led to the present trial "No, gentlemen of the jury," he concluded, "the accused has been a victim, not an assassin. That he has been mutilated by violence is certain; but he has explained, in the clearest manner, the cause of this unfortunate coincidence; and the sword of the son is unstained by the father's blood."

"To prove which fact," exclaimed a hollow and almost inarticulate voice from amidst the crowd in the body of the court, "there are the fingers which I cut off under the door of my room." And as Adolphe ceased speaking, an officer of the court laid them upon the desk of the President.

Having silently examined them, an expression of astonishment was visible upon the countenance of the learned judge, who handed them to the *procureur* by whom they were in turn transferred to the jury-box. It was at once perceived that the severed fingers thus produced in evidence had belonged to the left hand, while M. de Rosval was mutilated in the right!

Three days subsequently Adolphe had ceased to live. Mortification had supervened upon the frightful wound which he had inflicted upon himself in order to save the life of his father, and to preserve the honour of his family.

The young soldier's career was over; his dream of fame had gone down with him to the grave.

Maggie Pardoe.

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In a Spirit of Fun.

"WHY do you always write love stories?" said the man irritably, fidgeting in his swivel chair.

"Because," said the girl with a sigh, "there's nothing else in the world to write about, and I have had *some* experience."

"Stuff and nonsense! The peop'e who principally read such things are raw girls and boys, and sentimental spinsters. Look here, Miss Saville, I'd like to help you. You've got the right stuff in you, and you look as if you didn't mind hard work. What you write is readable, and moreover, full of promise; but there it stops. You spoil yourself with mawkish sentiment. You do, indeed."

"Then you *have* read some of the work I sent you?" she replied demurely, looking at him from under her long lashes.

"Oh, yes; though I never clearly understood *why* you came to send to such a paper as ours. That first story you sent me—er—'The Protoplasmic Atom'—took my fancy immensely. The idea was novel; the science from a problematical point of view was really soundly suggestive, and opened up quite a field of speculative thought. The first two chapters were *most* interesting, but the rest! You gave a whole page up to the psychological study of a kiss. After that, I turned to the end, and found it matrimonial, not scientific, so I returned your MS. immediately with a very fair offer, which you chose to disregard."

"Because it wasn't possible for me to accept. You told me if I left out the loving-making and re-wrote all the latter part up to the standard of the first, you'd take it. But, as I explained, this was impossible. The scientific part was only the atmosphere, the love-making was the real creative germ."

"You'll be wiser when you're older, Miss Saville. But at present I plainly see, like the rest of your sex, 'tis of no earthly use trying to convince you against your will. I thought that by making an appointment to see you, and giving you my personal advice, I might be putting you in the right way and doing you a good turn. Very sorry to find that you won't listen to me now that you've come. And please, may I ask you, as a favour, not to send any more stories of this type into our office; it's only wasting your time, not to speak of mine. The *Modern Argus* is a scientific and political paper for men and women of the world, not a young ladies' weekly, full of sentiment and complexion recipes. I'm rather surprised, Miss Saville, that you don't suggest writing us a fashion column!"

"Your circulation would be immensely improved if I did," she laughed, seemingly in no way offended by his brusqueness.

He looked at her keenly from under his spectacles, and she as keenly looked back at him.

His face was rather handsome in a thoughtful, intellectual way—not young, perhaps, and yet not old.

She was very pale, and her great grey eyes had a heavy, tired look. Under the edge of her broad brimmed hat shone a tangle of untidy, copper-coloured hair. When her expression was reposeful she looked sad, weary, and worn; when she smiled, a transformation took place. She might have been any age between twenty and thirty.

"I am wondering how old you are?" he said, inwardly wondering a great many other things as well.

"To a man of science a woman's age should be immaterial," said Miss Saville decidedly. "Ah, Mr. Signett, I've an odd feeling that you'll ask me to contribute to the *Modern Argus* some day. I feel like the boy in the gallery who vowed to play Hamlet. But—honestly, now—are you sure that you can't help me, with all my faults? I am almost discouraged for want of success."

"Positively sure. And—honestly, now—on my part, Miss Saville, do you suppose that professional, scientific or political men really care to read love stories?"

The colour came into her face, and she rose from her chair with a jerk.

"Do I suppose that the world is round, Mr. Signett? Why, the key of every life is to be found in that incessant, craving appetite, to be fed on love; which, after all, is only another name for Nature, and another name for heaven or hell! And of this one universal impulse every man gives different expressions. *You* love your work, you think, and devote yourself wholly to it, because that work is the present expression love wears for you. It may some day change to a child's voice, or even a woman's face; but as long as you're on this plane you must give love to something: and you must needs go on putting out all that is in your endeavour to receive it.

"You profess yourself a devotee of science! Well, science and its many laws change, slowly but surely, from century to century; what is accepted as true in one era is discarded in another. But the motive that propels it remains—and the motive of all real science is the love of one's kind. For, believe me, there never yet was a love story acted or written but what left its mark upon the world, and it is as real to us to-day as it was in the farthest yesterday."

She stopped abruptly, as if ashamed of having been betrayed into saying so much. Her eyes were no longer languid, but full of wrath and feeling.

The sneer had gradually died away from Mr. Signett's firm lips, for she seemed to have flashed into beauty all at once in her excitement. Nonsense she might be talking, but nonsense from a pretty woman's mouth is often wondrous persuasive.

"Are you making a study of the affections?" he asked awkwardly, feeling somewhat like a moth in front of a chloroform bottle.

"I'm not a love-sick school-girl, if that's what you mean," she answered, reddening visibly, as if she wished to imply that she was not in love with him. "I'm just a poor scribbler, trying to earn my own bread-and-butter in the teeth of adversity. Good-morning, Mr. Signett—and thank you for—your kind advice."

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Gathering up her drabbled skirts in her left hand, she bowed herself out of the office, and for at least ten minutes the editor of the *Modern Argus* sat glued to his chair in a brown study.

Although he personally objected to her stories he did not forget to look out for her name, and found much of her work in some of the smaller and worst paying journals. She was as prolific as she was clever, and her pen not quite so outrageous as her tongue. So though he often skimmed through her tales with irritation, it was never without interest; an interest that deepened as the days went on.

Gradually, as her name became better known, people began to talk about her. She was a prominent member of one of the "New Women" Clubs, and her little oddities and eccentricities were much commented on.

Often sharp sayings of hers about men were quoted, and it was astonishing how her views of his sex hurt him. Oftener sharp and hard things were said of her, and, oddly enough, this hurt him still more.

He even went out of his way to take up the cudgels in her defence.

"Why do you trouble?" she asked him point blank in the street one day, tales of his chivalry on her behalf having come to her ears.

"I care more than you may think," he said shamefacedly. "Have you no father or brother, or anyone to stick up for you? You're too young and pretty to face the world alone."

She was, as usual, untidily dressed; but her grey eyes were wonderful; her careless, vivid hair shone like a glory round her head; and her pale, tired face had an immensity of charm, born of the knowledge of the hearts of men.

"Won't you let me be your friend? I'm an awkward old bachelor; but——"

"There's nothing in common between us, Mr. Signett—no sympathy, I mean."

"Perhaps there might be more than you imagine."

"Well—perhaps. But you musn't give me any more good advice. I don't want it, and"—foolishly—"I don't care what people say."

Miss Saville might be called a truly unlucky woman. More than once or twice she had been on the point of making a brilliant marriage, but the men had died or disappeared, and her career was a series of unfinished romances. If she had made friends, the same fate pursued her till she lost them. In her literary work people were always expecting her to do something great, but it never came to pass. Her life—so full of promises—had no fulfilment. She was sadly unsuccessful, therefore scandal was rife about her. In the East they would have said she had the evil eye.

Sometimes she looked very pretty, and sometimes utterly plain; but her charm never failed her.

"To have hair that colour, not dyed, was unnatural," said the blonde women.

Mr. Signett often wondered what made her so attractive, but he never came to any definite conclusions.

About this time, after steadily overworking himself for some months, he fell a victim to influenza, and had it in its most virulent form.

He was naturally a very robust kind of creature, and the confinement to the house, the inertia, and the depression of spirits, usually so attendant on this malady, made a different man of him.

As soon as ever he began to mend, he wrote to Miss Saville, saying:

"Will you come and see me? I have found out that you can do me more good than all my physic. I've had so many lonely nights and days of self-contemplation lately—more than I ever had time for in my busy life before—and I am beginning to know myself, and to understand this new-old science of human love, which, according to your philosophy (and mine now), is the all of everything; the only thing worth living *well* for. I may seem foolish and sentimental, but this is my first love story. Will you let me dedicate it myself to you? I cannot say how anxiously I shall await your answer."

She both laughed and cried when the letter came. It seemed too good to be true. He was very dear to her, and it was heavenly to know that at last, in spite of himself, he loved her, since she had cared for him afar off, for so long. Perhaps if she hadn't cared at all, except from the cat-like point of view of maintenance and home, she would have written him a polite acceptance on the spot.

But, then, she did care intensely—more, even, than she would own to herself. And so, alas! she temporised.

With a happy laugh, she kissed and re-folded his letter, and having wrapped it in a sheet of paper, wrote: "Unsuitable. Declined with thanks." And sent it back to him.

"It's a just revenge," she told herself, with a tender smile that made her sweet face glorious. "He'll get this by the first post in the morning, just as I used to do his horrid refusals. In the afternoon I'll go myself and say that I've reconsidered my rejection, and will accept his love-story, if he'll only promise that the last chapter shall be as loving as the first."

She did this out of fun and sheer lightheartedness, not knowing how ill he was or how she might be likely (in his weak condition) to hurt and distress him by so doing.

That night she was too happy to sleep. It seemed as if the morning would never come.

"I love him—I love him," she murmured, over and over again.

"I wonder if he will guess that I kissed his letter? Will he be angry? I wonder what he'll say to me? When he knows how much I care, he will surely forget to scold me."

It was very early in the afternoon when she started, it having taken her nearly all the morning to dress.

Her wonderful hair had been brushed and smoothed till its coils shone like the curves of a copper medallion. The ink stains had been scrubbed out of her fingers and her gloves darned.

Hat and dress had been brushed and coaxed into an artistic impression of smartness.

But the happiness in her deep, dark-coloured eyes, and the smile on her soft, curved mouth, were things to make one forget fashion and its follies.

Coming in sight of the handsome house where he lived, she grew very nervous, and looked down shamefacedly at the pavement; walking along more slowly with her courage at vanishing point.

Going up the steps with a fast beating heart, she ventured to look up as she rang the bell, and then it struck her as being strange that every blind should be drawn down, as if its owner were away.

After a little delay the door was opened by a mournful-looking man-servant.

"I wish to see Mr. Signett at once on very important business," she said demurely.

"I am very sorry, madam," the man replied; "er—but Mr. Signett is dead. He died quite suddenly this morning when reading his letters."

Jessie Carvell.

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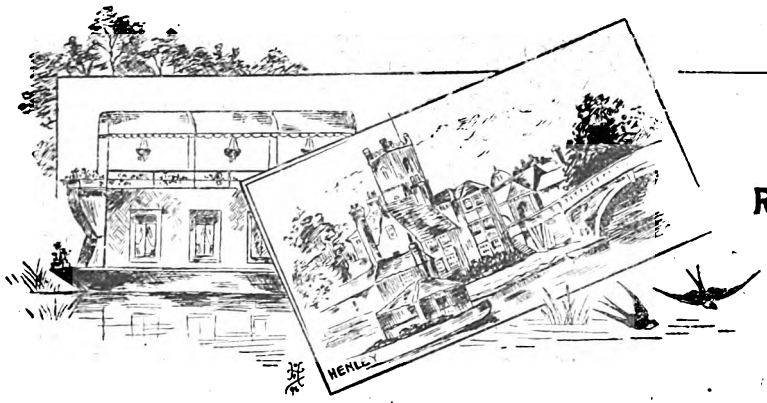

Jumbled Story No. 17.

REDEN'S HUGE CART.

(See page 519.)

I shall remember all my life, whenever I eat a brambles with their sweet, wild fruit, and eglantines, separated from the neighbouring road by the hedge so loving.

In the Curé's garden there are birds. In spring the peonies are red, like great gossips, and the neglected alleys where the grass grows wild, where the needs of life, human suffering, political affairs, submits.

* * * * *

I know a country Curé who has a little garden.

In the Curé's garden is an arbour, and under the trees and two apricot trees; there is—there is peonies and pansies. The strawberries are perfumed, my friend. Whatever they do, God permits it."

There are pear trees, muscadine grapes and dwarf like vagabonds—as they are!—where one meets apple trees.

* * * * *

Everyone may visit the garden, the like of which are joyous.

In the Curé's garden there are gravel paths. For me I have loved only Thee, Creator!"

Love is a conqueror—it should be proclaimed!

I take Thérèse's hand and kiss it. Thérèse drops a coin in the little box.

In the Curé's garden there is a niche painted blue with mossy roses and red fruit, from which one however, one takes a fruit, plucks a flower, and I drop a penny in the alms box for the poor.

* * * * *

In the Curé's garden one cannot hide; it touches the church on one side, and on the other is only the kitchen."

The Curé regarded us tenderly, and murmured:

"Thérèse, I love thee! Thérèse, I love thee!"

But what need to conceal it when one loves?

She looks in my eyes and smiles; then in her turn see a peasant who watched us over the hedge.

"Thou wishest to become my child?" he said.

She was an orphan; her uncle, the Curé, had the poppies in their red hoods disport themselves upside down.

* * * * *

"Is it you, Monsieur Valentine?"

"How pleasant it is here!"

In the Curé's garden there are strawberries, peony seemed to say to me:

I have eaten the fruit, I have gathered the flower, which is written "For the poor." There are peach is not in the whole village. On one condition, is a Holy Virgin; under the Holy Virgin is a box on tears.

In the Curé's garden the Curé entered, and came and sprinkled with little yellow stars; in the niche the birds sing of love, they warble of the morning which at this very moment were turning the village to seek us.

The strawberry was exquisite. I put the pansy in her eyes, and was happy, so happy that I did not adopted her—he spoiled her, the good old man!

* * * * *

In the Curé's garden I forgot the whole world, of thorns, from behind which we were espied by the poor, that I found happiness in the Curé's garden.

I say to Thérèse:

"It is, then, very good to love the creature? Gravel is the waxed floor of the garden. I prefer God and the Virgin Mary! They are not alone, they build in the trees, they hop in the grass—they strawberry, gather a pansy, or give a penny to the peasant.

The Curé answered:

"And I? Have you forgotten me?"

"You resemble a cook, and you belong only to Thérèse, the Curé's niece.

* * * * *

I looked at Thérèse, so pretty, so good, so sweet, surprises on every side; rosy honey-suckles, makes wine.

The peasant told all to the Curé.

Jean Pierre bowed his head and retired, ashamed.

And I had the air of replying:

"Jean Pierre, I have confided them to the good pansies have little faces like heraldic griffins.

"They were alone," he said. "He kissed her!"

* * * * *

I threw myself on his neck; Thérèse burst into my buttonhole.

And I kissed her hands, I looked earnestly into everything, my faith! in the Curé's garden.

I ate a strawberry and gathered a pansy. The arbour is a bench, on which is seated Mademoiselle she takes my hand, and placing it on her heart:

"Feel how it beats!" she says.

HONOR LUCELLE.

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THE LAST KING OF ATLANTIS

By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

SUMMARY.

ARNON'S memory of his early days begins at a time when he finds himself abandoned on the seashore, whence he discovers the cave of a band of pirates, by whom he is captured. Under the care of Didron the Chief he grows up as one of them, and on the death of the former he takes command. Viol is the daughter of Didron and marries Arnon, who, on one of his voyages, lands at Miropis and consults the Priest of the Spirit of Truth, from whom he learns that within a year and a half he will be a captive in a foreign land, and that he need not fear death until he has visited the Grotto of the Sleeper three times. On returning, he finds his ship burnt and men killed. After fighting he escapes, and meets and falls in love with Briseis, daughter of King Dulo X. of Atlantis, and to her he reveals his identity. Vichri, Briseis' cousin and lover, believes Arnon to be dead. For several months he lives at the Court; but the old roving spirit returns, and he sets out to discover the cave of treasure left by Didron and his band. On his return from an unsuccessful attempt, he finds his identity discovered by King Dulo, and is sent away as a galley slave. During his absence in a small boat up a creek on the Coast of Nubia, the ship is taken by rebels. Led by Arnon, the whole of the population, starving and fearing annihilation by the rebels, set out for another town.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAND OF KHEM.

FIVE thousand strong we left our starting place. Less than two hundred strong we staggered, footsore, despairing, into the ominously silent streets of deserted Eklohn. Our last faint hope was broken. The city had fallen long ago—perhaps before we had begun our fruitless quest.

Grass was growing on the public pavements, noxious weeds and rank shrubs everywhere filled the air with their deadly odours and forced their way between the huge stone slabs, uplifting even the very longest; jackals and hyenas, bats and vultures, roamed savagely or flitted clumsily in the marble halls that for many months, perchance, had echoed to no sound but their quarrelsome snarlings, hoarse screechings, and dog-like barks as they fought over the bones of the dead; pillars lay where the ruthless hands of the barbarians had thrown them, broken, disfigured; three large merchant ships from the far East, veritable giants of the deep, lay rifled and rotting by the moss-grown quay, over which, on one side, now that the harbour-dredging had ceased, the sand had drifted in great, red masses, bidding fair in time to choke up the haven and leave Ekholn, once famous as a seaport, far inland, buried in a desert or a reedy marsh; and over the whole of the great city, like a funeral pall, hung a dense, miasmatic mist, whose breath is a shivering fever that ends in death.

I held down my blade.

The Temple of Truth, far-famed for its grandeur and the opulence of its priests, stood in grim and silent protestation to the ruin that surrounded it, the great female figure typical of Truth looking to the west and to Atlantis with her sightless eyes over the great round world, unmoved by the evilness of mortal men. On a stone, hard by, one of the priests had scratched his last lament for the defeat of his country and the loss of her fairest province, writing it, perhaps, in his death-throes, when the sackers had left the city, and he alone remained—to die.

It may well be that in untold ages, after I am resolved into the elements, when Atlantis herself shall be but an ill-remembered name, some daring traveller will penetrate this land of hot deserts, tangled forests, and great lakes, and, coming here by chance, will wander wonderingly through these mighty ruins, amazed at their grandeur, and marvelling greatly that the builders thereof should be so utterly forgotten amongst the nations.*

But our eyes saw no grandeur in those relics of struggle and sack, and so, in a fierce mood, we turned our steps to the west again, and then to the north, past a rocky barren region, where the hills are honeycombed with monstrous caves, and into the great forest once more.

Fever now thinned our ranks with deadly speed, and one by one the children and the women and the weaker men were left for ever, loosely buried in the undergrowth, till only three score fighting men remained. Amongst the happy dead were my good old captain, and Teli, the aged waterman, both jettisoned now in their last port.

For some days we had seen no trace of our black foes, and our vigilance relaxed, so that one night we all slumbered, even the solitary watcher at his post, and our wanderings were at last ended. Thus it came about.

Being the most wary of the party through the lessons of my pirate life, I woke with a start towards the middle of the night, when the full-orbed moon was shedding her silver beams far and wide, and throwing up the shadowy forms of the leaf-laden trees with a weird distinctness, and peering round me to discover the cause of my disturbance, discerned some slightly moving shapes behind a clump of dates. Cautiously I woke my fifty and odd comrades in turn, enjoining strict silence, and when all were ready, with weapons to hand, we lay and waited. On all sides we saw the moving figures, now here, now there, and at intervals caught the flash of light on polished metal as a shield or a spear showed in the leafy openings.

* NOTE.—Those who have read Mr. R. Haggard's "She," will, perhaps, recognise in this the solution of the mystery of the immense ruins there and here described!

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Then, with a sudden, simultaneous rush, they came at us from every point in the encompassing circle, and we were fighting back to back against fearful odds for our very lives. A cloud, presageful of storm, crept up and overspread the pallid face of the moon, so that we could scarce make out our foes, and thus in semi-darkness we strove like lions brought to bay, with the energy born of a terrible hate and a fixed despair.

Ye spirits! How we wrought that night in the Nubian forest! How we charged and were driven back, how they pressed us sorely, but could not make us yield, how many were the dead who encircled our last stand like a rampart of human flesh! Our enemies, we saw, in the moments when the moon stole through the clouds, were armed with long shields, all covered with mystic symbols and writings—strange shields for Nubians to wear, we thought—and once or twice, in a lull in the struggle, I fancied that when I caught a glimpse of a head and face, it seemed not black and woolly, but a swarthy colour, and covered with a closely-fitting head-gear.

Amongst them came troops of dancing girls.

However, I fought on, now with sling and now with sword, till presently I stood with back to a broad tree, separated from the rest and antagonised by a stalwart foe with long, keen sword. He waved off these who would have aided him, meaning me for his own prize, doubtless; and there, for sheer vexation, I kept him thrusting and parrying till the day broke and the birds began to sing in joyous ignorance of the slaughter that had been.

Long before then the rest of my comrades had fallen, every man of that brave band, and once again I alone remained alive in a struggle when all my friends were slain.

"Now yield!" cried he of the long keen sword, and I understood his speech, though it differed somewhat from my own or that of the blacks. "Now, yield, and I will spare your life, as I would be glad to do."

I thought a moment, and then, reflecting that I had shown him that my knowledge of sword-play was not of yestereve, held down my blade, something—from whence I know not—whispering in my ear that not yet nor thus should I meet my end.

"You have fought well," said he to whom I surrendered; "methought, before daybreak, that you were no Nubians. Whence came you, and what is your nation?"

"Atlantis is my nation, a land far out in the western sea," I answered, "and they whom you have slain were the last of my countrymen whom the Nubian rebels had left alive in this that was once our province. But I thought you were Nubians till I saw your shields. Of what nation are you?"

"I come from Egypt, the Land of Khem," said he with pride, "being sent by Pharaoh to chastise these turbulent blacks, a great band of whom we met and routed but three days ago. Never before have Egyptians ventured so far south as this, and to-day we shall return, having taught the barbarians a lesson. But tell me of your country, for even rumour of it hath not reached me before to-day."

"It is much I could tell you, stranger," I replied, "and much of myself also—so much that you would be wearied before I had told you the half of it. Tell me your name and let me learn your tongue—near though it be to my own—a little better, and I will tell you as we journey north, for I would fain see your land, even if I must see it as a prisoner."

"That you need not do," said he with a brave man's generosity; "you shall go as my friend, whom I have rescued from the blacks. And men call me Asos, the son of Osymandyas, and in peace time I live at Memphis, where the Court is. It will be many months' journey before I see it again, even if no war should need me, for I am a captain in the army, and must do many little businesses for the King before I may return. But how are you named, friend whom I have found at the sword point?"

"My real name is Arnon, the son of Didron the pirate," I answered, "and I have been known as Phrena the Iron-fingered, of late."

"Art young for thy skill and strength and experience," he remarked, when I told him of that last sea-fight when old Didron fell. "Art young, or I would get thee into the King's bodyguard. Tell me more of thy country."

So, as we travelled northward, keeping my sword and sling and marching with the others as a soldier, dressed in the uniform of a fallen Egyptian, I told Captain Asos of the greatness of Atlantis; of its colonies in the great land to the westward, peopled for the most part with savages more

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crafty and cruel than those of Nubia; of its wealth and luxury, that was sapping the vitals of its vigour; of its temples and buildings, its harbours and fortresses, its navy of a thousand ships, and its army of twenty times ten thousand men.

Asos listened gravely to my tale. He was a tall, clean-shaven man, with sinews strongly knit, a mind that knew no fear, and a face that seldom broke into a smile; but when I told him of our army, thinking to astonish him, he laughed at me outright. I asked him why.

"Talk not of armies!" said he, with a scornful glance; "when you come to Khem, I can show you an array that would swallow up your men five times over."

"In numbers, it may be," I retorted sharply, my patriotism rising for the first time, "but not on the battle-field, methinks!" And this time it was my turn to smile.

Thus, with boast and counter boast, and comparison of peoples and their ways, we emerged from the forest and set out across a narrow stretch of desert, glaring balefully under a burning sun, full of rocky hillocks and ridges, indeed, but without a shade sufficient to cool our many men in the heat of the day.

Tantalisingly beautiful and enticing mirages we saw also, when our throats were most parched and our feet most weary, but never a fertile oasis or a refreshing spring. It was soon passed, however, and after a dank morass and another desert march, with a slight gale blowing the fine, red sand into our faces in scorching clouds, we came to Egypt, and, passing by the three great pyramids, larger even than the great group to the north of Kronos, where the Kings of Atlantis are buried, we entered into the Royal city on the banks of the mystic Nile.

On all sides, as we trod the stony central way, a festive throng beset us, singing, dancing, shouting, and some clad in the most outrageously grotesque costumes, many-coloured as the rainbow. Amongst them came troops of dancing girls, wantonly capering to the clashing of cymbals, the tinkling of square tambourines, and the shrill, piercing music of single and double pipes; while after these tumultuously ran, jumped, or rolled, bands of hired buffoons disporting themselves to the same silly medley of music, these latter, mostly blacks, being clad in bull's hide, so cut and worn as to leave a tail hanging ludicrously behind!

A little further on, as we neared a massive temple with the sun glittering from its polished marble towers, and reflected from its gates of bronze where the lepers sat, the low but swelling chorus of its priests fell upon our ears, now rising, now falling, now pouring forth in volumes of rich, strong melody.

"What means this merry-making?" I asked of Asos, thinking to myself that here, at least, was a city large as Kronos, which before I had thought matchless.

"It is the nineteenth day of the first month, that is named the month of Thoth," said he, "and this is the feast that is called by that name. See, here come the priests of Pthah!"

Slowly the brazen temple doors swung back, and, still chanting the tuneful song of Maneros, a long procession of clean-shaven, hairless, hard-skulled priests came forth, and greeting us with the salutation, "*How sweet a thing is truth!*" wended their stately way adown the avenue of tamarisk trees and were lost to view beyond in the ever-mingling throng of roysterers. Severity and temperance, in food and drink, charity and truth, no matter what befall, they preached to the careless crowd, many of whom, even as they listened, pledging each other and making themselves drunk with the heady zythus of Pelusium. So little valued they the admonitions.

Asos, impatient, moved on, and having reported the fruits of his mission to the King—named, he told me, Menophres—and transacted his business with his superior officer, led me to his own dwelling, for he had taken a strange liking to me.

It was a large house, stuccoed and flat-roofed, and as we entered the porch before the door, with its two columns flanking the stone statues of the bull Apis and the Athor Isis, my host pointed out to me some cabalistic scrawlings on the slab above, thus: which he said was the sign of the good house; and some other gravings on the stone—curious birds and fishes, and to me quaint meaningless strokes and circles—which, he told me with pride, was the name of the King, and could only be written upon the houses of those who were his servants.

Then when we had entered, and I had been presented to the wife of Asos, Itaska by name, who regarded me too boldly, I thought, for one bound to another, and I had eaten of honey and eggs, which is customary at the feast of Thoth, I rose and went out into the cool night air, thinking to enjoy the strangeness, the novelty, of all things I might see. What I should do, what would be my lot in this great land, where wealth was scattered broadcast, I knew not, thought not, cared not, but only, as I stood in the open air, beyond the houses of the city, bethought me for the thousandth time of the loss of Briseis, and wondered yet again if she were false or true.

Whether the Spirit of Love works her ends by means we wot not of, or whether the other gods must bend to her will and order things to suit her fancies, I cannot say, but this I can aver, that if I had not wandered, a solitary stranger, that peaceful eve, I had never beheld Atlantis more, had never been its King, had never clasped my dearest love to my arms again, so fateful were the doings of those midnight hours.

Far from the city, now sunk into slumber, save for its watchmen and the priests who meditated on the pylons of the temple of Pthah, I strayed—forgetful in my reverie, of Asos—into the arid, treeless waste to the south, where the dreary dryness of the soil was unrelieved except by rocky ridges, and here and there a collection of tombs dug out or built upon the hillsides, the last resting-places of the bodies of the poorer classes who could afford no costlier mausoleums.

Bright and clear, in that dry and thirsty atmosphere, shone the countless stars, shining down alike upon the lately festive city and the fertile fields to the north and east; upon the deep, wide-rolling flood of Sihor, resistless in its majesty, and the great four-angled pyramids pointing ever up into the roofless sky; upon the grave, immobile features of the giant Sphinx Horemku, and upon the place of tombs where I stood, marvelling greatly at the weird vastness of all that I saw that was of the handiwork of man, and the niggardness of parent Earth, who, but for the ancient river, had made this land a howling wilderness.

Truly the Nile—the Mother of Rivers, as her people call her—is the sole upholder of the Land of Khem, without whose tireless torrent and yearly flood, temples, cities, villages, and fields would alike be buried under drifting storms of finely-sifted desert sand.

Now, as I stood, thus pondering, a feeling grew upon me that I was not there alone—a strange, uneasy feeling, as of a spirit's prompting. At first I scouted it and put it from me, but it came again and again, and, half fearful, half angry, I turned my gaze to the tombs amongst which I had wandered.

Seeing no sign of the presence which I felt, I turned my steps, now here, now there, among the mazy ways, and at last, coming round the side of a huge stone cairn, thrown up, it may be, to cover a goodly number of the luckless dead in a common grave, I beheld a sight that caused the blood to chill in its channels, and my heart, for a moment, to stand still with horror.

By the side of a low-built tomb sat a fair maiden, weeping softly to herself over the cold covering of the dead, her rich auburn hair falling loosely on her shoulders, and partly hiding the sweetness of her dainty face, which, for all the dimness of the light, was plainly visible. But it was not she, for all her loveliness, that riveted my

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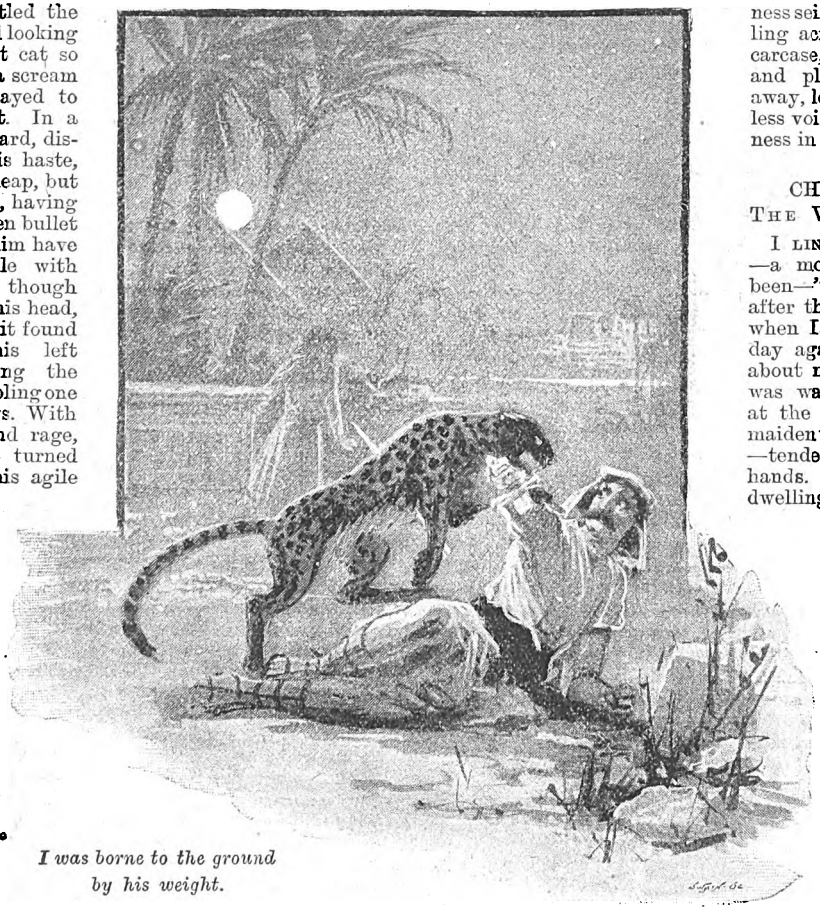
awestruck gaze. Near her—so near that she might almost have touched him by putting out her arm—crouched a spotted leopard, ready to spring, deterred only for the moment by the light sound of my footfall, which his suspicious ears had caught.

A great, evil beast he was, with cruel, rolling eyes, and sleek, shining coat, and thickened tail softly twitching on the dusty ground in anticipation of his easy prey. Yet he must have been hungry to have ventured so near the haunts of men and for his ribs to stand out so boldly that, given time, I could have counted them!

For a brief space, it seemed less than the lasting of a lightning flash, I stood motionless, whilst he glared fiercely at me for my intrusion, and snapped his cruel jaws, and gave a low, angry snarl.

The sound startled the weeping maid, and looking up to see the great cat so near, she uttered a scream of terror and essayed to fly from the spot. In a moment, the leopard, disregarding me in his haste, made his deadly leap, but that same moment, having fitted my last leaden bullet to my sling, I let him have the hissing missile with terrific force, and though it failed to reach his head, as I had meant, it found its billet in his left shoulder, shattering the bone and thus crippling one of his taloned paws. With a growl of pain and rage, the spotted beast turned upon me in all his agile lissomness, but I had thrown aside my useless sling, and sword in hand, awaited his onslaught with a grim, exultant joy.



I was borne to the ground by his weight.

High he sprang, with claws extended and jaws open, roaring with pain the while; down he came full weight upon my upheld blade, the point passing clear through and out above his back, missing the spine by the merest of unlucky chances.

To my dismay, before I could withdraw it, before I could ward off the blows and scratches of his great sharp talons, the sword was snapped off at the hilt by the violent twistings of the maddened brute, and, weaponless, I was borne to the ground by his weight, hearing as I fell a cry of fear from the maid.

But I was not called the Iron-fingered for nothing! and so, with a powerful grasp, I seized him by the throat, pressing out his life as I had done old Zerah's years before. This time, however, by the gods! I had a tougher task, for it seemed likely that I should be torn to pieces before the breath was stifled in that vicious animal, who must have had a dozen lives to have struggled with all those wounds and with that sharp-edged sword rankling in his body!

Over and over we rolled in the death grip, I and that raging beast, his three uninjured feet ripping and scratching, his hideous mouth opening and closing with short, savage gasps, his flaming yellow orbs fixed on mine in horrid enmity, and his great chest heaving laboriously against my own.

Now his struggles abated, his breath came shorter, the blood-wetted claws relaxed their hold, the flaming orbs ceased to roll and begun to glaze with the ghastliness of death, and presently, with a quiver, the lithe form lay still at my side. Till then—till I knew that he was dead, not once had my fingers loosed their grasp; then a great dimness seemed to pass between myself and all around, and I had scarce time to extricate me from that awful embrace when the faintness seized me, and, stumbling across the yet warm carcase, all sense of time and place and act fled away, leaving only a voiceless void of densest darkness in its stead.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Vision of Isis.

I lingered some weeks—a month it may have been—'twixt life and death after that awful fight, and when I knew the light of day again and could look about me, I found that I was watched and tended at the house of the fair maiden whom I had rescued—tended, too, by her fair hands. It was a spacious dwelling on the northern side of Memphis, its grove of cedars leading into the temple grounds, and its windows looking out upon the sculptured obelisks of the portal.

"Sleep hath held thee long, stranger," said a middle-aged man who stood by the bedside when I first came to full consciousness, his hand upon the maiden's head, as if in tender blessing. Well I remember him, whose kindly soul befriended me so long and truly in that far-off land of mighty buildings and ancient lore; a tall man, plain and rugged, on the further side of fifty years, with a restless mouth, and a way of laughing silently when he spoke with mirth—which was not seldom—that was terribly infectious.

"It is well for me, then," I answered him, "that I have slept at the house of a friend," the memory of what must have led to my being there coming up before me as a vision.

"Other than a friend's my house could not be," he said, "to one who has risked his life for my only child. Few of our people would have dared so much."

"I dared not have dared less," I replied, "when so fair and young a maiden was in peril."

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"Seemst thou canst use a honeyed tongue as well as sharpened steel, my son," said Mitres, as my host was named, with one of his quiet smiles, "and it may be as dangerous to young and untried hearts to see or hear too much of thee as to court the company of hungry leopards amongst the tombs."

"Nay, art too pointed in thy sayings, father," protested the maiden, "and may offend this stranger who called himself Arnon in his sleep, when we would fain offer him our gratitude for his timely help."

"'Tis a gentle soul of thine, Vesta" answered he, "but surely thou knowest that I spoke in jest, and am every whit

Tended, too, by her fair hands.

as thankful as thyself for our guest's brave deed. Now, tell him, pray, for what thou sat in that solitary place at night, weeping like a lovesick maid!"

At this, sweet Vesta hung her head, blushing in the prettiest confusion, but would not speak, and her father reiterating his request with a mirthful twinkle in his eye, strange to see on so grave a face, she fled from the room, though first casting a brief look upon me from those confiding eyes of hers that opened my own and filled me with dire forebodings.

Wherever there are women there are troubles, soon or late, I had found in my short life, and it was as though I saw the shadow of a coming cloud in that swift-shot glance. When the hanging draperies had closed behind her, Mitres spoke:

"An she will not tell thee herself, I must, my son. She wept over the grave of one whom she loved, one who was of a lowly caste and not worthy of her, and whom the gods (in their wisdom) called to Amenti before it was too late. May Set rend him! May Atmoo, Nef, and Amun curse him!" Then, calming himself after this sudden outburst, he went on: "But since you rescued her she has ceased to visit the spot, and has seemed a different child."

Leaving me to make what I could of this information, my host reclined thoughtfully in his chair for a time. At last he broke the silence.

"How had you thought to live, stranger, now that you have no kin in the land? For Asos, the captain, who has now been made a general, has told me how he rescued you from the black barbarians he fought and slew."

"It was in my mind to join the King's army," I returned, "for I have a sore sorrow in my life, and where the battle-press is thickest, and the clash of arms is loudest, is to me the greatest joy."

To which my host answered that he would rather I became a priest, as he was, promising me great riches, grand dwellings, honour, and the envy and admiration of all men therewith. At first the idea did not please me, who was so used to action, and had heretofore looked down on the priestly calling; but so many were his arguments and allurements, and promises of help and friendship withal, that I wavered a little out of mere respect for his superior years; and finally, so urgent was he, so imperative, that I was fain to consent, the more so when he told me, as the crowning inducement, that war had ceased for the time being in the Land of Khem, that the army was partially disbanded, that quiet reigned in all its nomes, and on all its borders peace.

So I prepared to become a priest and to be instructed in all the learning of the Egyptians, as Vesta's father wished, though why he so desired I could not divine, nor did I discover till after his wish was fulfilled.

To hundred-gated Thebes the King now moved his court, and thither went Mitres and his daughter (for his wife was dead), and also Asos and his family, for all must needs be in attendance on the wants and whims of Pharaoh and his royal wife and sister, Queen Hameuse. With them, of course, I journeyed, having first been initiated into the rudiments of priestcraft, and having spent a night of watching in the arched gallery cut in the rock near Memphis, where, in their huge stalls, like the sarcophagi of giants, the embalmed Apis bulls are buried, and where they will repose for ages in awful, silent solemnity.

At Thebes I was enrolled among the many priests in the mighty temple of Karnac, where I learned many things that are made known only to the privileged orders. They taught me the enchantments that have power with the lower gods; the raising of the Ancient Sin, the dread demon that sleepeth in every soul, and is of icy chilliness until it is warmed and wakened into baleful life; the sign of doom, which will reveal to the daring questioner the hour and the moment and the manner of his dying, and the utterance of dread, which none may speak and to which none may listen, with uncovered head and yet live, and which, when spoken, discloses to the mental gaze the million-million shades that haunt the vasty halls of grim Amenti, and gives the speaker power to bring back from there for a space, and question, the triple spirits of the newly dead. I was made to understand the secret mysteries of the esoteric faith; of the birth, death, and resurrection of Osiris; of his love for the world, which was so great that he gave his son Horus to save men from their wicked ways, and of the Mother Isis, the Spirit of the Universe, who reveals the fringe of her glory only to a favoured, faithful few.

Her I saw once only in all my nightly vigils, but the memory of her appearing haunts me even now. It was in an inner chamber of that sculptured, columned Temple of Karnac, where the neophyte must pass many days in prayer and fasting. Mitres, who stood high in the land for his piety and goodness, was with me, aiding my supplications with his own, and bade me be of good cheer, for if the presentment of the Great Mother should appear to me that night, my days of trial and preparation were over, and I could go forth fully instructed.

Already I was wise in the lore of the stars, in the reading of the Sacred Book of the Dead, in the mystic symbol writing of the sculptures and in the sending forth of the spirit; and one thing only I lacked; one ordeal alone remained.

In the dread silence of that darkened chamber we waited, I and that jolly priest, hearing even the throbbing of our hearts in the stillness, and seeing strange weird shapes and shadows in the spectral gloom, till, as the heavens lost the dim afterglow of the twilight and the sparkling stars came out, first one by one and then by tens and hundreds, the pale rays of the Northern Star, round which the firmament revolves—the star in the figure of the dragon—shot through the slanting window in the wall and rested on the golden scarabæus that gleamed with iridiscent lustre on my forehead.

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"Now is the appointed time," said Mitres slowly, "and by the awful name of Osiris, which none may unworthily pronounce and live, I ask our Mother Isis to smile upon thee, our adopted son," and whilst he spoke he drew back a space, and waved the wand over my head, twice, thrice, and then was still.

With a loud, vibrating roar the room and all within vanished, its four walls receding to the north and south and east and west, its roof ascending to the zenith, and its floor falling—falling into the bottomless gulf beneath, till, in the twinkling of an eye I seemed to hang on nothing in the centre of the awful abyss of space. Even my bodily form and feelings disappeared, leaving me a naked soul suspended motionless in the dread darkness that was void and yet intensely real.

Then all the stars blazed out in their innumerable multitude, ten thousandfold more plentiful than the keenest earthly eye can see, and, by Apis! when I looked again more carefully I saw that most were coloured, shining in all the many tints of red and green and blue and orange and yellow, some in pairs and some in clusters, and all attended by a train of subject worlds, as earth and the seven other planets dance around the gorgeous sun, only that on many of those favoured orbs a day would see them pass through the glories of an orange sunset and a deep blue dawn, with, perchance, a violet noon between.

Again I looked, and this time I saw that all these gleaming stars were fiery, flaming suns, some smaller, but most larger than our own, and that intermixed with them, invisible to mortal gaze, but countless in number as the grains of dust in a desert storm, there floated on the sea of space a multitude of dark, cold orbs, as it were suns that were burned out and rolled along in silent lifelessness for ever.

At last the Shape spoke.

And everywhere throughout the round immensity there roamed strange astral shapes, now whirling madly past a glowing sun, now slowly traversing an empty region, and anon breaking up, like a shower of sparks, into innumerable fragments, huge cosmic dust-swarms, which drifted hither and thither in quantity that passes comprehension.

Then it seemed to me that I moved, though I felt no quiver of translation; the stars shot past me on either side like long flashes of many-coloured light, behind, they closed in swiftly on my track, in front, the figure of Orion opened out and widened till its points were lost in the dark vault around, and I hung near the giant cluster of orbs which men call the Pleiades, itself a universe of flaming suns, mid which stood out nine giant worlds, transcending all their neighbours.

Through the distance shone the fierce Dog Star, blazing red, a veritable monarch of the skies, out-shining all and sundry of its rivals in the visible portion of illimitable space.

Then suddenly, as I gazed in wonder at the marvels of the heavens, I heard a sound as of the beating of many spirit-wings coming from afar. It deepened and deepened till it grew to the noise of a mighty rushing wind, it softened again to a murmur as of many waters and then ceased, whilst, but faintly heard in infinite vastness, came stealing the distant sound of music, the piping of the sweet-toned flute, the twanging of the seven-stringed harp, and the harmony of the rattling rings and jingling bars of the sistrum; and not one flute I heard, but many, not one harp, but a chiming chorus, not one sistrum, but the mingled melody of a thousand sistra, yet one and all invisible.

Now, as the cadences of heavenly music rose and fell in pure, majestic chords and sweetest symphonies, I saw a Shape grow slowly in the region beyond the stars, a shadowy Shape which, seen through the long vista of heated suns and dancing worlds, seemed to have a dim and wavy form, suggesting something of a female figure, yet so awful in its surpassing loveliness that my soul trembled at the sight thereof, and I feared the Unknown Form. Nearer and nearer it came, growing larger and more definite with its approach, and I doubted no longer that it was given to me to behold the presentment of the Mother Isis, who was and is and shall be.

But what pen, what tongue, can describe the glory of her face, the power of her mere presence, the beauty of whose form was Loveliness's Own? I cannot, nor wish, nor shall make attempt; enough to say that even my memory now refuses to recall the spiritual charm of that cloud-Shape in its entirety.

At last the Shape spoke, though it seemed to me that the sound came from the unfathomable depths beyond the great star-clouds like the far-off echo of a rippling stream, with something of the sighing of the summer wind intermingled with it; and this was the burden of the speech, so sweetly borne upon my spirit ears.

"Thou whom men call Arnon, dost feel no fear in my presence, who appear but once to mortal men?"

And I answered tremblingly:

"I fear, on account of the strangeness of my vision, but not of thy power, oh, Mother of worlds!"

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"Well is it spoken, mortal," the sweet voice said, still sounding faintly, as heard through a thick, deep veil; "but know, thou of little faith, who expected not this vision, who art still at heart an alien to Egypt's gods: know this, that I have granted thee this favour to speak a word of comfort to thee, that thou may'st take heart and live, and do the work that it is ordained thou shall perform."

There was a moment's pause, in which I heard, softly as before, the sound of the ringing staves of a thousand sistra, shaken by spirit hands. Then the voice went on:

"Great is thy part, mortal, in the doings of thy land, and thither shalt thou return when the time is ripe, but deem not that I shall cease to watch thee when thou goest out of the Land of Khem. 'Twas I who guided thy childish hands to the stairway on the rock when thou wast nigh to death by the buffetings of the thoughtless waves; 'twas I who brought thee unscathed through the fire when all thy comrades fell at Miropis; 'twas I who put mercy into the heart of Asos, when otherwise his men had slain thee in the Nubian forest; and in the hour of thy greatest need 'tis I will ward off the blow from thy head, and save thee from Amenti till the span of thy years be full.

Here I waited, listening.

"And this remember, favoured mortal, that thy true beloved thou shalt meet again, and all shall be between you as before; yet on thyself alone it turns whether thy days with Briseis be many or few, for a great temptation shall beset thee in thine own land, and as thou falleth before it or resisteth it, so shall thy wages be thereafter; but even in the worst, for mortal flesh is weak, it is granted thee to live when thy country dies, to succour many in their last distress, and to be clear in mind and sound in frame to the last.

"It has been given to many to whom I have revealed the fringe of my glory, to see the birth of suns and worlds from the fragments scattered through a million leagues of chaos, but inasmuch as thou art not of my chosen people, and will never pass behind the inmost veil of my temple, it is denied to thee.

"And now farewell, and if thou shouldst seek to see my face again or to hear once more the sound of my voice, thou must gaze upon the face of nature and hearken to the music of birds and brooks and whistling winds, for all things are in me and I in them, from Infinity to Infinity and from Everlasting to Everlasting."

The voice sank to an indistinguishable murmur, and then ceased, the shadowy Shape of incomparable beauty melted to a hazy cloud vanishing adown the vista of whirling worlds, and in that fearful, boundless vault was silence deep and dread. Then, like a meteor flash, I returned to the place where I had first hung motionless, the stars slid back on their courses, the great cluster of the Pleiades dwindled to a tiny cloud of twinkling points, the figure of Orion closed in to its wonted size, and all was still amid the glare of the many-coloured suns, till out of the north came a great blackness, swallowing up the heavens with capacious maw, and a voice said:

"It is enough!"

By the last gleam of light that remained I saw the roof of the chamber fall down from among the stars, the floor rise up from the gulf below, the walls close in from the four points of the heavens, and in bodily form I stood by the side of Mitres, in the temple of Karnac, the glow of a new dawn pouring in through the slanting casement.

"Breathe no word of detail of what thou hast seen or heard," said Mitres warningly, leading me before the assembled priests, where I was received with sacrifices and thanksgiving songs; and that day I entered on my duties, though more thoughtful and solemn than is my wont.

Mitres was hugely delighted that I had passed the ordeal so well, was unfailing in his words of good cheer and his quiet, catching mirth, the best of jolly companions, insisting most strongly that I shared his home till I could buy one for myself—which, he vouched, would not be long hence, and, when I hesitated, brought Vesta to join her entreaties to his. And so masterful was she with all her shy, sweet grace, that in the end I was fain to yield me to their wishes, lest I be thought churlish and ungrateful.

One thing I now saw clearly, that Vesta loved me, and that her father not only knew of it but rejoiced in the knowledge, having no object nearer to his heart than my union with his fair daughter, and yet neither had spoken a word to me that I could take advantage of.

But I did not love Vesta then, in spite of her youth and beauty, and whenever it came into my mind to marry her, seeing that Briseis was false and far away, the face of my Lady of Kronos, with royal blood in her veins, would rise before my mental eye, and I would put the thought from me, vowing inwardly that if I could not be hers I would be no other's.

So I stayed at the house of Mitres as a privileged guest, attending daily in that wondrous temple, reading the picture-writings on the wall, and watching the sculptors chiselling the shapeless slabs of stone to forms of love and awe, and recording Egypt's greatness and her conquests in imperishable monuments of living rock, destined, perchance, to endure when Khem herself shall be only a wreck of her present glory.

The days sped on. The Nile had overflowed its banks, covering the land with a deep deposit of rich, fertile soil, and the workers, relieved for a time from the drudgery of watering the land by means of poles and pitchers, had made merry over the signs of harvest when the swift-sown seeds sprang up from the grateful ground. The summer had waned and the month of Athyr come, when the Etesian winds had ceased, the Nile gone to its former bounds, and the nights grown longer, when fortune so favoured me that my name became famous through all the land.

It chanced one eve, as I walked through an inner corridor of the Temple, bending my way towards the Place of Counsel, where those in distress came to ask of Amun, that I heard hurried footsteps on the stony floor, and a warning whisper, "Peace!"

My curiosity was wakened, for I knew that dark deeds were sometimes planned in those shadowy chambers, and, resolved to know what need these unknown whisperers had of secrecy, I softly passed under a noiseless, swinging stone into a hidden recess running parallel to the corridor from whence the footsteps sounded, and from which every word uttered in the latter was distinctly audible.

Here I waited, listening.

(To be continued.)

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THE FRUIT OF THE RANDOM SEED.

"A Bank Manager, provided that the Chief Cashier is with him, and a visit from the Inspector is not imminent, has a better opportunity for wholesale robbery than the most accomplished professional thief in existence."

The words were spoken lightly and carelessly by a man in the stalls of the Pall Mall Theatre; yet if one person were more capable than another in judging such matters, it were assuredly the Chief Cashier of the Seacomb County Bank.

He did not know that his friend, the Manager of the Bank, was sitting in the seat behind him; he did not know that he had heard his words, with white face and starting eyes, and that he had repeated them over a hundred times as though to engrave them on his memory. How should he realise that the handful of seeds that he had thus sown at random had fallen on rich soil, and had taken firm root, and that they were destined to ruin his own life, and that of his colleague?

It seemed to the Bank Manager, sitting in the stall behind his Cashier, that the great theatre had drifted out of sight; the air of the swinging chorus grew fainter and fainter; the music of the orchestra was far away. Only these words rang incessantly in his ears: "Bank Manager—opportunity—opportunity—opportunity."

He rose from his seat and left the building; at that moment a roar of applause greeted a patriotic song, and from the midst of it voices were whispering to him, "Opportunity-tunity-tunity."

He went out into the streets. London in the midst of its revelry was ablaze with lights, but he heeded nothing. Men shouted to him, as bare-headed, wild-eyed, he crossed their path regardless of the traffic. Newsboys called out their news to him; men and women jostled him at every step; cabs dashed past him; but he saw them not; he went steadily forward until he left the roar of the great city behind him, and found himself in the Park, where a cool breeze was blowing, and the bright stars above were shining down.

He seated himself on a chair. "A Bank Manager," he spoke aloud unconsciously, "provided that the Chief Cashier is with him, and a visit from the Inspector is not imminent, has a better opportunity for wholesale robbery than the most accomplished professional thief in existence."

He paused for a moment, and then went on, "I am a Bank Manager; my Cashier is with me; aye, he is in my power, body and soul; the Inspector will not come yet."

He spoke in a curious, monotonous voice, and very earnestly.

"I am deeply in debt; my father lost £3,000 in the concern; if I take that sum I shall merely be taking what is my own."

The breeze whistled shrilly in the trees, and the man's over-strained nerves seemed to detect these words; "Lead us not into temptation; deliver us from evil."

He sprang to his feet with a hoarse imprecation.

"There is no temptation," he shouted back defiantly, "there is no evil; I shall merely be taking what is my own."

He ran hurriedly forward, and, hailing a cab, drove to his hotel. His mind was determined.

Thus the random seed which the Cashier had sown took firm root, and sprang into life.

* * * * *

The Manager's private room of the Seacomb County Bank was usually considered to be remarkably comfortable. The clerks looked into it with envious eyes when the door was open; the junior partner was wont to remark condescendingly that it was not half bad.

In the dead of night, however, when the inhabitants of the old-world, sleepy little town of Seacomb were wrapped in slumber, and the high stools and long counters of the Bank were deserted, the aspect of the little room was different. There was a weird, ghostly feeling in the air on the night when the Manager and Mr. Smithkins, the Chief Cashier, were closeted together for the last time.

"Smithkins," said the Manager, "have you forgotten what I once did for you?"

"How can you ask, sir? I shall never forget it as long as I live. Whenever the chance comes for me to do a good turn for you, I will take it. You may depend on me, sir."

"You will, Smithkins? You swear it?"

"Everything that is in my power I will do for you. I swear it."

"Well, the chance has come, Smithkins. Remember, you have sworn. My father, as you know, lost £3,000 in this bank. At the present moment I am deeply in debt, and, as I have often told you, I am thoroughly tired of this commercial life. How I came to be a

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manager of a bank, Heaven only knows. I have resolved, therefore, to take the sum of £3,000, to leave the country for ever, and to spend the remainder of my days in quiet and seclusion. You follow me?"

"What are you saying, sir? You must be mad. You cannot mean it—that you are going to run away with £3,000." The Cashier was dumfoundered.

"I mean it, Smithkins. I am not mad. I shall take £3,000, not a penny more, and all that I want you to do is to cover my retreat."

"It is impossible. I shan't allow you to do it. I shall stop you."

"You won't. You daren't."

The Manager shot the words out, and brought his fist down on the table with terrific force. The Cashier looked at him with the appealing eyes of a devoted dog.

"Think of Miss Catherine," he said at last. "You would not desert her."

The Manager was silent for a moment. Then he looked up with a bright smile.

"I leave her to you, Smithkins. You have frequently told me that she would be willing to marry you if I gave my consent. I leave her to you. She could not be in bett-r hands. On this condition you will do as I tell you?"

It was a terrible moment for the Chief Cashier. He loved his master's daughter more than his life, but he could not so easily be persuaded to allow a man to do so dark a deed. Yet he knew that no words of his would persuade the Manager; long ago he had sold himself to him; he was a tool in his hands.

"I agree," he said.

"Very well. It is late; let us go home."

The Manager preceded Smithkins to the door, locked it, and left the Bank. On the morrow, with £3,000 in his possession, he left for America, and not a trace of him was to be found.

Thus the random seed grew in strength, and bore fruit.

* * * * *

The Cashier stood on the door-step of his late Manager's house. His heart was beating like a sledge hammer.

"Is Miss Catherine at home?"

The door was held open, he passed in, and a moment later found himself in her presence.

"Miss Catherine, I bring bad news to you."

"Bad news, Mr. Smithkins? Mind I don't have your head chopped off, as they used to do to the bearers of evil tidings."

Miss Catherine was a charming little personage, who had no fear for anyone, and certainly not for her father's Cashier. At one time she had even amused herself by pretending that she was in love with him.

"Your father has suddenly been called away on business, and may not be home again for some time."

"How long is that, Mr. Smithkins?"

"A year, or—er—perhaps, two."

"This is, indeed, bad news. Did he leave no message for me?"

"He left a message, and by delivering this, I hope to reinstate myself in your favour. If you like it, you will not have my head chopped off?"

"Let me hear it first and then I will tell you."

"Well, his last wish was that you should marry——"

"Marry? Marry whom?"

"An ugly, unworthy person—me, Miss Catherine."

"*You*, Mr. Smithkins?"

"You *do* care for me, Miss Catherine? You will marry me?"

"Yes, but——"

The door opened, and Catherine could not finish her sentence. Thus she did not have an opportunity to answer, "Yes, she cared for him, certainly, but as certainly she did not love him."

Mr. Smithkins pressed her hand in a transport of delight, and left the room. A young man, handsome, dashing, well-dressed, came forward.

"Oh, Lord Harry, what do you think has happened? Mr. Smithkins came to say that my father has gone away for two years, and that he left a message that I was to marry him, and he asked me whether I didn't care for him and I said yes, and then you came in, and now he has gone away and thinks that I have promised to be his wife. What is to be done?"

"Why, you had better marry me at once," cried Lord Harry, as he took Miss Catherine boldly in his arms, and kissed her on her cheek.

Poor Smithkins at home thought that he would go mad with joy. He was a different man; he seemed to be living in a new world; his dingy lodgings were transformed into a palace. How deep and strong was his love for this poor girl he alone knew.

For the time he forgot the presence of the black cloud hanging over him that was soon to burst. The troubled times that were coming did not affect his happiness.

The cloud burst sooner than was expected. Some ten days after the Manager's disappearance the Inspector paid the periodical visit to the Bank. Then everything was discovered.

Never had the sleepy little town of Seacomb known such excitement. People swarmed to the Bank by hundreds to inquire after their savings. The wildest rumours were circulated on every side, and with the loss of the money the Manager's name was invariably associated.

At the earliest opportunity the Chief Cashier presented himself at the Manager's house. He must do his best to comfort Miss Catherine, and to prepare her for the alarming rumours which, sooner or later, were sure to reach her ears.

"Is it true, Mr. Smithkins," she cried, as soon as he had entered the room, "that £3,000 has been stolen from the Bank?"

"Ah, I was afraid that you would have heard. It is only too true. And I grieve to tell you, Miss Catherine, that, since no trace can be found of your father, people are talking—insinuating——"

"Insinuating that he took the money, Mr. Smithkins? How dare you hint at such a thing? Leave me this instant. Oh, this is too cruel."

The poor girl burst into a flood of tears.

"Believe me, Miss Catherine, not for a moment would I have harboured such a thought against your father. I was merely going to warn you against any idle rumour that you might hear. Your father is the most upright and honest man that ever lived."

The Cashier did not know what he was saying. The sight of the girl's distress completely upset him.

"Oh, Catherine," he cried, "will you not be my wife, and let me comfort you?"

The girl dried her tears, and choking back her sob, answered in a brave voice: "That is impossible, Mr. Smithkins. I am already engaged to Lord Harry. I fear that you misunderstood me the other day."

With these words ringing in his ears, broken-hearted,

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the Cashier left the house. Presently, without knowing that he had moved, he found himself in his lodgings. A crumpled envelope, addressed in a well-known hand, was lying on his table. He tore it open hastily; it came from the father of the girl he loved, and contained only these words: "I am dying. The doctor says that there is no hope."

A great cry went up from his soul; he buried his face in his hands, and for a long while remained quite still. He thought of his past life, and of all the deeds that he had ever done—and he thought of the future. He thought of the sweet face of the girl who had no love for him. Now there was a stain on her name, and her life would be ruined. Her friends would desert her; who would have dealings with the daughter of a felon?

Sobs shook the strong man's frame.

Presently he seized pen and paper, and in a short, kind little note, told the poor girl that her father was dead.

"What is life to me now," he cried. "Why should I live longer?"

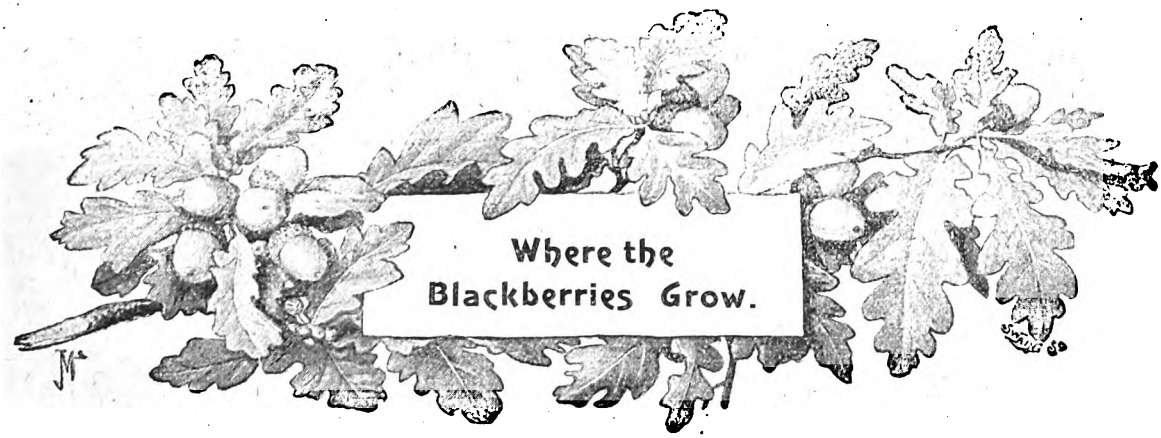
Taking a clean sheet of paper he wrote again, and the words that he wrote cleared, in this world, at least, the dead man's name of all stain of the crime of which he had been accused.

"I alone," he wrote, "stole the money from the Bank."

It was a masterly confession from beginning to end He thought long and carefully over it, so that it would leave no doubt in the minds of those who read.

Then, taking his hat, he stole out into the street.

Many people noticed that night a hollow-eyed, sad-looking man, standing near one of the parapets of the bridge that crossed the river.



THE girl stands looking at the picture; the man who painted it stands looking at the girl. What a sweet face it is, so girlish, so untouched by the sorrows and passions of life! The look of pleased admiration in the soft eyes gives him an odd sensation of pleasure. He is glad that his work pleases her.

The girl is presently joined by a tall, graceful woman. Shirley gives a slight start.

"Eleanor!" he murmurs.

"Oh, mamma," the girl is saying, "isn't this a sweet picture? I like it better than anything I have seen here."

Some of the faint, delicate colour fades out of Eleanor Seaton's beautiful, tired face as she looks at the canvas that has aroused her daughter's enthusiasm.

"Yes," she murmurs mechanically, "it is a beautiful picture."

And then with hands which are a little tremulous, she opens her catalogue and seeks the number of her picture.

"'Where the Blackberries Grow—John Shirley.' I was sure of it," she murmurs, and looks again at the picture.

A field in which there are quantities of wild flowers, tall, beautifully coloured grasses, and bushes laden with ripe berries. In the midst of the blackberry bushes stand a boy and girl. The former is busily picking berries, and his face is averted; the latter is a charming little figure in a calico slip and a small, pink sun-bonnet pushed back from a fair baby face, the pouting lips deeply stained with blackberry juice. A mass of gold coloured curls falls over the childish brow.

A fellow artist has joined Shirley.

"Mrs. Seaton and her daughter appear to be admiring your picture, Shirley," he says. "Come, let me introduce you. Mrs. Seaton is a charming woman."

"And the young girl is her daughter?" says Shirley, as they move away.

"Yes, but she will never be the lovely woman that her mother is," is the reply, and Shirley smiles.

Some hours later Mrs. Seaton sits before her dressing-room fire. There is an unusual quickening of her languid pulse. In the leaping heart of the fire she sees mirrored all the years since she and Shirley gathered blackberries in the acre field, one summer day long ago. How faithfully he had reproduced the scene in his painting!

The picture in the fire shifts a little; still the fields with its wild flowers and its laden bushes, but a young

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man and maiden replace the boy and baby girl. Back from the long past there comes to Eleanor Seaton the ecstasy of that unforgotten day.

But the picture has faded from the fire, and another replaces it. A wedding party: the bride, young and fair of face, and white as her bridal robes; and the bridegroom—not the boyish young lover, but a middle-aged, cynical looking man. Her youth and her innocence had caught his fancy; and she had bartered herself for his gold; sacrificed truth and, as she but too soon realised, happiness also. But she had soon learned the lesson many a woman had learned before her—to hide her aching heart beneath a smiling face. Girlhood, happiness—her own hand had slain them. With the coming of her child something like peace had crept into her heart.

Then Seaton died, and she was once more free. Of her young lover she heard nothing. She knew that he had left the old farm, that he had gone abroad to study art. Now, after all these years, they met again. The farmer's son had become a well-known artist. A grey-haired man replaced the lover of her youth.

The pictures of the past have died in the leaping flames. Other scenes are mirrored there, and hope paints them.

"What? Not dressed yet!" exclaimed a fresh, girlish voice. "Have you forgotten that Mr. Shirley and Mr. Halwell are coming to dinner, mamma?"

With dreamy eyes Eleanor Seaton turns and smiles up into the fair face of her young daughter. The girl wears a simple white gown. She is very girlish and very sweet.

"Oh, mamma! How lovely you are!" Ray exclaims, later, as her mother enters the drawing-room in a beautiful rose pink gown which is exceedingly becoming to her dazzlingly fair skin and pale gold hair. And Eleanor Seaton's cheeks softly flush and her eyes grow radiant. She is glad for the first time in many years that she is beautiful.

How swiftly the days and the weeks and the months glide by after that night! Shirley is a frequent visitor at the home of Mrs. Seaton. Then, when the summer comes, Eleanor Seaton has a fancy to visit the old farm.

The artist follows her and her daughter. One evening Eleanor stands at the old farm-house door. The air is full of the perfume of roses. The sky is crimson and gold. The woman's face is beautiful with the soft radiance of a love dream.

Then Ray comes towards her through the roses. The girl's face is flushed, her eyes droop. She moves slowly to her mother's side.

"Where have you been, dear?" the latter asks, wondering a little at the change in the girl's face.

"To the blackberry field," the girl replies. "I went with Mr. Shirley; he wished to show me the scene of his painting. Oh, mother," and the girl's arms go about her mother's neck, "he loves me—can you imagine it? He wants me for his wife, and I—I am so happy."

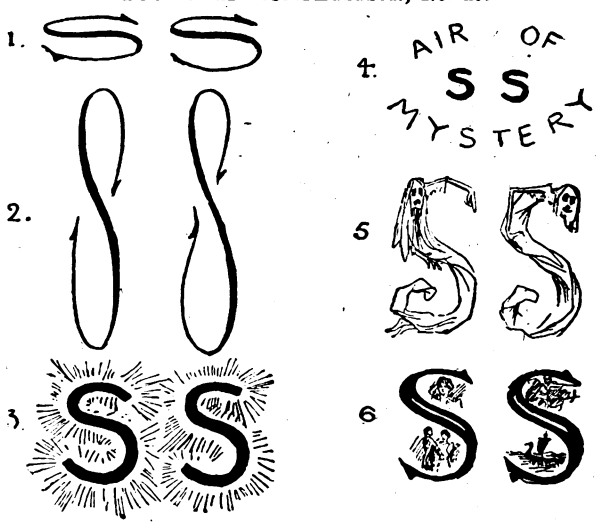
There is a silence for some moments. Then Eleanor Seaton lifts the sweet face from her breast, and presses her lips to her daughter's flushed cheek.

"I am very glad, dear, that you are happy," she murmurs.

The sunset glow has faded from the sky, leaving it pale and cold and grey. Eleanor shivers in the warm, perfumed air. Her eyes, to which all the old weariness has returned, look past the brown head of the girl towards the field "where the blackberries grow."

Emma Howard Wight.

POST-CARD COMPETITION, No. 17.



The pairs of letters shown above indicate by their formation the character of the short stories found in *S.S.* For example, **S S** would signify "Thick Short Stories." A guinea is offered to the reader who first sends to these offices a post-card containing the solution of this puzzle. Readers should put the numbers in tabular order, and the sort of story against each, *commencing with number six*, and going backwards. Another guinea will be sent to the reader living a greater distance than 100 miles from London under the same conditions. *Post-cards only, please.*

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION, No. 16.

Mr. C. F. Adams, of 9, Fitzalan Street, Kennington Road, S.E., secures the London guinea this week; while the provincial guinea is divided between Miss B. Thorn, 19, Furnace Lane, Aston, Birmingham, and Mr. A. Clayton, 226, Wheeler Street, Aston, Birmingham.

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION, No. 14.

£5 has been sent to Mr. H. H. Harrod, 7, Dingwall Avenue, Croydon, S.E., who was the only competitor who succeeded in correctly solving this jumbled story. Attempts forwarded by the following readers contained only one mistake, and a sovereign each goes to Mr. H. P. Wright, 72, Evelina Road, Nunhead, S.E.; Miss Rosina Adams, 2, Ironfield Lane, Stonehaven, N.B.; Mr. W. Spencer, 8, Bettridge Road, Hurlingham; Mr. E. Beardsley, 31, Ponsonby Place, Westminster; and Mr. E. J. Milner, 26, Rosebank Crescent, Leeds.

KEY.

22	5	62	99	39	90	69	83	85
1	37	19	97	31	64	17	27	100
30	10	42	41	43	93	88	79	52
81	21	54	20	2	75	24	32	70
92	96	98	101	45	60	72	102	66
4	29	68	77	8	89	50	57	95
84	36	23	63	25	74	55	73	87
35	82	18	38	34	33	51	104	65
14	103	86	47	44	48	53	7	
94	80	40	26	12	59	78	61	
9	71	11	46	28	58	91	56	
13	67	16	15	3	49	6	76	

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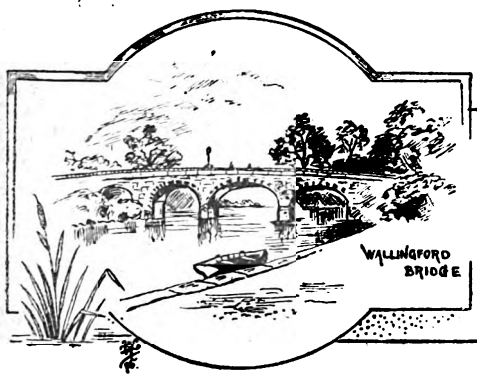
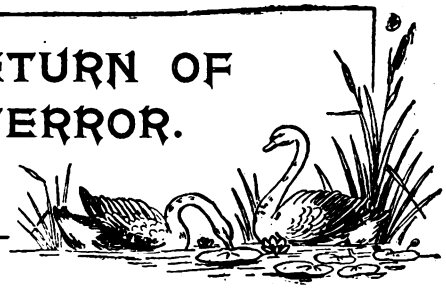


THE RETURN OF THE TERROR.



THE people who live in Jenkins' Rents are about as poor as they well can be; but the establishment at the corner, which ministers to their necessities in the way of liquid refreshment, boasts every modern improvement. There are little compartments all round the bar, divided off by mahogany partitions, each compartment with a swing door of its own, and its particular name in white letters on stained glass.

A man with close-cropped hair stood outside, one afternoon, with an expression of lost bewilderment on his by no means handsome countenance. He looked at the swing doors one by one, as if in doubt which to enter, and finally pushed his way into one which, by putting itself at the end of the public-house front, had taken an air of semi-privacy.

He found himself alone in the compartment, with a glimpse of other customers across the bar, in their pens at the other side, and waited till a frizzy-headed damsel came round to his part of the counter. She listened with a weary expression for his order, economising her animation for more showy customers.

The visitor cleared his throat.

"Is old Blazer in?" he asked, leaning forward, with his elbow on the mahogany counter; and the girl opened her eyes.

"Who?"

"Old Blazer, the boss?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know who you mean. Our proprietor's name's Smith."

The barmaid turned away as she spoke to serve three-pennyworth of rum to a lady with a hoarse voice, at the other side of the bar; and the man who had asked the question was preparing slowly to leave the place, when a shrill voice came from the next compartment:

"Blazer's been dead this five year. Died suddent of 'perplexy, and his wife sold the business to these ere people."

The stranger grunted an acknowledgment and cleared his throat again.

"D' yer happen to know what's become of a young person as used to live in the Rents 'ere, o' the name o' Bet Pawkins?" he asked, addressing the query to the mahogany wall which divided him from his unseen informant.

There was no immediate answer; but peering round the end of the partition by the counter came the white, wrinkled face of an old woman. She stared through bleared eyes at the stranger for a minute or two, and then burst into a cackling laugh.

"Why, bless us!" she cried, "it's Jim the Terror come back. How long 'ave yer been out, Jim?"

"Came out to-day," said Jim, his voice sounding not very friendly. "Where's Bet?"

The hag cackled again, wrinkling her hideous old face into new furrows.

"Oh! Bet's bin gone long ago. She won't have nothin' to do with yer now."

Necks were being craned and heads stretched round partitions. A general interest was awakened among the customers in the story which was being unfolded before them.

A man who had heard the old hag's cry of recognition hurried round to Jim the Terror's compartment to greet an old friend; but the man had no eyes for him. He was looking with a stern, set face into the bleared eyes of his informant.

"What d'ye mean?" he asked hoarsely. "Where d'ye reckon my Bet's gone to?"

"Oh! I don't know. She went off with a quarryman, and married him, about six months after you were nabbed. Lawks! that's seven year ago—ain't it? You got a 'tenner.' I suppose you're out on ticket?"

The man had been staring at her all the while she spoke. Now he answered excitedly, catching at the bony hand which she stretched at him.

"Now I remember yer, old Mother Guzzlefoot, and I knew yer for the worst liar in Jenkins' Rents. But I'll teach yer not to tell lies about my Bet!"

He shook his fist in her face,

"S'elp me, it's no lie!" cried the old woman with energy, as she shrank back behind the partition. "Betty Pawkins has married a respectable man from up North, who knew her before she came to London, or took up with you!"

There was a ring of indignant sincerity in her voice, and the Terror's face turned a queer yellow-white.

"Where did she go to with him?" he asked.

"Back to where she lived when she was a gal, if yer know where that is."

The man returned no thanks for the information; but turned to go, jostling roughly aside the man who had come round to renew an old friendship. At the door he paused, and shouted over the partition to the old woman:

"Well, if you meet Betty Pawkins before I do, which ain't likely, you can tell her I am out of quod, and I'll never rest till I'm even with her for forgetting me. D'ye hear?"

He struck open the swing-doors as he finished, and stamped out into the street with a look on his face which explained the nickname they had given him in Jenkins' Rents—Jim the Terror.

* * * * *

Nearly two weeks after Jim the Terror's return from

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gaol, a woman was kneeling at the edge of a stone-quarry in Yorkshire, looking down the precipitous side.

From behind a man approached her stealthily. He was dusty and travel-stained, but there was no sign of weariness in the step with which he crept forward. His face was rigid and pale through his brownness; his eyes gleamed. The moment had arrived for which he had come on foot all the way from London. All the way his heart had been consumed by the one desire for revenge, now the desire was about to be satisfied.

For the man creeping forward was Jim the Terror, of Jenkins' Rents, and the woman was Betty Pawkins, who had given him up, as soon as he was safely in prison, to marry another man. All those years in gaol he had looked forward to seeing Betty when he came out; and to find that she had deserted him turned in one moment all his eagerness into a passion for revenge.

He had travelled to her native place on foot to satisfy it; he had inquired in the village, and following the direction given him, had come upon her kneeling at the very edge of the quarry. It was as if Fortune had tried to make matters as easy as possible for him. He had but to approach her carefully, seize her arms, while he explained what he was going to do, and then throw her down without anybody being the wiser. It was almost too easy; but he had no intention of losing the chance.

He was close upon her, when suddenly the woman gave a scream. But she did not turn her face, and it was quite clear that she was not aware of the Terror's presence.

Why did she scream? Jim's curiosity was aroused, and he crept to the edge to look down, without touching her.

Below him, half-way down the almost precipitious side of the quarry, a little fellow of five or six, who had evidently slipped from where the woman was standing, hung desperately to a jutting-out block of stone. Below him was a sheer descent of thirty feet, and it seemed as though the child's little strength must soon be exhausted, and he fall and be killed.

Jim the Terror took in the position at a glance. A foot above the boy's head was a narrow ledge on which the boy could rest in safety till help arrived, if he could but reach it. But it was quite impossible for him to reach it by himself; it would be easier for Jim to get to it, sliding down the steep rock, and helping himself on his way by means of jutting edges.

There must have been a soft place somewhere in his heart for children, for the sight of the lad's danger took all thought of his revenge quite out of his mind.

Without even a look at the woman whom he had been about to kill, he crawled over the edge of the precipice, and began to descend carefully.

In less than five minutes he was on the ledge, which was almost a foot and a half wide, and lying full length on it had reached down and grasped the just relaxing arm of the youngster. In another minute the boy was sitting on the ledge at his side. Then, for the first time, he looked up into the strained white face of the woman above him.

"Run and fetch some men and a rope," he shouted; and the woman disappeared.

The boy seemed to realise his danger only when he heard the words, and he began to whimper.

Jim soothed him roughly.

"None of that, you young imp!" he said. "You're all right now. We've only got to wait till they bring us a rope."

The boy stared at him.

"Where's mother gone?" he whimpered.

"Who?"

"Mother—she's gone away. Where has she gone?"

Jim did not reply; but after a little pause, he said:

"Oh! that's yer mother, is it?"

"Yes."

The youngster stared at him with wide-open eyes.

"And what's your name?"

"Charlie."

"Well, Charlie, how would you like to lose yer mother—eh?—and never see her again?"

The boy began to whimper again, and there was another silence while they sat side by side on the narrow ledge of the rock. Then Jim the Terror went on with his catechism.

"Nice home have you got—eh?"

Charlie nodded.

"Got a good father?"

Another nod.

"Come, speak out," said the man; and as he went on talking, the youngster found his tongue and prattled away merrily, looking up with a smile every now and then into the rough face bent over him. "Does your mother ever talk about London, and what she used to do there?" Jim asked; and little Charlie, who was growing cheerful again under this examination, answered readily:

"Oh, yes; she talks about big London sometimes," he said with his childish lisp. "But not often; and she looks so sad when she does. She used to live there, and was so poor, she hadn't no bread even; and if daddy hadn't found her, and brought her home with him, she would have died with having nothing to eat. Wasn't it awful?"

He looked at his big companion for a reply, and this time Jim could only imitate him and nod.

The child ran on, telling the story, no doubt, word for word as he had heard it.

"And wasn't it kind of daddy to go all the way to London to find mother, and to save her when she was starving?"

He waited for an answer, and again the Terror nodded.

It was quite a relief to him after this questioning to hear voices and find that the help he had sent the woman for was come. There were two men looking over the edge of the quarry, and letting down a rope. He tied it round the boy first.

"You'd better let it down, and I'll steady it!" he shouted.

It was easy enough to get out of the quarry at the other side, once a person was safe at the bottom of it. In less than ten minutes Jim and Charlie were together on firm ground, walking hand in hand towards the quarry opening. They reached it before the people from the top could do so. The Terror lifted the boy in his arms then, and rather shamefacedly gave him a hug.

"Good-bye, old man," he said hoarsely. "Yer mother'll be here in a minute for you."

But the boy hung on to his hand, unwilling to let him go.

"Won't you come home to tea? Mother would be ever so glad!" he said.

Jim shook himself free, however, and answered, with a grin smile:

"I don't think she would, youngster. No, I'll go my way, and let yer mother go hers;" and the next moment he disappeared round a projecting rock, as the child's mother came in sight. H. F.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SOCIAL STAB.

"HERE, what the devil!" began Braetoun savagely. Then, crushing down the ignoble thought: "Ah, that pain again. Talking to her," he continued, with a feeble little laugh, "about me?"

"Perhaps so, my lord," said the woman drily. "Shall I stay here at the window?"

"Eh? No, of course not. Yes, stay and tell me. Is he still talking to her?"

"Yes, my lord, very impressively."

"Humph! Pills and potions, and all that confounded stuff. Why the deuce doesn't he go? I hate all this underhanded business of talking about a man behind his back."

The nurse sighed.

"Here, what the deuce do you mean by pumping out sighs like that?"

"Did I sigh, my lord?"

"Yes, you did sigh, my lady. What about? Because the doctor's gone?"

"Oh, my lord!"

"Not in love with him, are you?"

"Oh, my lord, you shouldn't speak to me like that."

"I shall speak as I like. I believe you are. You good-looking, dark-eyed women are not above taking a fancy to people. Anything between you two?"

"Oh, my lord, for shame!"

"Oh, my lady, for shame," said Braetoun mockingly. "It is that, isn't it? That's why you sighed."

"I sighed because I was sorry for your lordship, that was all."

"Gammon! I know better."

"Indeed, my lord, you are wrong."

"Now, then, out with the truth. I've watched you, my lady. You are a bit taken with him, eh? You like him just a little, eh?"

"I like him very much as a medical man, my lord, but in no other way."

"Don't believe you. Here, hasn't that brougham gone? I didn't hear the wheels."

"No, my lord. Doctor Murray is still talking to her ladyship."

"What about?" cried Braetoun impatiently. "What can they have to say?"

The nurse tightened her lips and was silent, while Braetoun fidgeted about on the couch.

"Gone?" he said at last.

"No, my lord; they are still talking."

"Look here; he's giving her all kinds of instructions, and I won't have her interfere. You are to see to everything I require, and I will not have matters taken out of your hands. You hear me?"

"Yes, my lord, you may depend upon my doing my duty."

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"Ah, at last. Tell her not to disturb me. I think I shall have a nap."

"That was not Dr. Murray's carriage, my lord, but another one passing."

"But they are not talking still at the carriage door?"

"Yes, my lord, but Dr. Murray is saying good-bye now. He has again taken her ladyship's hand."

"Humph! He didn't take mine," muttered Braetoun "Hang him! I say," he continued, with all the childish petulance of one still weak from a long illness, "how long is he going to keep her talking there?"

The nurse drew a long, deep breath, and Braetoun turned to her angrily.

"Look here! what the deuce is the matter with you?—why do you keep on sighing like that?"

"I—I beg your pardon, my lord," faltered the woman.

"Don't beg my pardon: don't do it," he cried. "Well, is he gone?"

"No, my lord."

"D——n!"

"But he is moving away now, my lord. No; it was for the footman to open the door, and he is helping her ladyship to alight."

"Humph! Deuced civil and polite. Better be off to his patients. Ah, there's the bell. Somebody ought to have been at the door."

The nurse came away from the window and walked softly to the fireplace, took a bottle of scent from the mantelpiece, and sprinkled a little about the couch.

"Don't do that," he cried irritably.

"It will help to calm you, my lord, for your sleep. You are tired now."

"No, I'm not. Not in the least. And do stand still. How am I to hear my wife come upstairs?"

She drew back, and he lay listening for some little time, and then with his face twitching he cried:

"Why, she can't have come in. Go to the window and look."

"I beg your pardon, my lord. I heard her ladyship come in and go upstairs."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so? But, go upstairs without coming in here first? Nonsense! Open that door."

The nurse obeyed, and the convalescent lay listening till footsteps were heard overheard.

"Her ladyship has gone up to take off her things, I think, my lord."

"Confound what you think! There, shut that door. That's better. But don't look at me in that way. What's the matter? I don't look worse, do I?"

"Your lordship looks very careworn and troubled," said the woman in a low, sympathetic voice. "Pray let me bathe your forehead with a little of this scent."

"Then I do look worse," he cried, with a sudden catching

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of the breath; and he made a snatch at the hand which held the scent-bottle.

"No, no, no, my lord. Don't think that," she said in a pitying way. "Indeed, you only look troubled," and she sighed again.

"Look here," he said angrily. "You're thinking something. You're keeping something back. What is it?"

"Don't, don't pinch my arm like that, my lord, you hurt me."

"Curse you! and you're hurting me. Look here, I can read you. You're keeping something back, I tell you; what is it? You were sighing just now. What was that about?"

"Oh, nothing, my lord—only, perhaps, because I was sorry for you."

"Then you think I'm worse?"

"Indeed, indeed. I don't, my lord. Pray loose my arm."

"Then what is it? Curse you! Will you speak?"

"I musn't—I daren't, my lord."

"And I say you shall. Do you hear me? I say you shall."

"Oh, my lord, my lord," cried the woman in a frightened whisper, "you must not, indeed, you must not give way to passion like this. It is so bad for you—it is, indeed."

"Then speak out, and tell me what you were thinking, or, curse you, I'll have a fit."

"I dare not, indeed, I dare not," she whispered. "I must not tell you."

"You shall," he cried, holding her now with both hands, while she made a feeble show of trying to get away. "Will you speak?"

"Indeed, indeed, I dare not, my lord," she sobbed now. "It is nothing—only a fancy of mine. I mustn't tell you. Don't, pray, force it from me, because I know it's wrong, and you'll have me turned out of the house in disgrace for saying it."

"Whether I do or no, you shall speak," he cried. "Now then, what was it?"

She sank upon her knees by the couch and held up her clasped hands as he still held her.

"Don't, pray don't make me speak, my lord. It's cruel to me. It was only a wicked thought or two that came into my head."

"What was it?" he growled fiercely.

"Must—must I speak?"

"Yes, and at once. Curse you, I'll half kill you if you don't."

"But you'll drive me away for saying it, and I can't afford to make enemies, my lord."

"Out with it," he cried, as he gripped her as hard as his weakness would allow. "Now."

"It—it was only that—that I thought—oh, pray, pray don't make me say it, my lord."

"Speak out, curse you, you jade!"

"That—that her ladyship oughtn't—oughtn't to talk so much—to Doctor Murray, and you lying ill and helpless."

"You—you thought that?" he said fiercely.

"Ye—yes, my lord. I couldn't help it. I often felt so—in the long, dark nights when you were insensible. It was very wicked of me, but it was when I was extra tired, perhaps, and felt so sorry for you to be lying there."

He let her arms go free, and lay back gazing at her with a peculiar, stony aspect.

"There—there," she sobbed, as she wiped her eyes. "You made me say it, my lord, and now you're going to punish me."

"Hold your tongue," he said. "Get up. No, don't go away. Sit down in that chair."

She obeyed, and seemed to be trembling.

"You noticed that, did you?" he said in a husky whisper.

"Yes, my lord," she faltered.

"And a good deal more?"

"Oh, don't, pray don't make me say anything else," she whispered.

"I'll make you say everything I wish," he snarled. "Now then, out with it. I want to know the whole truth. Now tell me everything you saw."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Emsworth Makes Mischief.

"Ah, Mr. Emsworth!" said Murray, rising, as Rancer showed in the bearer of that name one morning, "I'm very glad to see you."

"Don't seem like it," said Emsworth surlily. "Haven't been near me for over a month. But it's the old story: a rich man has no friends."

Murray smiled sadly.

"I was in hopes that though rich men have no friends, this was meant as a friendly visit—but I see you are ill."

"D—n bad, my dear boy. Don't take any notice of my surly words, only you should have come to see me. But there, I know you've too many *miserables* to attend to as it is. Well, how are you?"

Murray laughed pleasantly.

"Pretty well worked to death, sir. But let's hear how you are, and see what I can do?"

"Oh, you can't do anything. It isn't a case for pills, unless it's blue pills made of lead instead of quicksilver. My complaint's brain, and a local application of that kind is the only thing that would put me right."

"Indeed! and what about your daughter?"

"Hah! There you have me on the hip," said Emsworth with a weary sigh. "But I often wonder why I have passed a life of slavery to make money, only to find that the position I've won is all thorns. Mustn't make hers worse, though, poor child. I dare say I shall get some rest in the next world, for I'm having plenty of punishment for my sins in this. But don't quite cut me. Come and see me a bit more. You always do me good; you do, indeed."

"Well, I will try and be more sociable. It is not out of unkindness or a wish to be neglectful."

"Oh, I know that," said Emsworth, fidgeting about in his chair; and Murray waited with a strange sensation of misery troubling him, knowing full well as he did that Emsworth must have some bad news to communicate—news which would affect him as much as its bearer. At last it came.

"Seen the Braetouns lately?"

"Yes. I have been there twice during the past week. Braetoun sent for me. Return of his old complaint."

"His nature's all unscrewed," cried Emsworth passionately, and he brought his fist down heavily upon the table. "There's no fairness in it all. Here's a fine, healthy fellow in one case, with eight or nine young children and a wife, gets cut off, and those he has to leave behind him, without a shilling; and on the other side, men like Braetoun, a mere shadow of a man, to go on living, injuring everyone about him. By George, what a blessing it would be if he would only die!"

The old man was silent, and the pause grew painful.

Murray broke the silence by saying the words that came uppermost, but repented speaking the next moment.

"Have you seen Lady Braetoun lately?"

"No; he comes between us like a blight. I can't go near them, because if I do it's a misery. I see things which make me boil over, and then, poor child, she takes his part. She thinks me hard and harsh, and I'm better away."

The stream had begun to run now, and Emsworth went on as if it was an intense relief to take someone into his confidence.

"It's of no use to be mealy mouthed; he's a scoundrel, a heartless scoundrel. Anyone would have thought, after the way in which Olive forgave him, and nursed him through his long illness, he would have turned over a new leaf. She behaved like an angel to him, and in return he tramples upon her best feelings, and I believe he would throw her over altogether, if it was not for the hope of getting hold

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of my money when I die. But he shan't, not a penny. I'll —I'll leave it to you."

"For Heaven's sake, don't," cried Murray. "I thought you wished to call me your friend."

"Well," said the old man, staring, "can't one leave a friend a few thousand?"

"Not this one," said Murray, smiling. "I have a good income, sir, so long as I work, and work is my greatest relief. Don't do anything to make me feel that I can be idle."

"I shall do as I like with my own," said Emsworth sulkily.

"Do so, by all means, but please don't mention money to me again."

"Very well. Then I'll build a church, or endow a hospital. I can't go and spend it, for I've lost all taste for enjoyment of any kind. Oh, it's maddening. He has thrown off every feeling of shame or compunction now, and carries it all off openly. He's hardly ever at home — always at Brompton or his place in Surrey with that cursed Delilah. It all began again after that unlucky journey from Brighton. I've done everything I could to stop it—bribery and corruption—ah, it didn't want any of the last. Plenty of that, eh? But it is no good. I give you my word of honour that I've been and seen the girl—there. I called her a Delilah—I beg her pardon. Poor little wench! I don't believe there's anything more in her than a genuine liking for that scoundrel. I've appealed to her and her old aunt over and over again. I've offered them any amount they liked to name to go right away. The aunt is always on my side, and told me that if I'd allow her niece a hundred a year she should go right away, and never see Braetoun again. So I've had a quiet, kind, fatherly talk with the little thing.

"I never said a bullying, unkind word, but regularly appealed to her, telling her about what I felt for my child, and pointing out the cruelty of the position. Then I thought I'd got her, for she seems a tender-hearted little thing, and she began to cry. I told her what her aunt had said, and that I thought a hundred a year was too little. So I would allow her two hundred and fifty a year, and give her at once a set of handsome diamonds. But I might as well have offered her nothing, for she only shook her head. Then I doubled it, and she said, 'Don't ask me, sir; I can't, I can't.'"

Murray sat with his head resting on his hand, listening, his eyes half closed, and Emsworth went on.

"I went away in a rage, but within a week I was back, for I'd been to Chester Square and seen the poor, white face and strained eyes there, and I felt that I must make any sacrifice for her sake. So, right or wrong, I went back, and the little thing—by George, Murray, she'd have made a good woman if she'd come into the world differently—she met me with a little, sad smile, and as soon as we were sitting down together she began at me, with the tears running: 'It's of no use, Mr. Emsworth,' she said, 'I can't, I can't.' 'Wait a moment, my dear,' I said, 'and hear what I've got to say'; and, old fool as I am, I offered her a thousand a year—and I'd have paid it to secure Olive's happiness. But as soon as the girl heard it she laughed, and her eyes seemed to sparkle through her tears. 'I don't want money, Mr. Emsworth,' she said. 'I loved him, and he loved me, before he ever saw you and yours, and I wouldn't give him up for millions.' There, I don't care, law or no law, Murray, if I could only get her to consent, I'd take my girl off to Africa, and Braetoun should never see her again. But she wouldn't listen to me, poor child, and my hands are tied. I did say something to her one day, and there was such a look of horror in her eyes that I shall never dare to speak so to her again."

Emsworth took out his handkerchief to wipe his face, and sat gazing at Murray's wrinkled brow the while.

"Then there's this miserable horse-racing, too. The devil always seems to do his best for the greatest scoundrels. He has been having a regular run of luck lately with that mare of his, Bella Donna. Hah! Poison, and no mistake! But it's found him in funds, and made him a bit independent, so he hasn't sent my poor girl begging to me."

The old man stopped short, and then laughed in a curious manner.

"I was laughing at the queer way in which things turn out. Remember my bringing Olive here? Hah! That was a nice piece of advice of yours, my boy, to take her on that voyage. Pretty day's work, too, to send that scoundrel with us."

"For Heaven's sake, don't reproach me with that," cried Murray, in so agonised a tone of voice that the old man was startled.

"Oh, no, I don't reproach you, my lad," he said, laying his hand upon the other's shoulder. "We can't see what's going to happen. You gave me good advice, and there's no fighting against fate. But it was a sad business for all of us, and I know you've suffered as much as I."

"Heaven knows I have," said Murray in a hollow voice which startled Emsworth.

"Thank you, my lad, thank you," said the old man, taking his hand. "I know you have; I know you have. There isn't a doctor in London who could have done me so much good as you have this morning. It's too bad of me to come pouring out my woes to you, but you've been a good fellow to me, Murray, and I'm not blind. I've seen for long enough the tender, brotherly feeling you've felt towards my child. Braetoun was your old school-fellow and patient, but you wouldn't have given up your time and worked for him as you did over his accident if it hadn't been for my poor darling. Do you know what she says?"

Murray raised his eyes and looked at the speaker in a startled way.

"She says she is sure that Braetoun would have died again and again if it hadn't been for you But there, I'm wasting your time, and I'll go. God bless you, my dear boy. Come and dine with me to-night."

Murray shook his head.

"Well, to-morrow, then?"

"Don't press me, Mr. Emsworth. I'll come and see you soon. There, I can promise no more."

"Always welcome," said the old man, shaking hands warmly; and when he was gone the Doctor sat gazing straight before him at vacancy, pondering on his visitor's words respecting his brotherly affection for Olive.

"Was he sincere?" he thought, "or does he read me through and through?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Murray Goes Mad.

But it's a long lane that has no turning. Braetoun's mare had been making a fortune for him, and Vinniss, who saved his winnings, grew more independent and insulting to his employer, who was dependent, for he spent his. Sam, the weedy son's riding, had carried all before it, and presuming upon his run of success, Braetoun determined upon a grand *coup*, made his stroke, and, to use his own expression, "came a cropper."

That night he went home looking ghastly, and literally raged against his wife for some trivial little omission, swore at her, and told her she was the curse of his life. Then as Olive was feeling that her misery was greater than she could bear, her reviler suddenly broke down, staggered, and would have fallen but for her willing arms guiding him into a lounge.

Then the imploring message reached Murray once more, and at an unlucky time, for in spite of all self-control, his passion had broken away after a visit to Eaton Place, where he had heard from Emsworth what had happened.

He was walking up and down his room after trying to calm himself for the visit by taking a dose of the drug he used, but it had lost its old effect.

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He shuddered, and stood gazing blankly before him, not daring to repeat in words what it might mean.

But he was himself again directly.

Rancer had tapped and entered, to say a cab was at the door, and Murray looked calm and stern enough as his servant helped him on with his coat, and he stepped into the vehicle to have himself driven swiftly to Chester Square.

"Is that Doctor Murray?" cried a voice, as he went upstairs; and there stood Olive, looking, as he thought, more beautiful than ever, with her mild, appealing eyes gazing at him as the one friend who could bring her help, and a thrill ran through him as she caught his hands in hers, and cried, with a sob of relief:

"I thought you so long. He is worse than ever—one of those terrible fits. Pray—pray come."

She was quite right. Braetoun was worse than ever. He had, in spite of endless warnings that he must be very cautious in the use of stimulants, flown to brandy, and then to the French liqueur, as soon as he knew the extent of his losses, and the result has been shown.

Then followed the old miserable business of the fight with the wild delirium, which finally gave way to Murray's remedy and skill, and Braetoun sank into a heavy stupor, looking more dead than alive.

They were alone in the sick man's room, and the house was very still, for the clock had just struck three, and the weary servants, no longer alarmed by these attacks, had gone to rest. Olive, who, from old experience, had been able to read the changes which had taken place, knew that the crisis had passed, and sank upon her knees by the bed, while Murray, who all through the weary hours had been maddened by her presence, the touch of her hands, and the intoxicating perfume of her hair, as she helped him to calm the delirious man, and at times even hold him down, stood watching her, till she rose with a faint smile trembling on her lip.

"I can't speak to you now," she said. "Wait a little. Go down to the drawing-room. You are quite exhausted. There is a tray there. The servants will have taken one up. Please go down."

"And you?" he said in a whisper. "You are utterly worn out. You must come down, too."

"No, no; he must not be left," she cried appealingly.

"Yes; he will sleep now for hours. The danger is past, and he will not hurt. You must rest now."

"I could not sleep, indeed, and I can rest here."

"Then I must fetch you some refreshment. You are paler than ever, and look ready to faint."

"I cannot have you waiting on me," she replied, with a faint smile. "I will come down. But are you sure that he can be left?"

"You know now as well as I," he said quietly. "We have gone through all this wretched business before."

"Yes," she said, with a weary sigh, and laying her hand upon his arm they passed out of the chamber together, and down the silent staircase into the dim, calm, and peaceful drawing-room, where, upon a side table, there stood tea, coffee, spirits, and a kettle just simmering over a gas jet.

Olive hurried to the table as soon as the door closed behind them, turned up the gas, and proceeded to make tea, while Murray took a turn up and down the dimly lighted room, and then threw himself into a chair, turning his face towards the shade, but listening intently to every movement she made, the click of the china, and the rustle of her dress.

Then he shivered, for the rustle of the silk came closer, and he looked up with a start, to find that she was bending over him.

"How tired and worn you look, Doctor! The tea will be ready in a minute," she said gently. "I could not speak upstairs; I should have broken down and cried like a child. I can tell you now—what I wanted to say—that—that——"

In spite of her words the tears gushed to her eyes, brimmed over, she burst into a passionate fit of sobbing, and covered her face with her hands, as Murray sprang to his feet and caught her in his arms.

"Don't, for God's sake, don't give way like that," he cried wildly. "I cannot bear to see you suffer. It is too horrible."

For a moment she did not shrink, but went on sobbing hysterically. Then with a start of surprise, as he pressed her closer to his breast, she drew back, but he retained her hands.

"Don't shrink from me," he whispered; and the words which had been kept back so long came rapidly and full of passion. "You don't know, you cannot tell all I have suffered for your sake."

"Yes, I know, I know," she said in a startled way, but as if not quite realising, not willing to believe herself. "You have been so patient, so kind. You have saved his life again and again. We can never thank you enough. But come, now you need rest and refreshment."

"Saved his life!" he said wildly; "and for what? Do you think I am blind and deaf to everything? There have been hours when in my misery and despair I have been ready to end my own. Olive, from the first time we met I have loved you with all a strong man s first passionate love. I have gone through a year of madness, realising first how it was impossible that you could listen to me, then ready to rejoice that you were going to be happy in the love of the man you chose, and gradually awakening to the fact that I had stood by and seen you brought to misery, wretchedness and despair. No, no, don't, in Heaven's name!" he cried angrily, as with a quick movement he drew her tightly, more tightly to his breast, while she pressed her hands against his shoulder and forced herself away, trembling, scared, and horrified at his declaration, and with her eyes wildly dilated as she gazed in his, but, utterly helpless as she felt her position, unable to utter a word.

"I cannot, it is impossible to tell you all I have gone through in my ever-growing love. I, who would have died to spare you pain, forced to be a witness of your misery and unhappiness, till I have reviled myself in being as it were a partner in your husband's guilt. You struggle, you thrust me from you, but you cannot be so cruel; you cannot—you who are so lonely and despairing, cast from you a love that can know no end, for I live, I breathe, only for you, and if, now I can hold back no longer, you cast me off, there is but one release from my misery, and that is death."

"Doctor!" she panted at last.

"No; your slave."

"Doctor—Doctor Murray," she cried wildly, in her vain struggle to escape. "For Heaven's sake! You must be mad!"

(To be continued.)

THE NEXT NUMBER OF

PEARSON'S MAGAZINE

Appears on the First of November.

POSTAL RATES.

SHORT STORIES will be sent direct from these offices, post free, to any country within the Postal Union, at the following rates, prepaid:

One Year	6s. 6d.
Half Year	3s. 3d.
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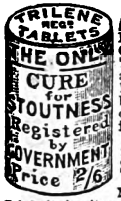

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Send 2/6 to THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.

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CURED INSTANTLY BY

BUNTER'S Prevents Decay. Saves Extraction. Sleepless Nights Prevented. Neuralgic Headache and all Nerve Pains Removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 1½d. **NERVINE**

DOUGLAS, HUNGERFORD, AND WILLIAMS.

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Jan. 2, £8 per cent., Feb. 1, £6, Mar. 1, £5, April 1, £8, May 1, £7, June 2, £10, July 1, £9, Aug. 1, £9, Sept. 2, £8, Oct. 1, £8, Nov. 1, £7, Dec. 2, £7.

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Works by hand or treadle. Guaranteed 4 years. Equal in quality and size to any machine. To ensure satisfaction, we will send machine on receipt of 5/-, C.O.D. for ONE MONTH'S TRIAL. Balance can be paid 5/- Monthly. Call or write for designs and Samples of work. **39/-**

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And Head Noises Relieved by Using Wilson's Common-Sense Ear Drums. A new scientific invention, entirely different in construction from all other devices. Assist the deaf when all other devices fail, and where medical skill has given no relief. They are safe, comfortable, and invisible; have no wire or string attachment. Write for Pamphlet. Mention this Paper.

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Ladies desiring any improvement in this direction should send me stamp for free particulars of a simple, inexpensive, harmless self-treatment, whereby a *full natural bust* can be obtained. Address, in confidence, Mrs. B. K. NORRIS, 7, Addington Crescent, York Road, London, S.E.

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A lady who has permanently destroyed Superfluous Hairs on herself, will be happy to forward free, to all similarly afflicted, full particulars of a simple, inexpensive and harmless self-treatment. Send stamped addressed envelope in confidence to Mrs. "T. D.," 87, Strand, London.

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If so, wear the "A D" Invisible Elevators (Regd.). Will increase your height up to four inches; the only approved means; detection impossible; simple, inexpensive. Send stamped envelope for particulars to the ORIENTAL TOILET CO. (B 5 Dept.), 87, Strand, London.

70

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If not, please obtain one, and send it to

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with your name and address on the back, and you will receive by next post full particulars of the most wonderful package of crockery the world has ever seen.

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1896 PROCLAMATION.

"OH, YES! REVENUES from ECONOMY are ENORMOUS."

The Richest Provision in Knowledge made absolutely easy for the Accumulation of this income. Write to Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, who will provide you with full information, posting you free (if, when writing, you mention this Paper) a large, amazingly interesting, valuable, instructive, and detailed illustrated "Pioneer" Reduction Catalogue, showing you what you can save, what to buy and where to buy Carpets, Mats, and Hearthrugs of every manufacture, including Wilton, Plush, Brussels, Velvet, Antique, Foreign, and Furs, also Queen's Royal Household, Prudential, Eclipse and Alarm Carpets and Hearthrugs (Regd.). Also Blankets, Curtains, Sheetings, etc., and a thousand other articles wanted in every household. (Copyright.)

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Trade Mark on all Goods. Beware of Imitations.

Admittedly the Cheapest in the World. *Woven without seam Altogether superior quality, with handsome border to correspond. A marvel for excellence and beauty. Thousands of Repeat Orders and Testimonials received, giving the highest satisfaction. When Ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.*

6ft. by 9ft	Sale Price.	9/6	10½ft. by 12ft.	Sale Price.	20/6
8ft. by 9ft.		11/6	12ft. by 12ft.		22/6
6ft. by 12ft.		12/6	9ft. by 15ft.		21/6
9ft. by 9ft.		13/6	12ft. by 13½ft.		25/6
9ft. by 10½ft.		15/6	12ft. by 15ft.		28/6
9ft. by 12ft.		17/6	12ft. by 18ft.		33/6
9ft. by 13½ft.		19/6	12ft. by 21ft.		38/6

A Queen Royal Hearthrug, 6ft. by 3ft., to match, 2/- extra.

SPECIAL OFFER.—Three for 5s. 9d., Six for 11s. 3d., Twelve for 22s.

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REAL BRUSSELS CARPETS

Extraordinarily Heavy, very Best Quality, Newest and Choicest Designs. In Old Gold, Sultan, Terra Cotta, Crimson, Sky, Navy, and the latest colours. With handsome border to correspond. Guaranteed to wear for years and give every satisfaction. The sizes and prices as follows (all ready for putting down):

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4½ft. by 7ft.,	11/-	VELVET PILE BRUSSELS CARPET SQUARES.	9ft. by 12ft.,	38/-
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7½ft. by 9ft.,	23/-		12ft. by 13½ft.,	59/-
9ft. by 9ft.,	28/-		12ft. by 15ft.,	69/-
9ft. by 10½ft.,	33/-		12ft. by 18ft.,	77/-

When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any colour preferred.

A Velvet Pile Rug, 6ft. by 3ft., to match, 5/6 extra.

SPECIAL OFFER.—Three Rugs, 16s.; Six, 31s.

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With Life Imitation, Natural Head combined; a most elegant and soft fur, quite equalling in style anything offered at 15/6 each, and for durability not to be surpassed. Similar to illustration.

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On receipt of this Coupon and P.O.O. or Stamps for amount, we guarantee to send goods as above (post free this week only) to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. Cash returned in full if not satisfied. (Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

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Cheques and P.O.'s payable to—
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IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE (CHANCERY DIVISION), HODGSON v. WEBB BROTHERS.—On the 18th day of July, 1890, his lordship, Mr. Justice Chitty, granted an interim injunction, restraining Messrs. Webb Brothers, of Hackney Wick, from infringing Mr. Fredk. Hodgson's Trade Mark, "Eclipse," No. 93,774 (Leeds).

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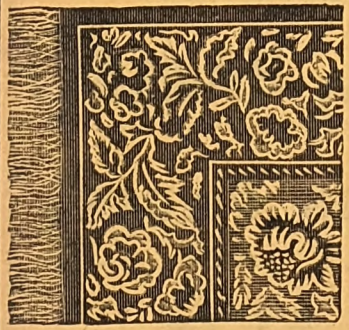

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Two Carpets and Two Rugs 8/-, or Four Carpets and Four Rugs 15/6.

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REVERSIBLE CARPETS

(Registered).

Reversible, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 12 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine on one side the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian, and on the reverse the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

REDUCED SALE PRICE.

Size.	Each.		Size.	Each.
6ft. by 9ft.	4/9	REDUCED SALE PRICE.	9ft. by 15ft.	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft.	5/11		12ft. by 12ft.	12/9
9ft. by 9ft.	7/6		12ft. by 13½ft.	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft.	8/6		12ft. by 15ft.	15/9
9ft. by 12ft.	9/6		12ft. by 18ft.	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft.	11/6		12ft. by 21ft.	22/6

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A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Regd.), to match above Carpets, sent for 1/6 extra, size 2yd. long and 1yd. wide. Special Offer, Three Hearthrugs for 4/3, or Six for 8s., or Twelve for 15/6, sterling value.

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A STORY FOR LOVERS OF THE MYSTERIOUS APPEARS ON PAGE 553.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 409. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 31ST, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

GRAND PIONEER REDUCTION SALE

By Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son, the well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement. **Super-eminent.**—The **Queen's Royal** Household **Prudential, Eclipse,** and **Alarm Carpets** and **Hearthrugs,**-to (Reg.). **Amazingly** interesting, instructive, and detailed **Grand Reduction** Catalogue post free, if, when writing, you mention this paper.

REMARKS.—A lady customer writes complaining that we send out too large a Carpet for the money. Be it so or not, we send out no Carpet measuring less than 6ft by 9ft.—even for 2s. 11d. **TEST THEM. THEY WILL SURPRISE YOU.**

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This is a wonderful step in economy.

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Reversible, with a different pattern on both sides, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 10 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine on one side the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian with on the reverse the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

	Each.		Each.
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. " " "	5/11	12ft. by 12ft. " " "	12/9
9ft. by 9ft. " " "	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft. " " "	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " "	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. " " "	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft. " " "	11/6	12ft. by 21ft. " " "	22/6

When ordering please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

"Neal Lodge, Upper Norwood, S.E., January 18th, 1896.
"The Dowr. Lady Abercromby is pleased with the 'Prudential' Carpet she ordered."

Blairquhan, Maybole, N.B., August 3rd.
Lady Hunter Blair writes: "Will Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son send her another 'Prudential' Carpet, same as before, crimson and gold, dimensions, 9ft. by 10½ft. Cheque inclosed."

A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Reg.), to match above Carpets, sent for 1s. 6d. extra, size 2 yards long, and 1 yard wide.

SPECIAL OFFER.—3 Hearthrugs for 4s. 3d.; or 6 for 8s.; or 12 for 15s. 6d.

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100,000 "ALARM" CARPETS

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Sale Price 2/11 EACH.

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Suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Bordered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as per advertisement for our goods, thus saving any Middle Profits. Remember these are Woven, not printed, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool. Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double above prices. A Rug sent with Carpet, 10d. extra.

SPECIAL OFFER. 2 Carpets and 2 Rugs ... ... 7s. 3d.
Value unequalled in the Annals of Advertising. As a favour, kindly Examine and Compare these Carpets.

"SHORT STORIES" CARPET COUPON, 31/10/96.
On receipt of this Coupon and P.O.O. or Stamps for amount, we guarantee to send goods as above to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. Cash returned in full if not satisfied.
(Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

All orders dispatched same day in rotation as they arrive by post. Cheques and P.O.'s payable to

F. HODGSON AND SON, Manufacturers, Importers, and Merchants,
WOODSLEY ROAD, LEEDS.
Telegraphic Address—"Eclipse, Leeds." Telephone No. 948.

MASON'S EXTRACT OF HERBS

For the Immediate Production of

BOTANIC BEER.

A Nine-gallon Cask of Alcoholic Beer from a Brewery will cost you 10/6, but Eight Gallons of Beer made from

Mason's EXTRACT of HERBS

Can be obtained for 6d., plus a pound or two of Sugar and a little Yeast.

THE
FINEST BEVERAGE IN THE WORLD.

Inventors and Manufacturers:
Newball & Mason,
HYSON GREEN WORKS,
Nottingham.

If unable to obtain it in your neighbourhood, send 2 stamps for sample bottle; or samples of both Wine Essence and Extract of Herbs, post free for 15 stamps.

PALATABLE SUBSTITUTE FOR COD LIVER OIL.

DEVONSHIRE CREAM.

(REALLY GENUINE.)

In Patent Air-tight Tins, ½lb., 1s. 4d.; 1lb., 2s. 4d.; 2lb., 4s. 4d., including Tin and Postage.

MRS. CONYERS, KILKHAMPTON, STRATTON, N. DEVON

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"THE NIMBLE 9D."

Great Reduction in price to 9d. per lb. in order to reduce stock, but

QUALITY GOOD AS EVER.

NEARLY 100,000 BEDS ALREADY SOLD

TO THOROUGHLY SATISFIED PURCHASERS.

NEWHAM'S LINCOLNSHIRE FEATHER BEDS

THESE BEDS are warranted doubly purified, dusted, and perfected in our own extensive factory at Boston, Lincs., made in strong linen bordered tick. The quality, sweetness, and purity of every bed guaranteed. These beds ALWAYS GIVE SATISFACTION, and many thousands of purchasers have sent us flattering testimonials and other orders for beds. Note following prices, *which are 25 per cent. less than our recently advertised prices.*

No. 1—Single Bed, Bolster and Pillow, 6ft. 3in. by 3ft. 6in., weighing 40lb. **30/-**

No. 2—Double Bed, Bolster, and Two Pillows, 6ft. 6in. by 4ft. 6in., weighing 50lb. **37/6**

No. 3—Double Bed, Bolster, and Two Pillows, 6ft. 6in. by 4ft. 6in., weighing 55lb. **41/3**

No. 4—Extra Size Bed, Bolster, and Two Pillows, 6ft. 6in. by 5ft., weighing 65lb. **48/9**

Any sized Bed only 9d. per lb., *Carriage Paid*, to any station in the United Kingdom. FEATHERS ONLY 9d. PER LB. The trade supplied. All orders must be accompanied by cheque or P.O.O. (which, as security to purchasers, may be post-dated ten days). Send for samples of Feathers and Ticks, Price Lists, etc., which will be sent *Post Free* and need not be returned. A great reduction on three or more Beds. *Please mention this paper.*

S. S. NEWHAM & CO., Boston, Lincolnshire.

"WORTH A GUINEA A BOX."

BEECHAM'S PILLS

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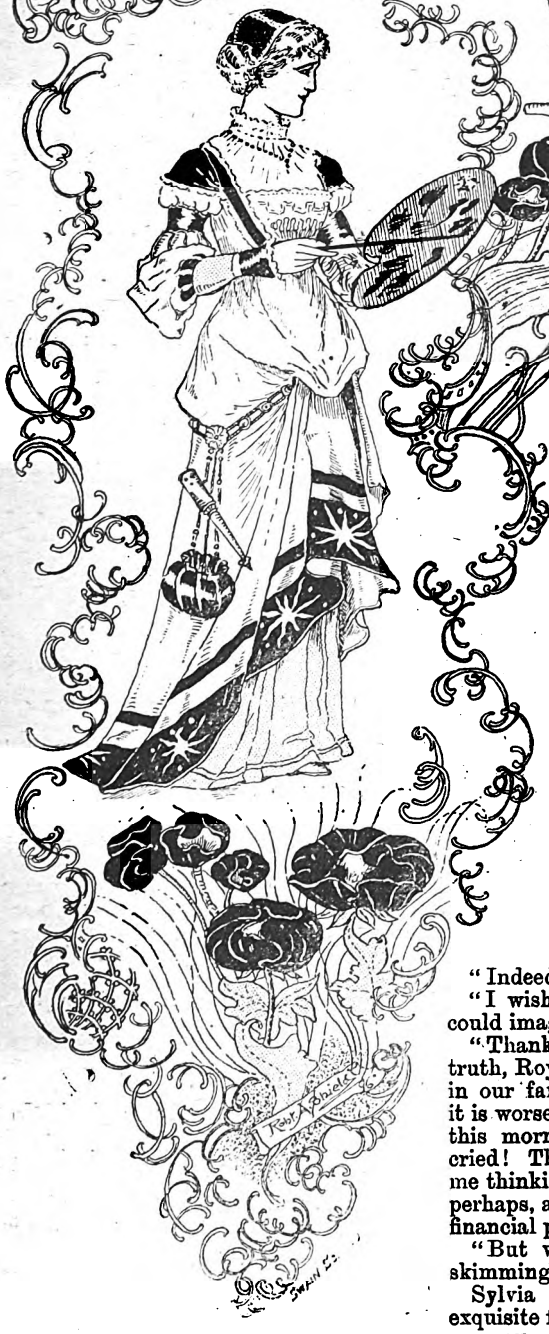
SHORT STORIES

Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 409.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending October 31st, 1896.



MRS. BLAIR.

CHAPTER I.

"HERE is the beautiful Sylvia—late as ever!"

A slender girl, in palest mauve, crossed the river lawn, and was handed into a skiff.

"We thought you were never coming," said her cousin, as he sculled her away.

"Did you?" raising her eyebrows, "and you know how I love boating. What a large picnic! Two punts, three canoes, a dinghy, and electric launch. Tell me about the people—anyone amusing?"

"Well, there's Mr. Blair."

"Point him out."

"Just in front, canoeing."

"That type of man does not appeal to me. I noticed him as we started—he stared!"

"Really! very rude, but I expect you're used to it. Many girls would rather like being stared at by Mr. Blair."

"Why?"

"He is irritatingly eligible, disgustingly rich."

"Indeed! how interesting!"

"I wish I had not told you, Sylvia; you're just the sort of girl I could imagine marrying for money."

"Thanks for the compliment to my good sense. To tell you the truth, Roy, I was born extravagant; it is a kind of hereditary disease in our family. I've nearly ruined poor papa with my debts; he says it is worse than having a son at college. There was a terrible scene this morning when my dressmaker's bill arrived; mother actually cried! They say I am driving them into the bankruptcy court. It set me thinking. Life is too short for worry, and I just dawdle on; but, perhaps, after all, marriage might be worth considering from a purely financial point of view."

"But what about love?" asked Roy, leaning on his oars, and skimming them along the surface of the water.

Sylvia bent over the side and glanced at the reflection of her exquisite features.

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"I have already succumbed to the one overruling passion of my life. I love what is real and substantial, not a dream, relying on the fitful slumbers of the emotions. I want wealth and luxury, to be envied by everyone, to see the world coveting me! Ah! you smile, but I am not joking. That is my ambition—grand, isn't it?"

Roy rowed on with vigorous strokes. Was it the rays of the sun that flushed the boy's face scarlet; or only a clearer knowledge of life than that of the speaker under her lilac sunshade?

"Perhaps," he said at last, "you had better make friends with Mr. Blair."

"Yes," she replied lightly. "I think I should like to know him."

Under the shade of island trees, Roy introduced Sylvia Holland to Hesketh Blair.

A moment later the two were drifting in a backwater, talkative and alone.

The girl was smiling sweetly, conscious that her beauty had already made an impression on the man.

Sylvia leant back lazily, one white hand dabbling in the tide, the witchery of her eyes peeping through long, brown lashes.

"You are dreaming of something pleasant," he said, after a momentary pause.

"Yes," with a low laugh—"dreams that wave before the half-shut eye. I love what is beautiful, and hate the commonplace. This is beautiful," glancing round at the summer scene, while her thoughts added, "but *you* are commonplace!"

CHAPTER II.

"WHAT a house! What a hostess! What a hall!"

The speaker gazed at the overpowering luxury of the *tout ensemble*. Mrs. Blair's friends were taking their leave, and sweeping down the marble staircase. She overheard the remark, and it pleased her well. The thin yet well shaped lips smiled. Admiration was her food—her substance, her very being.

To be beautiful, popular, successful—that comprised the essence of life, as Sylvia Blair discerned it.

"Good-night," said Roy's voice at her side. "You have had your usual triumph, Sylvia—packed rooms, and the most select crowd in London."

The carriages rolled away, the huge hall grew empty, and Sylvia Blair was left standing alone among her household gods.

She loved the dazzling setting that marriage had given her; it was good to be rich and powerful. She thought of it, and laughed softly. Until Hesketh Blair laid his fortune at her feet she had been like a leafless tree.

"What are you thinking of, Sylvia?"

She started from her reverie, and moved listlessly away.

Her husband followed her to a sofa, upon which she sank with a yawn.

"You are tired, my darling," he said softly.

Mrs. Blair shook her head.

"Oh! no, I was only wondering how I looked. This gown is very daring, but extremely Parisian."

"I never felt prouder of you in my life," he answered. "The new music-room was immensely admired. How splendidly Madame de Montesquien sang '*Il mio cuore*,' from *La Traviata*?" Sylvia turned her beautiful eyes upon her husband as she spoke. Something in his face frightened her.

"How old you are looking Hesketh," she said a trifle sharply. "Haggard, thin, and your complexion positively grey."

"This electric light is unbecoming," he replied, with rather a hollow laugh.

"Not under crimson shades, surely?"

A pause. Hesketh's lips were compressed, his eyes had a hunted expression in them which was new to Sylvia.

"Does this life satisfy you?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes," replied his wife. "So long as we continue popular and prosperous I am perfectly happy. What more could a woman want?"

"And if," he continued, shifting his eyes uneasily, "if hard times should some day knock at our door, and we were to go away, Sylvia—just you and I together—to live in some quiet spot——"

"Hesketh!" Her voice vibrated with horror; she interrupted him with a short cry as she pronounced his name. "Why do you talk like that, and imagine such dreadful things?"

"It is late—I am tired—forgive my foolish romancing. Wealth," laughing loudly, "never slips through the fingers of its possessors, however readily they fling it abroad, to feed their friends, and live every moment of their lives—eh, Sylvia? You never heard of Mammon playing such a shabby trick?"

She felt as if something cold and clammy were creeping down her spine. Her bouquet lay at her feet, faded; she kicked it impatiently.

"You are in a most lugubrious and disagreeable mood. I suppose you are trying to frighten me into economy, but it's absurd, Hesketh, positively preposterous. I hope you won't rake up the subject again."

He took her firmly by the wrist, and drew her to the door. Then flinging it open wide, pointed at the driving rain.

"How would you like to be out in *that*," he said, "with no cover to your head, soaked to the skin, and homeless?"

She shrank back into the soft red glow of the great hall, looked at him reproachfully, but did not speak.

"The world is not all a 'Valley of Diamonds,'" he added.

"Except," added Sylvia, "to women like me."

She drew herself up, and her beautiful eyes flashed. The brilliants were shining in her hair, and on her neck and arms. The whole attitude was defiance. His wife's beauty soothed Hesketh's spirit of unrest. He gazed at her as at a beautiful picture, while a proud sense of possession stimulated his troubled spirit.

"You cannot complain," he said, "I have given you everything I have; if I died to-morrow and left you without a farthing, you would have no right to murmur."

CHAPTER III.

MRS. BLAIR was driving back from Ranelagh with Lady Cameron.

"You must scold your husband for disappointing us," said the latter.

"Yes," replied Sylvia. "I really don't know myself why he did not come. I got a most vague telegram just before starting, telling me not to wait lunch. He is always doing those tiresome things. Some men have no conscience!"

The carriage drew up and Sylvia alighted. The house in Park Lane was a mass of flowers, every window sill a

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bank of yellow bloom. "Has Mr. Blair returned?" she asked.

"Yes, madam. He is in your boudoir."

Mrs. Blair raised her eyebrows. Hesketh never sat there when she was out.

She made her way to the dainty little room, so characteristic of herself. The very wall-paper was redolent of Sylvia's personality—a French design of cupids, rose garlands, blue ribbon and butterflies. Novels and fashion papers lay about, flowers and photographs (chiefly masculine) in profusion. Her husband was in the window seat, half concealed by Pompadour silk curtains; she noticed he looked pale.

"Hot, isn't it?" drawled Mrs. Blair, taking up a huge silver scent bottle, and shaking the perfume over her hands. "You were well out of it, Hesketh. Sitting in the sun has given me an abominable headache."

He rose, and bent over her tenderly, an expression of passionate adoration in his eyes.

"My poor darling," drawing her to the sofa, "and I failed you. It was very horrid of me, but," with a sudden break in his voice, "I had business to attend to——"

"Business," tossing her head impatiently, "I hate the word; it sounds so mundane and unbeautiful. I believe," turning to him with a deprecating gesture, "that things have been going wrong—your money affairs, I mean. But don't tell me about it, Hesketh; just put it all right, and do not publish your private worries to the whole world by looking blue over them. Take a pattern by your wife; you never find me moping! By-the-way, dear, I am getting so tired of this room, these tints were all very well at first, but they pall after a time. I want it redecorated. White and silver is my latest fancy; how do you think it sounds?"

He bent his head, and a deep scarlet flush crept over his features; he bit his lip to conceal his emotion. How could he tell her? how nerve himself to strike the blow, and deny this radiant creature the accessories her beauty demanded? The hand of Fate that robbed him of his all seemed pressing with a deadly force upon Hesketh now, in the presence of his luxury-loving Sylvia. He could bear his own misery—not hers. That was beyond all mortal endurance. To see her fond eyes fill with tears, to soothe her silent weeping, and know that this was only the beginning of the hard struggle with life.

"White and silver," he murmured. "Oh, yes; all white and silver, like your name and your soul!"

She smiled, and pressed his hand.

"Dearest," he asked suddenly, "have you ever known any real suffering? Is it possible that from the beginning life has been only a playground, a pleasure garden?"

Mrs. Blair laughed a soft little ripple, and looked down at the jewels on her fingers.

"It would need a bold woman to answer that question in the affirmative. But shall I tell you the secret of sailing joyfully over the troubled seas in which poor humanity drowns, chokes, and struggles on all sides? It is a very simple method, though it may shock you. Annihilate your heart; do away with it altogether; it is a superfluous article, that glories in stirring up uncomfortable emotions. To be utterly heartless is to be immeasurably blessed. I realised this at the age of ten. My canary died, and I sat huddled up on a haystack crying for hours. When my governess found me and took me in, she pointed out the fact that my white frock was crumpled, my pretty eyes spoiled for the day, and that the canary was still dead. I inwardly digested the fact. That governess was a very sensible, if an extremely worldly woman. She used to call me an angel, and buy pink ribbons for my schoolroom frock."

"Don't say you are heartless, unless it is that you have given all your heart to me, and I cannot spare a morsel of it," he replied, feasting his eyes hungrily on her. "You don't know what you are to me; sometimes the force of my love comes over me like madness, and I feel I could sooner kill you than that we should be parted."

He clasped her to him and kissed her fiercely.

"You are crumpling my chiffons, Hesketh. Don't be foolish," waving him away airily. "It is too hot for these outbursts of affection; besides, I know all about it. You are a good, dear boy," speaking patronisingly, as to a child, "and you love me very much, enough to kill me, terribly flattering! Now I must go and dress for the opera, we are dining alone, *tête-à-tête*, for your birthday treat. What! did you think I had forgotten that auspicious occasion? No, only I was painfully conscious of not providing a present, I've spent all my pin-money and over; you shall write me a cheque to-night!"

She moved towards the door, but he started forward with a cry, placing himself between Sylvia and the exit.

The time had come, he *must* speak, though his heart should break.

"You—you can't go to the opera," he gasped. "I've something to tell you."

She saw the beads of perspiration on his forehead, the trembling of his hands, and heard his short, quick breathing.

Sylvia toyed with the mantel border, and looked annoyed.

"Oh! go on," she said, irritated at his interruption.

He looked her straight in the face with quivering lips, while two words broke from him: "I'm ruined!"

Sylvia's colour faded, her eyes were bright and hard as steel, her nostrils dilated, she drew herself up in an attitude of defiance.

"She is dazed by the blow," he thought pityingly; "she cannot speak."

"Sylvia—my love—my life—we will bear it together," he whispered, taking her hand; "we are both young, and I can work."

But she drew sharply away.

"Don't touch me! For mercy's sake spare me your comments on a hopeless, degrading situation. Ruined, are we? Do I look like a woman that could suffer poverty lightly, a drudge, a housewife? Bah! it is imposible. If you have any respect for yourself left, do not talk of dragging your wife down to your own miserable level, and bearing it *together!*"

He staggered back, numbed and paralysed by Sylvia's cruel utterances. That such words should come from the lips he had loved and prized bewildered him. The scales fell from his eyes, and as he stared at the splendid figure drawn up against the brocade hangings of the flowered grate, he saw her as she *was!*

Where lay hidden the tender grief, the sympathy which in his devotion he had trembled to awake? Now that the moment had come, when he yearned for some sign to appease his grief, she stood apart, while the love and solace he expected ended ignominiously in nil!

"What would you have me do?" he asked hoarsely.

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She raised her head and looked him full in the eyes, advancing a step as if to emphasise her words:

"Shoot yourself, I have no further use for you!"

The bald, crude phrase came like a blow upon his temples.

"Sylvia!"

The word rang out like a cry of agony, vibrating through the room.

She turned away, and pointed to the door.

"Go," she said; "I wish to be alone."

He obeyed mechanically.

"You will not retract your—your advice!" with a curl of his lip.

But his sarcasm was lost upon Sylvia, her soul was too bitter, and her heart too hard for remorse or shame.

CHAPTER IV.

She went to the window and watched him drive away from the house.

Her face wore an expression of unutterable horror, not at the idea of the suggested suicide, but of the ruin that stared them in the face.

She still had her youth and beauty, and if Hesketh could be driven to destroy himself.

Sylvia's thoughts stood still; her mind became a blank.

She knew that the future without her husband would be possible, and with him intolerable. She paced the room with restless tread, every moment was a torture of suspense.

Then, flinging herself on the sofa, Sylvia burst into fits of hysterical laughter, which waned to fretful sobs. "He *shall* not spoil my life," she muttered; "he will kill himself, I know it, I read it in his face when he looked at me. I am safe! safe!"

The door opened, Hesketh advanced towards her. The sight of him was repulsive to his wife.

"Where have you been?" she asked, seeing how late it had grown.

"To buy this," he answered with a sinister smile, drawing a revolver from his pocket, "and to think the matter out."

She winced at the sight of the weapon.

"Why do you bring it here?"

"Because it will be easier to die if you answer a few questions—first. Don't lie to a doomed man, Sylvia."

"Go on."

"Did you ever, even for a day or an hour, love me? Was it all the dastardly acting of a hypocrite from beginning to end? Had you *one* tender feeling towards me, a single thought above my money?" She shook her head.

"I had no heart to give, but the sham appeared to content you. What else have you to say?"

"Is it still your wish that I should rid you of my presence? Will you repeat those words which must condemn your soul everlastingly: 'Shoot yourself. I have no further use for you!'"

Sylvia's lip curled in scorn. "Once was enough, I do not retract them."

"I am satisfied," he answered coldly, the blood frozen in his veins.

The table with the silver scent bottle, scattered flowers, novels, and *bric-à-brac* stood between them. Hesketh glared across it at the fair form of the woman he had loved and pampered—the creature who, in her soulless selfish beauty, was waiting for him to free her.

The devil in Sylvia seemed to enter into the man. His eyes glowed suddenly; fresh vitality crept through him. He raised his arm and levelled the revolver across the table at his wife. He was between her and the door.

"I considered this matter," he said quite calmly, "and decided that your fate and mine should hang on your answers to my questions. Having perfectly convinced myself of your worthlessness and treachery, I shall spare, or postpone, my own demise."

"Then take care how you handle that pistol!" she retorted, moving aside; "can't you see you are pointing it at *me!*"

He followed her direction with hand and eyes, the stamp of deadly determination on his features, then spoke in a tone that was strangely unfamiliar to the woman.

"Don't you understand, Sylvia? I am going to shoot *you*, instead!"

Petrified by the terrible threat, the cowardly spirit of Mrs. Blair crept out through the ghastly anguish of her eyes.

Abject, awful terror consumed her being; she could not move or utter, the pallor of death stole over her face and lips, drawn by unspeakable fear. She could only stare with chattering teeth at the weapon, raising her hands feebly as if to ward it off. A sharp, shrill cry escaped her; half incoherent words broke in despair from the wretched wife.

"Take it away for the love of Heaven," pointing at the pistol. "Are you mad, Hesketh? I didn't mean it—not a syllable—my mind was unhinged by your news. I am like that, I don't know what I say. I'll go away with you—anywhere—to the end of the earth!"

"A longer journey than that," he added unmoved. "You have tricked me enough."

She pulled herself together, though the violent trembling of her body was still visible.

"Stop this fiendish joke!" she cried, "have you not bullied me sufficiently for to-night? To-morrow we will plan a future. Put that revolver back in its case, and face facts."

"That is exactly what I am doing, but I have not yet finished with my birthday present," pointing to the weapon. "I gave it to myself to celebrate the day."

An awful pause, in which the worldly, pleasure-loving life of the woman rose before her eyes.

"No, no," she moaned. "I *can't* die—I'm not fit—God knows—*you* know. Hesketh! Hesketh! Spare me—don't send me to hell like this!"

She rushed frantically towards the door, in a paroxysm of fear, but he was before her, still covering her with the revolver.

"Yes," he hissed, "that is the place for devils! Go!"

His demoniacal laugh mingled with the sharp report that shattered the transient beauty of Sylvia Blair's false face, and left her victim red handed in the waning light of a summer evening. Winifred Graham.

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TALKING IT OVER.

Dramatis Personæ.—Miss Nina Moore and Mr. Bertie Fairfax.

Scene.—A library in Miss Moore's house. A wood fire blazes on the hearth. Low bookcases line the walls. Plants and flowers fill the windows. Magazines and papers are scattered on small tables. An escritoire conveniently stocked with writing materials is near the window. A tea-table by the mantel is covered with dainty cups, old silver, and the inevitable kettle. Miss Nina Moore, on a quaint settee, sits by the fire pretending to read.

Time.—Five o'clock in the afternoon.

Miss Nina Moore (to herself): "I wonder if he will come. I think he has sense enough to realise that there is no reason why we should not be friends. Oh, dear, I hear him in the hall."

Mr. Bertie Fairfax (pushing aside the portière): "I have come at your request, Miss Moore. I believe that you suggested in your note this morning that you would like me to bring, instead of send, your letters and—the other things."

Miss Moore (stiffly): "Thanks, very much. The letters first, if you please; the other things, which you so politely name the ring and scarf-pins, I care nothing about."

Mr. Fairfax (handing her a small package of letters, generally minus envelopes): "I did not mean to be rude, but if we are to talk things over, as you said, you should not become cross at once, you know."

Miss Moore (not noticing his remark): "Are these all the letters? I thought I had written to you quite often in the last three months. I have stacks of yours. I believe you have lost them."

Mr. Fairfax (guiltily): "I don't know. Perhaps, the others are. Sisters have such a way of clearing out a fellow's top drawer."

Miss Moore (indignantly): "Your sisters, indeed! Charming idea that!"

Mr. Fairfax (in confusion): "Oh, I did not mean that! They—they are only put away so carefully. I will come across them some time when I least expect. But you told me in your note that you thought it best that we should talk over our broken engagement, and I am here for that purpose."

Miss Moore: "Yes; let us be perfectly frank with each other—the only way to be in such affairs, I always think, and——"

Mr. Fairfax (interrupting her): "You speak like a veteran, as if you had dissolved engagements by the dozen."

Miss Moore (ignoring the interruption): "You see, our engagement was rather peculiar. I had heard so many pleasant things of you from Alice Long that I was prepared to like you from the first. Then you had just come from Africa, where so few people go, and there was a report that you had shot an elephant; you danced well; you wrote clever notes, and sent the most beautiful flowers; and, altogether, I found myself—well, we became engaged before I knew what you really were."

Mr. Fairfax: "Your frankness is delightful. I never knew more reasons for an engagement than you have just given. If it is anything in my favour I admit the elephant."

Miss Moore (reminiscently): "Yes, I do not quite regret the affair, but I feel sure that a platonic friendship will be the only thing for us, and therefore please observe that I am giving you back the ring and watch, but shall keep the books and the silver candlestick, which looks so lovely on my desk."

Mr. Fairfax (mechanically taking the bundle she offers): "What do you mean by a platonic friendship?"

Miss Moore: "Well, you may come and see me once or twice a month. You can take me out occasionally to a dance or a theatre; and if you see me at a party with anyone I loathe, you can come to my rescue."

Mr. Fairfax (sarcastically): "Delightful position! Thanks very much, Miss Moore!"

Miss Moore: "Now you are angry still. I am sure that we can do this, and prove to the world that the mere fact of having been engaged does not necessarily makes us hate each other for ever afterwards."

Mr. Fairfax: "A broken engagement is not as a rule conducive to friendship, particularly when the whole story began and ended so suddenly, without rhyme or reason, one might say."

Miss Moore (wrathfully): "One might of course, be guilty of such a rude speech, but it would reflect little to his credit or knowledge either. Pray is not every engagement suddenly made or broken?"

Mr. Fairfax: "Most emphatically, no. One should not enter into such a state except reverently, wisely, and——"

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Miss Moore (hastily): "Now you are quoting from the marriage service, which is quite foreign to the subject, and has nothing whatever to do with it."

Mr. Fairfax (in surprise): "An engagement nothing to do with marriage? I beg, Miss Moore, that you will explain what you mean."

Miss Moore: "Oh, why are you so disagreeable? I hate to argue. How different Will Barton was last year when we decided that we could agree better apart."

Mr. Fairfax (freezingly): "Really, Miss Moore, do you consider such reminiscences in good taste? You have never honoured me with your confidence before in regard to Mr. Barton."

Miss Moore (slightly embarrassed): "Oh, it was nothing serious! We merely thought that we cared for each other, and found afterwards that we did not."

Mr. Fairfax: "Like your own case."

Miss Moore (very angry): "How generous you are to remind me so often that you made a mistake in asking me to marry you!"

Mr. Fairfax: "I am sure that I never said so. But why prolong this interview? You must see that we are as great failures at platonics as we were in the lovers' business."

Miss Moore (scornfully): "The 'interview' shall end at once; but let me put up the candlestick with the ring, and you can give it to Alice Long."

Mr. Fairfax: "Why should Miss Long's name be dragged into this conversation, when I scarcely had a bow from her for months? And why should I be burdened with so large a bundle? I do not want the candlestick. Keep it; you may need extra light when you write to Mr. Barton."

Miss Moore (perfectly furious): "You are insulting. Take it. I do not want anything to remind me of one so hateful as you are! When I wrote you the note I did it for the best. I thought that we could at least be friends"—(beginning to cry)—"but I find you worse in that *rôle* than you were as a *fiancé*."

Mr. Fairfax (with a man's horror of tears): "Don't cry, please, don't, Miss Nina; I am so sorry."

[Draws his chair closer to the settee and tries to take her hand.]

Miss Moore buries her head in the sofa cushions, pulls her hand away, and murmurs through her sobs: "I suppose you will tell your wife, when you get one, what a goose you think me."

Mr. Fairfax (smilingly): "I think probably she will know without being told. But, Nina dear, you must not call the future Mrs. Fairfax names."

[Again takes her hand.]

Miss Moore (forgetting to remove it, raises her head slightly from the cushion): "Then we can try platonics?"

Mr. Fairfax (positively): "No, darling, we cannot; wiser people than we have tried and failed. We are lovers or nothing. Nina, sweetheart, look at me."

Miss Moore (wiping away one or two tears, gazes at him pathetically): "Then we are—but suppose we quarrel again, Bertie?"

Mr. Fairfax (seating himself beside her on the settee, and securing both her hands as hostages): "Suppose we do, we can make it up, as we are doing now."

Miss Moore (coyly): "May I not have my ring? It seems to be a sort of chaperon. And will you take care of my letters next time?"

Mr. Fairfax (laughing): "That depends upon what's in them. So see that they are pleasant, and begin no more with 'Mr. Fairfax, Dear Sir,' like the one I received to-day. Besides, they must not savour at all of 'platonics,' although I am always willing to come and 'talk over with you.'"

E. Massey.

AIMÉE.

La Force.
September 17th, 1793.

Friends of the Faubourg St. Germain: You would be grieved if you could see me now as I sit writing to you by the dim light of a feeble candle.

Does it shock you, this heading of mine, that stares so boldly in your startled eyes from the top of the page? Does it say that I am disgraced, and do you believe it? If so, pardon me for the sake of old times and old friendships. But in the old times the King ruled, and we sang, "O Richard, O mon Roi!" But now the people, gone mad, have their say, and we must suffer and endure, and listen to them sing, "Ca Ira."

You would ask how I came here. When I have answered, you will say, what a fool to have gone back. Just so. Yet listen.

You know that when the rest of us fled, my brother remained behind. He had done much for the people and trusted to their gratitude. You cry out, how foolish! Exactly. He thought they would not harm him. He was mistaken. They would have torn a dog to pieces if it had borne my name.

They seized and condemned him to death. I heard of his imprisonment and went back to save him. It was unjust that he should suffer for my sins. I came too late. From a sheltering doorstep I saw the mad mob rush past me, and in their midst, on a pike held high in the air, was my brother's head. I tried to get across the frontier and escape, hiding in the woods and under hedges by day, and dragging myself along the road by night, living on the refuse that dogs would not eat.

I was discovered by a vile ditch-digger from Rouen, who, meeting me on the road, recognised me; and, urged to patriotism by the remembrance of what he was pleased to call his daughter's wrongs, he hastened to the village and reported his discovery, and so this worthy patriot, with a score of equally worthy patriots, lay in wait and seized me as I staggered wearily along.

The peasants have become virtuous, my friends, or desire to appear so, and have tenacious memories for former trifles that were better forgotten. A strange time is this when the people are become hypocrites, and we nobles, in sackcloth and ashes, pose for martyrs.

They placed me in charge of an escort, armed with pikes and old muskets, and sent me off to Paris to the

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court of condemnation. I could tell you of things that I saw *en route* that would make your blood run cold, but I spare you. Apropos, this word of warning. If you value your heads, keep away from here, for the people are gone mad, and our blood flows freer in the present than ever did our wine in the past.

To make a long story short, we reached Paris the next morning, and my trial came off without delay. When my worthy friend, the patriot from Rouen, told how he knew me, and ended up his remarks with a burst of tears, it was all over with me. The galleries howled and stormed: "Down, Lamouette—down! to the guillotine, Lamouette!" You should have heard them!

The Judge rang his bell, and the jurors voted separately, and at every vote the galleries roared anew. *Decreed in the name of the Republic, One and Indivisible: The prisoner is an enemy of the people. Back to La Force with him, and death within the week. Dog!*

Picture to yourself a long, low hall with hard, wooden benches nailed to the stone walls; long, narrow windows with great iron gratings hardly admitting a ray of light. This is our prison—I say ours, for there are some six-score of us altogether. Fair-haired girls and grandmothers, courtiers, nobles—all are represented.

The whole company rose and bowed to me as the gaoler thrust me into the room, and a tall, elegantly-formed man with white hair and a face like a Greek philosopher, stepped forward.

"May I ask," said he, bowing profusely, "to what cause we owe the pleasure of your company?"

"The Republic is displeased with its humble servant."

He smiled quietly. "It is a breach of good manners that needs correcting; we are all, I fear, sufferers from the same rudeness," was his comment. There was a laugh. He then asked my name and condition, with the remark that it would be rude, if made elsewhere, but the time and place permitted it. My reply was evidently satisfactory, for he turned to the others and said:

"This gentleman, the Marquis of Lamouette, has had the good fortune to be sent among us for a short time, and I hope you will all strive to make his stay as pleasant as possible. And you, monsieur, will, I hope, take part in all our gaieties and be cheerful and entertaining, forgetting your own misfortunes and striving to make others forget theirs. This is the only duty required of you." He then took me by the hand and introduced me to all in the room.

What astonished me most was the perfect composure, and even gaiety, pervading all their actions. I hardly noticed an anxious look or a nervous movement among them, yet, like myself, they are all condemned to death.

There is one person to whom I am quite attracted, a sweet young girl of some twenty years, with long brown hair and very dark blue eyes. I imagine I hear you laugh. "Up to the old tricks again," you say. You are mistaken. This is not the time or place. Man goes to his death better than he goes through life.

September 18th.

Our life here is a constant round of theatrical entertainments, readings, game playing, and even dancing—anything to make the time pass quickly and keep our minds from the thoughts of what the future has in store for us all. Last night we had a little play, written by Madame Duron, which was well presented by the Dramatic Club. You would be surprised to have seen how well the parts were taken. We are to have another performance to-night. If it were not for the gloomy surroundings, wooden benches and cold stone walls, with their little windows, you would think, to see us, that we are attending a levée at the Tuileries. Our clothes are somewhat in need of repairing and brushing, but our manners, as ever, are correct.

The Count and I have become quite friendly since he took me in charge yesterday. He commanded the French guard at the Palace on the 10th of August—his accounts of the affair are most interesting. I asked whether, in his opinion, the King could have crushed the revolution if he had placed himself at the head of the Swiss and other faithful troops. He shook his head. "It might have been; there was every chance of succeeding. Even if the King had trusted Dumoriez all would have been well; but the King was weak, pitifully weak. Poor Louis! he was a good man, but the hand of fate was against him, and all he could do was to die as a King should."

"I cannot see," I said, "how you bear yourself so calmly amid such scenes as these about us, for you always appear gay, as if there was nought but happiness in the world." He looked at me keenly, and an amused smile lighted up his features. "My dear Marquis," he said, placing his arm in mine, as we began to walk towards the end of the room, "a man should forget himself in times like these, and live only for others. I have faced death too often in the service of my King to fear it now, when I am in the service of my fellow-men. There are frail girls and weak women here, and I strive to make them forget that there is such a thing as to-morrow, but teach them to live only in the present. And they are willing to laugh at anything, that they forget to weep." He is a true and noble man, this Count; if I were a Christian I would say: "God bless him!"

After the play last night I danced the minuet with the little girl I spoke of in yesterday's entry. Her name is Aimée Dumont, and she is of Provence.

"Monsieur," she said, when we had taken our places for the dance, "you are from Provence, are you not?"

"I have that pleasure," I replied.

"And may I ask if you are a relative of Richard Lamouette?"

"We are one and the same person."

Her eyes met mine, and I saw in them a look almost of hate, and certainly full of scorn. She lowered them immediately, and said sarcastically:

"I have heard of you before."

"You might add that you have never heard any good of me; that would have been nearer what you really meant."

"I have heard, monsieur, that you took advantage of the laws—and that only recently. It was a cruel thing to do, and one that has caused much bloodshed and hatred in this poor country." She had continued to keep her eyes upon the floor, but suddenly looking up into my face, added, "I hope they slandered you, monsieur."

I meant to say they had, but those deep eyes, fixed full upon me, made me hesitate.

"Alas, mademoiselle, it is but too true."

"And did you tell the starving people who came to you that you cared not whether they lived or died, as long as they paid the *taille*? I heard this told of you, too."

I had recovered myself somewhat, and answered meekly, as if I were one bitterly wronged:

"In that they slandered me. I was sorry to see them dying, but what could I do? They hated and would not trust me. I did all in my power, and yet they would have torn me to pieces last year had I not escaped."

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She folded her hands before her, and leaned forward, with upturned face, as if interested.

"Why, then, did you return, if you were in a place of safety?" she asked.

My voice trembled at the memory of that dreadful scene at Rouen, and she looked at me as if astonished at my show of feeling, and her face seemed kindlier.

"I had a brother who was in their hands. I came back to save him, to give myself up, if need be, to their vengeance, if they would spare him."

"And you saw him?"

"He was dead, mademoiselle. I had come too late."

Just then the dancing began, but I noticed that she kept glancing at me continually throughout the dance. After we had finished, she bade me good-night without another word, and went down to the other end of the corridor, singing the old Royalist refrain:

"O Richard, O mon Roi, l'univers t'abandonne."

September 20th.

O Sleep, thou that comest to us in the silence of the night, bearing to the heart, weary of toil and of vain struggle, a certain rest and quiet from daily temptations; thou that art a sign and promise of a deep and everlasting peace that shall be ours when the curtain falls upon the comedy of our vanity and folly, how hast thou betrayed me! Through all the night hast thou been summoning before me the phantoms of past misdeeds, and hast awakened to resurrection the voice of a conscience long slumbering. But yet there has been this alleviation for thy betrayal; for through the blackness of these shadows thy face, O Aimée, shines upon me, and I hear thy voice singing softly:

"O Richard, O mon Roi."

Burdened with such fancies, I could not sleep, so I walked up and down the room to rid myself of this vague feeling of unrest. I had been walking perhaps a half-hour, when, as I approached the lower end of the hall, I heard someone call me. Turning round, I found myself face to face with mademoiselle.

"You are restless to-night, monsieur, or is it the cold?"

"The cold, surely; are you suffering from the same cause?"

She looked down shyly, and her voice was grave when she answered:

"Yes, monsieur, but a little nervous, too. You know I go to-morrow."

I nodded thoughtfully. She sat down on the bench just under the window and motioned me to sit beside her.

"May I ask you a question, monsieur?"

"Whatever you wish."

She leaned forward, resting her chin on her hand.

"Have you any brothers or sisters or parents living, monsieur?"

"No; they are all dead."

"And have you no wife or children who will miss you?"

"No, I am all alone. There will be few to care, thank God."

She looked up suddenly, her hand on my knee.

"Hush, monsieur! That word is never spoken here but in jest." Her voice grew wistful, I thought, from eagerness. "Are you a Christian, monsieur, may I ask?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"I am so sorry."

Her voice quivered—seemed almost sad.

"Will you, over there on the bench, keep still? Pity a man can't sleep in peace, and the last night, too. Go to sleep, you, or keep still."

It was the querulous voice of old Hulot, the Farmer-General, one of the morrow's victims. We spoke no more, but sat waiting for daylight. Only once she leaned over and whispered:

"Monsieur, you will forgive me for what I said the other night? I am sorry."

I pressed her hand gently and we both were still. A little later she fell asleep, her head sinking upon my shoulder. I took off my coat, and wrapped it round her, then leaned back against the wall, to wait for the dawn. "To-morrow," thought I, looking down upon that fair, sweet face, "she will be far from here. She will have reached the goal." The voice of someone speaking aroused me. It was the Count; he, too, was restless.

"So Cupid has squeezed in even here," he said gallantly.

"She is asleep," I said; "speak softly."

He came a little nearer and looked down into her face.

"Poor little girl! How much the Republic would suffer if she lived! Don't move," he said, as I shifted my position; "let her sleep. The time flies swifter and the agony of suspense will be the shorter. She goes to-morrow, does she not?"

I nodded.

"By-the-way," he added, "I shall have the pleasure of your company the day after. The gaoler told me last night." He bent over and kissed her hand like the old chevalier that he was, and with a "*Bonsoir*, monsieur," he turned and walked away.

The night seemed very long. I dared not move lest I should wake her, so I sat still and waited. Her fair young head, with its wealth of long brown hair, rested quietly on my shoulder.

It must have been almost morning when she awoke. "Have you been awake all night?" she asked, looking up into my face.

I nodded.

"And you are shivering with cold, and have wrapped me in your cloak to keep me warm; you are very kind, I can never repay you."

"You owe me just one thing," I replied; "you will let me kiss you?"

She smiled and hesitated. "Monsieur, you may, just once."

It was eight o'clock when the gaoler came and called out the names of those set apart for the day. I stood beside her when her name was read, and she never winced. There was the usual silent clasp of the hand as friend parted from friend; sometimes a last kiss was given and taken as they went to their places.

She came back to me when she had gone the rounds. "It is time to say good-bye," she said.

I nodded, not daring to trust my voice.

She looked full in my face when I did not answer. She must have read my thoughts. "Did you care for me so much?" There was a pause——

"Monsieur, you may kiss me just once more."

There was the rumbling of the tumbrils in the court below; the harsh monotonous voice of the gaoler calling out the names of the doomed as they passed separately through the gate. A last lingering pressure of the hand and she goes. The heavy gate swung back upon its hinges, and I see her no more—shall never see her again in all this world, never. The tumbrils creak and rumble as they pass through the street. I listen until the rumbling dies away in the distance. Farewell!

This to Eugène Saint Aubert, of Coblence, by the Gaoler Fouquier. Let him be rewarded.

Geo. W. Ellis.

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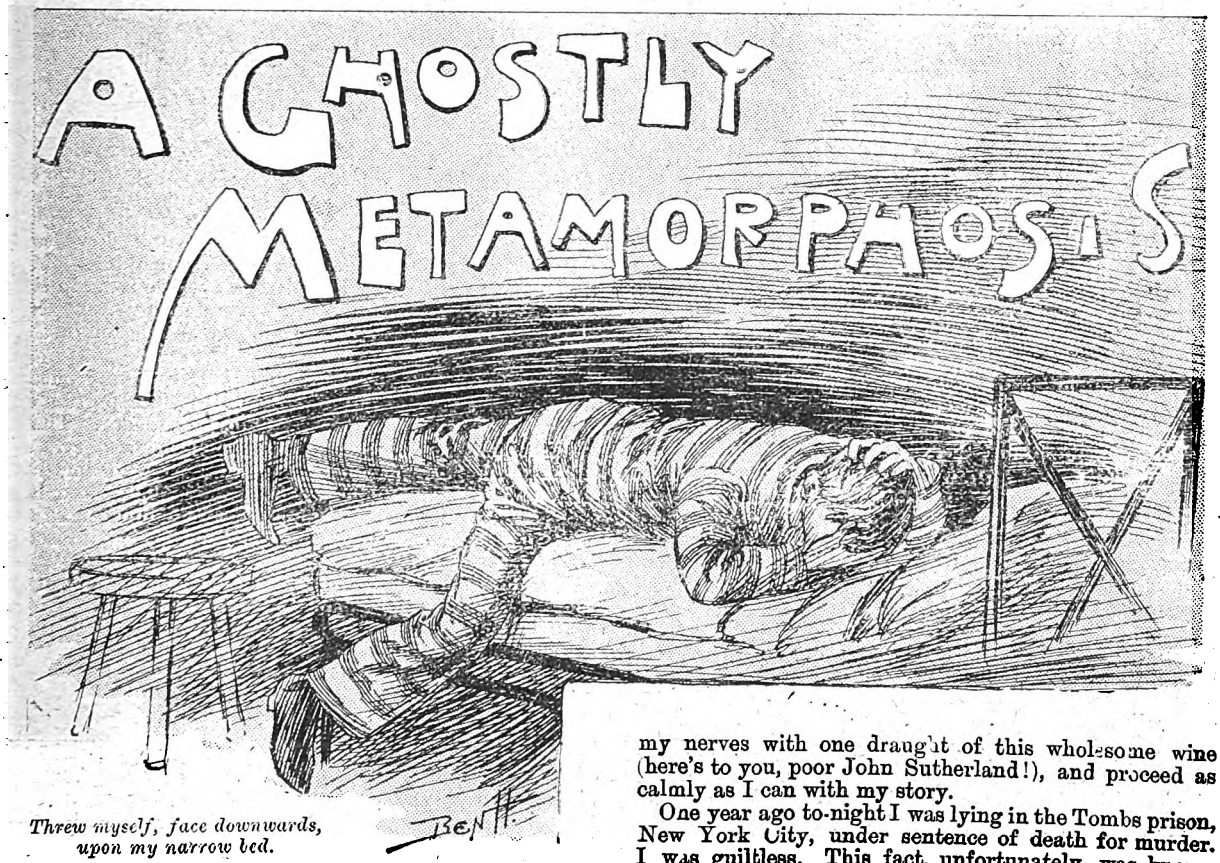
A GHOSTLY METAMORPHOSIS



Threw myself, face downwards, upon my narrow bed.

IF my pen continues to remain a pen, and my ink changes not into blood or wine until the purpose is accomplished, I shall, I think, succeed in giving to the world a tale as wondrous strange as any to which the world has, for many years, listened. There is nothing in the appearance of this gracefully pointed bit of steel and its cedar wood handle, as I hold it between my eyes and the lamplight, to suggest a possibility of its suddenly becoming a serpent's tail or a devil's divining rod, nor do I perceive in the contents of my crystal inkstand anything beyond a superior quality of black writing fluid; and yet for caution's sake, and lest I all unexpectedly become again the victim of a supernatural practical joke, I beg the privilege of prefacing my story with the above absurd, as you will say, provisos.

There are going to be in the unfolding of this narrative, as everybody will discover, several very embarrassing factors, chief of which is this, that although I suppose I am relating certain extraordinary events which have happened to me, I have no positive means of knowing that such is the case. The two of us, by whom I mean Harry Jessup (who certainly once was, and still seems to be) and poor John Sutherland (who clearly is not), are so closely, so intimately connected—soul intertwined, if I may use the expression—that I (or is it he?) who speak can be certain of all things more easily than of my (or is it his?) identity.

Clearly, however, we shall not get on at all at this rate. Though honestly endeavouring to enlighten, I perceive I am but mystifying my readers. Let me quiet my nerves with one draught of this wholesome wine (here's to you, poor John Sutherland!), and proceed as calmly as I can with my story.

One year ago to-night I was lying in the Tombs prison, New York City, under sentence of death for murder. I was guiltless. This fact, unfortunately, was known only to myself. In justice to my memory (or, should I say, justice to the memory of John Sutherland?) I must briefly relate the circumstances which led to that error of justice which condemned an innocent man to the gallows.

I was born (that is, supposing I am the person who, though contrary to all external appearances, I still believe myself to be) in the City of London. If I had parents I never knew them, neither was I acquainted with brothers, sisters, or relatives, even of a remote degree. I purloined what little knowledge I had of the world from the lips of gentlemen at the backs of whose chairs I stood during the breakfast and dining hours at some of the most reputable restaurants in London.

I got a bit of book learning at an evening school, and other odds and ends of accomplishments I picked up at merry places by gaslight. It was while employed at one of these "Homes of Harmony," that I obtained that knowledge of the pianoforte which, in spite of its superficiality, is to-day so great a source of wonder to those persons with whom I am now surrounded. I read more than fellows of my sort, and, as a consequence, soon became educated beyond my station, and I emigrated to America.

Upon my arrival in New York I found work at fair wages in an eating-house somewhere east of Broadway. I was put to share the room of an Italian waiter, a surly, ill-favoured person, who, within two months after I had taken quarters with him, cut his throat while I lay by his side in bed, a circumstance which brought him no greater harm than it brought to me, since on the

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following morning I was thrown into gaol, and six weeks later removed to the Tombs, under sentence of death.

A year ago to-night, at just about this hour, to avoid the gaze of the curious newspaper writers who clustered thick about the stove at the end of the narrow corridor upon which my cell opened, and who (the gaoler having permitted me the freedom of the passage) pitilessly noted down my every despairing movement, I stepped back behind my grated door, and threw myself face downwards upon my narrow bed.

I remember that the cot was covered with a coarse grey blanket, across which, near either end, was woven a narrow strip of red. The gaoler rattled the grating of my door and spoke kindly, advising me to remove my coat and boots, and get a bit of sleep. I lifted my head as he spoke. The blood-red streak in the blanket was immediately under my chin; I had thrown myself down, my throat across it. I sat bolt upright on the bed. My hand went involuntarily to my throat.

The gaoler's kindly face seemed to my terror-stricken vision the face of a devil. I knew that within a few hours I was to be murdered, and he was to be my murderer. I felt that I ought to hate him; that if I were half a man, I would seize his beard, and batter his head upon the rusty iron of the cage. Yet, when I spoke, my voice was low, courteous, even modestly submissive, as I thanked him for his attention. Great Heaven! think of it—I thanked the man who stood at my cell door keeping watch over a stalled ox for the coming of the butcher.

He turned to go. The rage which in my soul had found birth and death without power of expression was followed by a frantic grief, an overwhelming self-pity. I longed to throw myself upon my knees before the retreating figure, and beg for mercy; but again my limbs refused to act, and as the gaoler faced the grating for a last look at his victim, I think he must have seen a smile upon my face, for he brightened, and said:

"That's right, Jessup; I'm glad to see you keeping up a good heart."

Tell me the face is the soul's mirror! The soul is as powerless to control the body as the body is powerless to control the soul. Rage, grief, despair incite to action, and the body mocks them all. True, I am an unlearned and unlettered man, but of the soul's relation to the body who on earth should know more than I have been taught?

It is possible that the suicide, just prior to the carrying out of his purpose, is made acquainted with that sickening, muscle-relaxing, nerve-tightening despair which comes to the man who is to be executed to-morrow, but I do not think so.

In the case of suicide, there must be (and this, before long, I shall fully discover) an absence of that pitiful helplessness which tears the heart-strings of the man who is to be put to death by his fellows.

Oh, the grief of it! The haunting horror of any human form! With pistol in hand—even when its cold round muzzle is pressed against his throbbing temple; even to that fractional part of a second in which the cruel deed is done—the suicide is soothed by a consciousness of an optional escape. There is no time fixed. He is the master of his punishment. The inexorable is lacking in the refinement of his torture.

When the gaoler had disappeared from view, I sank back upon the cot. I turned myself upon my back, and looked at the plain white ceiling. I tried to people its vague surface with heaven's lamps—to imagine it was God's firmament. There were the countless stars twinkling as cheerfully as though no sorrow anywhere existed. Spread out about me was the mighty ocean, foaming and rolling near by, then stretching away like a great black, silent plain.

I was once more upon the steamer—the accursed steamer that brought me from England to be killed. The motion—how delightful!—swing so, swing so. My hands went to the sides of the cot for the protection of my balance. Oh, the motion!—now up, now down! The stars, how bright! The waves!—see, see how high! Mercy! what pleasure! Great tears flow down my cheeks. Crash!—we've struck! We're sinking! My fingers go to my eyes. Rub, rub, and there is again the white ceiling. No stars? I spring to my feet. No ocean? A prison cell; death by strangulation in the morning.

I staggered to the cell door! I pressed my cheek against the grating, and was able to see a portion of the group of watchers at the end of the corridor. Their heads were together; somebody was relating a story. A fat man had his profile to me. From time to time his hands went down upon his knees with a slap, and his sides shook. He was being amused by reminiscences of the trusty gaoler. Amused! These men being amused, and I——

I could no longer endure the sight of my fellow-men. Again I threw myself upon the bed. The red stripe on the blanket had lost its terror. I saw nothing, thought of nothing, but men—crowds of men in black—coming after me. Coming with a rope to strangle me. I, a man like themselves, with head and legs and arms like theirs. They would take me by the hands, and we should touch one another; they would look in my face and I should look in theirs, and nowhere, nowhere, would I find anybody to help me, to save me! Shut up in a cage awaiting the approach of my own species; sons of women like myself; men, with toilets carefully made, coming—deliberately, relentlessly—coming to put me to death! Coming, perhaps, from happy firesides, and waiting only until I should be dead to return to their wives and little ones. Not a man among them but would lend an arm to the meanest cripple in the street; yet coming, coming to butcher me. Could the good Lord, who made us all in a world of sin and suffering, approve it?

I got down upon my knees; I tried to pray, but just as comfort seemed approaching, a sudden, awful sensation, as of the presence of the executioner standing at my back, rope in hand, brought me trembling to my feet.

Again I fell exhausted on the bed. And now a mighty terror of my own body seized upon me. My head was raised, so that I saw the entire length of my figure. It seemed to me to be the body of a strangled corpse. I moved my foot to dispel the illusion, but with the cessation of its motion the frightful hallucination returned. I madly assisted the delusion. I crossed my hands on my breast; they seemed to become waxen, cold, and bloodless. I closed my eyes and pressed my elbows tightly against my sides to avoid contact with the linen of a coffin. A sickening nausea arose within me; my heart seemed turning over in its place, and then—consciousness ceased; merciful sleep had come to my relief.

* * * * *

I awoke with a start. When I make this statement I feel that I am doing scant justice to an extraordinary phenomenon. How do I know that I ever awoke? May

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I not still be lying in a dream on that prison bed? May not the gallows and rope be yet in store for me? Well, if such be the case, surely my supposing that it is not the case can do no harm? You, my mythical readers, will not worry over it if you are mythical; and if you are real, why, then, I, too, must be real and the phenomenon a reality.

I think that I awoke suddenly, and with the thought of the dire business of the morning very present in my mind. It was broad day ight—the light of that day I had shivered to think of—the light which was to be a

I put my hands to my eyes.

signal for all those men in black, with crêpe on their arms, to take their victim to the sacrifice. A film seemed stretched across the balls of my eyes, upon which were mirrored a multitude of colours, that now, as my staring pupils dilated, took form in a hundred beautiful things.

First of all, I seemed to see, just in front of me, the face of a pretty child, smiling from a halo of yellow hair; a sideway glance, and heavy curtains of some bright red material parted to permit my dazzled eyes to behold a window flaming with reflections of the morning sunlight. Overhead, my sky was a plane of of brown and gold. My hand, falling at my side, rested upon a texture as soft as swansdown; my body undulated upon a bed softer than any it had ever before known.

It is now a year since the day of that awakening. I have been for the last ten minutes endeavouring to recall my first impressions, my earliest thoughts, as this scene, the beau y of which I have but hinted at, dawned upon my senses. I may have supposed myself in Heaven; but, if so, the idea could have been no more than momentary, for it was impossible for one lying as I was lying, in a position commanding a view on all sides, not speedily to discover that he was the occupant of a very comfortable bed in a decidedly luxurious bedchamber. My little girl of the golden hair hung in a massive frame on the tinted wall directly opposite the foot of my bed. The window through which came in the early sunlight was in a corner of the east wall; my brown and gold sky was excellent fresco, equal to anything I had ever seen in those establishments in which my livelihood had been gained on the other side of the water.

How long I had been staring at these marvellous surroundings I cannot say, when suddenly there came a soft rap at the door, which was on the right of the apartment, and a very cheery voice, the voice of a young girl, exclaimed: "Jacko! Jacko! Are you going to sleep all day?"

I listened in amazement, and naturally made no reply.

"Jacko," continued the pretty voice, "I tell you it's after eight o'clock, and we are all waiting for you."

Clearly the child was addressing some person whom she supposed to be in the room of which I was the only occupant. The rapping on the door of an obviously impatient little fist continued. It was necessary to respond. I said: "Hello!"

"All right," replied the little voice. "I'm glad you are awake at last. Now, do hurry!"

Hurry? Hurry where? I had an engagement at nine o'clock, the child assured me, and a French clock on the mantel confirmed her statement that it was past eight. Where was I? What did it all mean? I softly protruded one foot from the yielding bedclothing and planted it upon the thick carpet on the floor. How warm and grateful was the sense! My other leg followed, and I stood erect. In what was I dressed? White linen, with beautiful scarlet loops in place of common buttonholes—the night-robe of a prince! I smoothed the fabric with my hand, and was surprised discover a roundness and plumpness in my limbs, which I had never before been conscious. I put my hand to my bewildered head. A beard? A beard upon my face which had ever been beardless?

In the corner was a handsome dressing-table, surmounted by a high mirror. With wild, uncertain steps I crossed the room. The polished glass of the mirror showed the face of an utter stranger. Forgetful of the fact that had he stood behind me my own figure must have obscured his image, I wheeled about and confronted—no one. The room was occupied by myself alone. Again I faced the glass. There stood the stranger, with face as white as that of a corpse and eyes that seemed starting from his head. I put my hands to my eyes; the spectre in the glass imitated the motion. I screamed and fell to the floor, the image in the glass disappeared simultaneously with my fall. I had never fainted in my life, and did not become unconscious. Lifting myself upon my elbow, I looked round me.

The base of a wardrobe immediately opposite my point of vision was set with plate-glass. In that mirror I again saw the stranger, lying, as I was lying, with his cheek upon the palm of his hand. I got upon my knees and clasped my hands. The figure in the glass followed each motion. I jumped to my feet, the head and shoulders of the image disappeared, but from the waist downwards, remained. I then perceived that the mirror in the base of the wardrobe was less than three feet high. It was, then, my own reflection that I saw!

No, not my reflection, for I was a man six feet in height, slimly built, with light hair and blue eyes, and a beardless face. The object in the glass was scarcely

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five feet nine, inclined to stoutness, with short, curly brown hair, and a heavy beard. I turned to the mirror above the dressing-table, my knees quaking under me from consternation.

The ashen face of the brown-bearded stranger again confronted me. I lifted my finger to my lips in a dazed meaningless way, and the man in the glass did the same. Just then there came a loud knock at the door, and a heavy voice said:

"Open the door for a moment, Jack, I've something to say to you."

Was the voice addressing me? I stood still, alternately growing hot and cold.

"I say, old man, open the door," continued the voice from without.

Half unconsciously I approached the door and pushed back the bolt that held it. A handsome young fellow, rosy and radiant as from a brisk walk, and bearing a striking resemblance to the image in the glass, rushed in as the bolt was drawn, and clapping his hands upon my shoulders exclaimed:

"Jack, old man, it's all fixed! we're going with you. The governor gave in at the last when mother, Nell, and I all got after him in a body. But what's the matter with you, Jack?" (holding me at arm's length, and peering anxiously into my face.) "You look as if you'd seen a ghost. Here, Nell!—mother! Jack is going to faint."

I have before mentioned that I never faint; neither did I then, though I doubt not Walter had good cause to imagine that I would. I felt the blood leaving my body; I became limp in the strong young fellow's arms as he tenderly assisted me to the sofa.

Placed her arm lovingly round my shoulder.

Attracted by his call, there entered a moment later a matronly-looking woman of fifty or thereabouts, followed by a girl of fifteen, whom I at once recognised as the original of the portrait, grown a few summers older. Both threw themselves on their knees at my feet. Mother (I give the title by which I to-day address that estimable lady) placed her arm lovingly round my shoulder and drew my head towards her own, while Nell grasped one of my hands, and began to kiss it gently.

"My poor boy," began the lady, "you have overtaxed yourself, just as I feared you would, and the anticipation of this morning's event, in the weakened condition of your nerves, has made you ill. I shall be glad when the ceremony is over, and you are comfortably off."

Great Heavens! What was the lady speaking of? "The anticipation of this morning's event?" "Weakened nerves?" "Comfortably off?" What does it mean? Had I really been executed in the prison-yard, and was I in some place of purgatory waiting to go through the agony under different surroundings? Was this the beginning of a sinner's eternity? Were these people fiends in the guise of angels? Was I to go on for ever being executed in different shapes?

"Come, dear," continued the lady; "Walter will help you with your clothes, and after a good cup of coffee you'll be yourself again."

"And," chimed in the pretty little maiden, "we won't tell Julie what a devoted husband she is to have. A man—oh Jacko, for shame!—who becomes ill on his wedding-day merely at the thought of being married!"

During all this time my lips had refused to utter a sound, and I could now only exclaim, "Heaven have mercy on me!" a remark which caused Walter and his mother to hold a hurried conversation at the back of the sofa, and then to leave the room, saying cheerfully that they would not be gone a moment.

Left alone with me, the young girl clasped her hands over my knees, and looking into my face, said:

"Now, Jacko, my darling, tell me what is the matter? You won't keep anything from your own Nell? I admire Julie and I respect her, but if this marriage is going to make you unhappy, I'll break it off if I have to go to the girl myself and tell her that you do not love her. Oh, Jacko! my best, my dearest brother, tell me what is the matter?"

"Please leave me," was all that I could articulate.

"Dear Jacko," cried the affectionate girl, "I cannot leave you. You never spoke to me so before. My brother, my dear, dear brother!"

"Where is your brother?" I cried.

There was probably a look in my eyes that terrified the girl, for she rose to her feet and, with tears streaming from her eyes, left the room.

I was alone, and again approached the glass. The brown-bearded man looked haggard and unnatural. "For the love of Him who made us," I cried, speaking to the stranger in the mirror, "tell me who you are, and who I am?"

"Why, Jack, my boy, what is the matter?"

I felt a strong hand upon my shoulder, and, turning, confronted a pleasant-mannered, middle-aged gentleman whom I rightly inferred to be a physician. Just behind stood Walter and his mother. I do not know whether it was the strong individuality of the doctor that impressed me with a sense of the reality of my surroundings, which up to this moment had

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seemed illusory and vague, but I suddenly felt a warmth of blood returning to my limbs, and a sense of rest and security in my condition; a determination to drift willingly whithersoever fate might lead me. A smile must have shown itself in my face, for the doctor turned to the anxious lady, and said: "It is nothing, my dear madam; mere nervous excitement, which will soon pass away."

He then prepared a potion, which I cheerfully swallowed. Walter inquired whether he should not assist me to dress, and I assented. The drollery of my existence now began to take precedence of all other emotions. The brown-bearded man in the glass was no longer an object of terror in my eyes; he became amusing.

I saw, I could not fail to see, that his motions and actions were entirely in my control. Little by little, I came to a grateful acceptance of my new identity. A man who has been hanged, said I to myself, cannot be chooser in any subsequent allotment of events.

This mild acceptance of my extraordinary fate, at that time, was probably due in a large measure to the drug which the doctor had administered—a powerful narcotic no doubt—that quieted my nerves and caused my troubled brain to become languid.

Piloted by Walter, who happily insisted upon keeping hold of my arm, I passed through a spacious and handsome hall, and down a broad pair of stairs to a very luxurious breakfast-room, where, for the first time, I met the head of the family, a mild-eyed man, past middle-age, who during the strange scenes of the morning had been absent from the house, and who now greeted me very tenderly.

Throughout the breakfast which followed I remained completely silent. There was a pier-glass opposite me in which, with quiet amusement, I beheld the brown-bearded man put morsels of food into his rather handsome mouth, I myself enjoying the sensation of swallowing the same. I did not fail to notice that my silence and evident pre-occupation was a source of keen distress to the others at the table, but I was powerless to improve matters.

As the soothing effects of the doctor's potion wore away, my thoughts became more troublesome and bewildering, until finally, unable to remain any longer quiet, I rose from the table, and fled to an adjoining room.

There seemed to have been an intention on the part of some member of the family to follow me; but the head of the house exclaimed, "No, let Jack alone; he'll come out all right presently."

Upon a table in the room in which I had taken refuge lay a newspaper. I picked it up. The date—that dreadful date to which for weeks I had looked forward with sickening consternation—showed me that it was the latest issue.

The paper was called the *Denver Tribune* and was printed in Denver, Colorado. As I scanned the sheet, a faint recollection as of something heard in childhood came upon me. I recalled a conversation caught in a fragmentary way years before, while talking of this "Denver, Colorado."

What were they saying? Oh, they were speaking of Denver as the chief city of a cattle-raising province in the United States.

I was, then, still in the United States! In Denver! But how in Denver? How anywhere except in a murderer's cell in the Tombs prison, New York?

A clock on the mantelpiec struck nine.

While pondering with aching head upon these questions, my eyes encountered the following paragraph:

Harry Jessup, the brutal murderer of Eduardo Italiani, is to be hanged in the Tombs prison, New York City, at seven o'clock this morning.

Again and again I read this paragraph. My eyes devoured the three brief lines of print, till every word and letter seemed eating its way into my soul. "Harry Jessup, the brutal murderer of Eduardo Italiani, is to be hanged!" Is to be hanged? A clock on the mantelpiece struck nine. "Is to be hanged at the Tombs prison, New York City, at seven o'clock this morning." Is to be hanged? I, Harry Jessup, am to be—Oh, Heavens! what does it mean? This is the day, this is the morning, and the sun, which rose at five o'clock, is four hours old! My eyes dropped again upon the paper, which had fallen in my lap, and I read the following notice:

The marriage of Mr. John Sutherland (better known to his countless friends in Denver as "Jack" Sutherland) to Miss Julie Chamberlain will take place at the residence of the bride this morning. It is to be a very quiet affair, only the immediate friends of the two families having received cards.

For a moment my brain seemed to be bursting. The sickening nausea which I felt in the prison returned, and then, quietly, like a great wakening of some hitherto dormant intellectual faculties, there stole into my soul the consciousness of a miracle performed. I had not suffered at the hangman's hands. I lived. I had never ceased to live. Every action of my life was accessible to memory. I was still Harry Jessup. Were I dead, had I passed into another world, my store of knowledge would of necessity be increased or diminished but it remained the same.

I mentally ran over my past life, and at every station found proof of a personal and intimate knowledge of but one man, and that man was Harry Jessup. I rose and approached the glass. There stood the brown-bearded stranger.

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I looked in the face, and *knew that he had stolen my soul.* The mirror showed me the body of John Sutherland, with the soul of Harry Jessup. But the soul of the man whose body I wore, what of it?

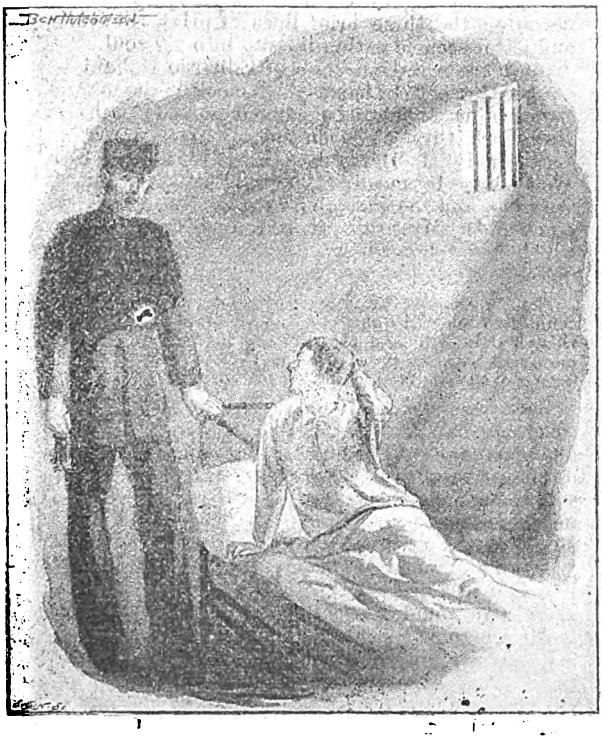
The sound of voices, subdued but earnest, come to my ears from the adjoining room. The name of "Jack," "dear Jack," was constantly upon the lips of the distressed parents of the loving brother and sister.

It needed no marvellous perspicacity for me, stranger as I was to them all, to discover that this "brother Jack," into whose suit of flesh I had unwittingly stepped, was a very dearly beloved member of the household. I learnt from such fragments of their talk as reached my ears that the loved ones were sorely troubled at my (at John Sutherland's) behaviour, and were at a loss what to do.

The newspaper paragraph, taken in connection with the young lady's remark in my chamber, made it obvious to me that this was to have been the wedding-day of the brown-bearded man, and I readily understood the dilemma into which his (or rather my) unaccountable conduct had thrown the entire family.

Remember, I am now writing of events a year old, and, if I seem singularly composed, it is only because time has graciously permitted me to grow accustomed to the contemplation of these wonders.

As I listened to the tender whisperings of mother and sister, so full of solicitude and anxiety, an overwhelming sense of my own enforced duplicity took possession of me. Who and what was I that I should have entered ghost-like into this happy family circle, bringing sorrow and suffering to all its members, and unwarrantably usurping the place of the eldest son; turning him from his bride, driving him——the thought flashes like fire upon my brain: Where is John Sutherland? This is his small, fat, white hand I hold before me. This is his heart which I feel beating; but his soul—himself—the man—the being who called himself Sutherland? Where is he? Was it an exchange of bodies? Between the hours of twelve last night and seven this morning I threw off the flesh and form which was my own, and assumed another mortal dwelling-place. The occupant of this body—the body which I see staring at me from yonder mirror—abandoned it for mine. It must have been so.



"Who are you?"

And my body—the external man Jessup—the corporeal shelter which this fond son and loving brother had been forced to enter; what of its fate? Dragged into a prison court-yard, and stretched by the neck at the end of a rope, two hours ago?

I do not remember all that occurred in the fever and subsequent delirium which fell upon me. I am told that I lingered between life and death for several months, tenderly watched by the parents and the sister of the unhappy man who died in my place.

When I was able to move about, my ignorance of all surroundings, which, as may be imagined, was complete, was attributed by the family physician to a shock of the brain centre, which, he explained, had destroyed my memory. I must, he said to Mr. and Mrs. Sutherland, be treated as a child, and retaught all that I had ever learned.

He suggested a trip to England, and we are now, after many months, about to leave America. My failure to recognise the affianced bride of John Sutherland has, I am told, thrown that young lady into a decline. No member of the Sutherland family has ever crossed the Atlantic, and my intimate knowledge of London will, if I ever reach London, be a new source of wonder to my companions.

We arrived in New York yesterday from Denver, and as soon as I could decently excuse myself from my "relatives," I went straightway to the Tombs prison, in Center Street. Having obtained a card of admission, I entered the inner prison, and made my way to the corridor known as "Murderers' Row." Cell No. 5, my cell, was empty. The gaoler, at sight of whom I came near to faint, informed me that Cell No. 5 had not been occupied since one Jessup, the murderer of an Italian, left it for the gallows a year ago.

"And tell me," I inquired, with a calmness which amazed me, "how this—this Jessup met his fate?"

"Terrible, sir, terrible!" replied the gaoler, evidently having, as he spoke, a vivid picture of the scene in his mind. "I never want to see the like of it again. You see, sir, he was a very nervous customer—most extraordinary so—and I expected we'd have trouble with him. But not long before midnight he fell into a sleep, just like the sleep of a child, and at half-past six he was slumbering as pretty as anything you ever saw. We hated to wake the poor fellow, but it had to be done, so I steps inside the grating and takes hold of his arm. He was awake and bright in a minute. 'All right, Walter,' he says, cheery like: 'I'm with you.' Then he looks round in a dazed sort of way, and says he: 'Why, hello! What the devil's all this?' and looking at me, he says: 'Who are you?' I told him, as kind as I could, that it was time to be going. He was on his feet then and staring round. 'Well,' says he, 'this may be a very pretty joke the boys have played on me, old man, but I don't like it. I suppose this is the County Gaol, and I'm in West Denver, hey? The boys must have got me pretty full at Charpiot's, and yet I could almost swear that I went home straight.'

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"I saw at once that he was crazy, and I thought it would be a mercy to get through the business as soon as possible; so I called in the deputies and we read him

the death-warrant. It's been a puzzle to me ever since, to know what that young chap was thinking about while we were reading the warrant. At times he'd laugh, and then he'd look sort of dazed and wild like.

"After the reading I told him we'd have to be moving and that I should be obliged to pinion his arms. 'All right, old man,' he said; 'everything goes, but I'll get even with those fellows when their time comes, you mark my words. I suppose now,' said he, with a laugh, 'you're going to haul me up?'

"I tell you, sir," continued the gaoler, "it made the cold shivers run down my back to hear him so joking like, just as if it was all a bit of fun. When we had his arms tied we started for the yard. There was a priest with him, at whom he laughed, saying: 'Well, the boys seem to want to make it as real as possible.'

"After we got into the court behind the prison where the gallows stood, and he saw the squad of police and the reporters and deputy sheriffs, he began to tremble, and then suddenly, in a voice that I can hear to this day, he screamed: 'What does it mean? Help! Murder!' As quick as possible we got him under the drop and pulled the black cap over his face, and then I think he fainted, for he cried: 'Julie! Father!' and fell down in a heap. The work was well done, and he didn't suffer much; but I can tell you, sir, I don't want to have to hang any more crazy men."

Well, as I said before, we are off for England in the morning, but I do not think I shall reach the other side. I have an idea that somewhere about half-way across the Atlantic I shall drown this brown-bearded man whom everybody calls "John Sutherland." N. P. B.

You Cannot Get Number 11 of PEARSON'S MAGAZINE Before Saturday, October 31st,

But on that day you will have an opportunity of getting in exchange for sixpence the following budget of literature and art:

Gates and Pillars of the Empire. *Robert Machray.*
No. 6.—Calcutta and Bombay Illustrated.
The 'Eathen. *Rudyard Kipling.*
Illustrated by Georges Montbard.
How Nelson Lost His Arm. *Randolph Murray.*
Illustrated by F. T. Jane, and from photographs.
Vengeance is Mine. (Complete Story.) *William Beatty.*
Illustrated by Stanley L. Wood.
The Poor Man's Club.
Written and Illustrated by *Harry Furniss.*
The White Slaves of England. *R. H. Sherard.*
No. 5.—The White-Lead Workers of Newcastle.
Illustrated by H. Piffard.
Perchance to Dream. *Rudolph de Cordova.*
(Complete Story.)
Illustrated by E. F. Skinner.
The Most Popular of Presidents. *Marie A. Belloc.*
Illustrated with photographs.
Music as a Medicine. *W. Paill.*
Wisdom Let Loose. *W. L. Alden.*
Illustrated by Charles May.
A Sea Change. (Complete Story.) *Morgan Robertson.*
Illustrated by S. Nation and G. W. Peters.
Ancient Military Types.
Illustrated by Crow.
A Dog-Fancying Duchess. *Robert Machray.*
Illustrated with photographs.
Secrets of the Courts of Europe. *Allen Upward.*
Second Series. No. 5.—"The Perfidy of Monsieur Disraeli."
Illustrated by Hal Hurst, R.B.A.
Harnessing the Stars. *Alfred T. Story.*
Illustrated with photographs.
The Last Extreme. (Complete Story.) *J. S. Fletcher.*
Illustrated by Sydney Cowell.

Jumbled Story Competition.—18.

On pages 572 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *November 2nd,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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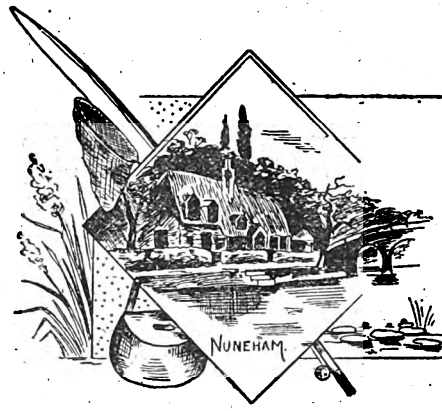

Glanders, of Squatters' Gulch.

THE stranger was intoxicated. There was no mistaking it. He was also ugly. There was no room for a doubt of that, either. The hilarious patrons of the Tarantula Saloon had for some hours been watching his increasing opulence of alcoholism and combativeness, with that interest which always marked them when prospects of a fight became prominent.

It may be supposed, therefore, that the movements of the stranger, upon the night of which I write, were viewed with something more than common interest. One by one the leading citizens had dropped into the Tarantula Saloon during the evening, until the tables were all well surrounded, and the bar was lined with watchful observers.

"Who's the stranger?" inquired Tom Cathcart carelessly, as he dealt three cards to Jack Gashwilder.

"Dunno," briefly responded that authority, throwing his hand down in a disgusted way. "He's on'y just arriv', and it's my opinion as how, if he keeps on, he'll reach the end of his lariat extremely quick."

"I've half a mind," mused Mr. Cathcart pleasantly, "to rise up and give him a benefit myself. I don't like no Missouri mud-eater to stand the boys up like he's doing."

"Never mind," affably rejoined Gashwilder, with that air of authority which gave his opinions such great weight, "hold on a bit. Fur-lined George will be along soon, and the stranger will have to take water then. Let him go on. Gimme two cards."

"Hello!" ejaculated Mr. Cathcart, a moment later; "the ball has begun."

Every man in the room had risen to his feet. The tall Missourian, a man of angular frame and sinister visage, had at last succeeded in drawing somebody into a controversy. The citizens of Squatters' Gulch were about to be entertained.

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Cathcart, "it's a shame for him to pick a row with Glanders. The poor chap can hardly hold his own head up, let alone fighting. I've a mighty good notion to sail in myself."

"Hold on!" cautioned Jack Gashwilder, with his index finger laid knowingly along his nose. "Thomas Glanders is all right; he is slow, but sure. Look there!"

The quarrel at the bar had been growing louder. The stranger, inflamed with the fiery liquor he had been drinking, had selected one of the least offensive men in the settlement as the special object of his displeasure. This person, a Mr. Thomas Glanders, was a quiet, respectably-dressed man, with a stolid face and a dejected manner, who was looked upon in a friendly, often a pitying, light by his companions. There had been something sad in his life—that was known to the entire population of the Gulch. What it was no one precisely knew, and no one cared. But nearly everybody took an interest in him, and not a soul lived in the town who would not have fought for his sake at any time.

The stranger was heaping abuse on Glanders' head—abuse which he could not comprehend, and which seemed to half bewilder him. But the offensive Missourian went on, goaded to increased fury by his own words. Still Glanders stood helplessly gazing about him, making no reply, but occasionally passing the back of his rough brown hand across his forehead. Finally, in a transport of rage, the stranger drew a revolver. Then Glanders seemed to awaken. He spoke for the first time.

"Put it up," he said quietly, "or I will kill you."

The stranger laughed, and the crowd, angry and menacing, began to close in upon him. Glanders motioned them back.

"Put it up," he repeated, "or I will shoot you in your tracks."

The stranger fired, and Glanders' hat fell to the floor.

Few of the citizens of the Gulch had known or would have believed he could act with such decision. He had hitherto been thought by them to be a slow and easy-going person, too inoffensive to be trodden upon, and too gentle to respond with violence. But upon this occasion he belied his reputation. Quick as lightning—so quickly that only one or two in the room saw the movement—a derringer sprang from his pocket, a deep report sounded through the room, and the stranger fell to the floor.

There was silence for a moment. Then the wounded Missourian, after writhing a moment where he lay, beckoned Glanders towards him. He was no longer violent. The fumes of the drink had quite evaporated from his brain, and he realised what had happened. Glanders, whose anger had disappeared as quickly as it came, when he saw he was the victor and his life was no longer threatened, stepped forward and raised the stranger's head to his knee.

"Whisky," he said shortly, to the bar-keeper.

The liquor was brought, and he poured it between the stranger's lips. It was a dramatic scene. So deep, so solemn was the colouring of the picture, that not a man in the crowd—usually a turbulent one—had as yet uttered a word.

The wounded man, somewhat revived by the stimulant, motioned Glanders to lean closer, and he obeyed. There

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was nothing but pain in his red face now, and great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. The stranger whispered a few words brokenly, and then suddenly fell back, dead. Glanders lowered the man's head to the floor, and then slowly rose to his feet. The hush which had some time ago fallen upon the crowd was not yet disturbed.

"Boys," said Glanders, in a voice which trembled slightly, "I hated to do it, but it couldn't be helped. I'm sorry it was so, and I'm willin' to abide by what you say. If it was murder, string me up, and be quick about it."

A murmur that rose almost to a shout ran through the room. Every man there endorsed his cause. Glanders began to move slowly towards the door. He paused once, drew his hat down over his eyes, buttoned his coat tightly about his throat, and thrust his hands into his pockets with an air that indicated a purpose.

"Poor things!" he muttered, as he strode into the night. "They're orphans now, and I made 'em so!"

* * * * *

Drawn back some paces from the roadway, close to the trunk of a tall pine tree, some distance from the sturdy settlement of Squatters' Gulch, was one of those huge, ungainly vehicles which, in the early days of pioneering, were known as prairie schooners. Near by, dimly seen through the darkness, were two lean, unhappy-looking horses, browsing in a helpless way upon the scant herbage which the place afforded. At the foot of the tree a heap of smouldering embers showed that there had been a small fire earlier in the night.

This was the scene into which Glanders peered half-an-hour after the tragic occurrence I have just described. For a long time he sat, thoughtfully and silently, upon the pole of the waggon. So far as any sign of his was concerned he might have been asleep. Possibly he was going over the events of the evening. Perhaps he was framing a scheme for the future.

When more than an hour had thus slipped by, he came out of his reverie, and rose to his feet. Thomas Glanders was a methodical man. For years he had plodded along in a quiet, careworn manner, accomplishing nothing that any of his companions could discover, but never complaining of ill-fortune or pain. Men supposed he must have money.

He lived well, but unobstrusively, and he never had difficulty in meeting his obligations. To the suffering he was always kind. Indeed, the local clergyman, who found few but sour grapes in this vineyard, was wont to say that Thomas Glanders could be relied upon, when charity was needed, to give as liberally as a gambler.

But there was no ostentation about him. He lived by method. He rose and went to bed at certain hours, he ate at prescribed times, and he drank his four glasses of whisky every day as regularly as he breathed. His was a purely matter-of-fact life. Whatever bad luck came to him—and it was altogether out of proportion to his good fortune—he accepted it without a word of complaint.

If, as was rarely the case, he had a touch of more than ordinarily pleasant luck, there was never a sign of jubilation in his conduct. He rarely talked, saving when words were absolutely necessary. What he had to do he did, and he made very little fuss about it.

When Glanders rose from his position upon the pole of the waggon, his first operation was to pile a few sticks of wood upon the coals. In a little while there was a blaze, which, after spluttering a moment, gave out considerable light. This illumination, or the sound of Glanders' footstep about the place, apparently aroused some degree of life inside the waggon, for there was a slight movement, and then a childish voice, rather petulant in its tone, said:

"The old man, I s'pose."

"Shet up!" responded another voice, obviously that of a lad, "or you'll get another larrupin'. Ef he's full, he's sassy."

Glanders leaned against the tree, and all became quiet again. For the second time since he had arrived upon this scene he fell to thinking, and, as before, his reflections were so absorbing, that he lost all conciousness of what was passing around him. He did not even notice that the canvas flap of the waggon was raised, and that two very big, blue eyes were peering cautiously through the aperture thus formed. It was also without his knowledge that the owner of those curious eyes stole out of the waggon and crept slyly towards him. Not until she spoke was he aware of her presence.

"Where's the old man?" were the first words Glanders heard.

They startled him slightly, and he looked earnestly into the young face that was upturned to his. Perhaps it was the flickering of the firelight that caused the quick shade that fell across his face. But it looked like an expression of pain. The girl, annoyed at his silence, went on impetuously:

"Don't you hear? What's the matter with you? Where's the old man?"

"Down the gulch," replied Glanders slowly, and with some difficulty.

"Oh," said the girl, with an odd mixture of sarcasm and curiosity. "He sent you up to say he was drunk, I s'pose? Said he wouldn't be home till he got good and ready—didn't he? Told you to tell us to look sharp, or he'd lick both of us when he got home, I reckon—hey?"

"Does he beat you then?" asked Glanders, with a weak attempt at evasion.

"Does he? Now you just bet he does. And I've got my opinion of a big loafer, that licks a little gal like me, what can't help herself. Some day he'll wake up the wrong outfit, and then he'll get put under the daisies with his boots on—you hear me?"

Glanders did hear her, and he shuddered. But he was strangely attracted by the big-eyed, rough-spoken little girl, who stood there looking him in the face and ejecting her words with an energy that would have been ludicrous under other circumstances. She was a slender child, perhaps twelve years old. Her hair was curly and light, and it fell in a tangled mass over her forehead and neck. She was poorly clad, and her brown feet had long been strangers to the cramping influence of shoes. There was a touch of great pity in Glanders eyes as he looked at this child standing there in the firelight and regarding him fixedly.

"Come here," he said, after awhile; "come here and talk with me. I want to ask you some questions."

He went over and sat down again upon the pole of the waggon. The girl looked at him for a moment without moving. Clearly her first impulse was to resent his suggestion. But that design lived only for a moment, and she approached him without shyness.

"I'll do it," she declared, in a voice from which the sharpness had all gone. "I don't know who you are, but I like you, though I can't tell why. It ain't 'cause you're handsome—that's dead sure."

Glanders paid no attention to this uncomplimentary

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allusion to his personal appearance. With him it was no time for idle words or thoughts.

"Tell me," he said, when the girl had settled herself on the ground in front of him; "do you like the old man?—are you fond of him?"

"Well," responded the girl, after a pause, "I can't say as I'd like to eat him. He's too handy with the back of his fist to make me so awful much in love with him."

Glanders sighed, as though he felt relieved from some anxiety.

"But, then," the girl went on, with childlike frankness, "you can't quite hate a man when he's the only purtector you've got. 'Though he was ugly he put all the bread into my mouth as ever went there, and I've got to remember that. Sometimes there wasn't much of it, and sometimes it was mighty queer bread. But as a gen'ral thing he did the best he knowed how, and —say, what are you thinking about so hard?"

Glanders was just at that moment thinking he was about the darkest criminal in the world. To save himself from possible destruction he had killed a fellow-being—an act, I regret to say, which was not sufficiently infrequent in those days, and in that section, to call for any special regrets upon its own account. But Glanders reflected that in depriving the Missouri bully of his life, he had also taken away the only prop upon which this helpless child leaned for support. It was a reflection which filled him at first with dismay and self-reproach, and then with a certain definiteness of purpose.

"Sis," said he, after a moment, passing his hand over her straying curls with a kind of rough tenderness that was not without its element of magnetism: "Sis, ef thar was a man—mind ye, I don't say thar is a man—but ef thar was one as come to you and says, says this man: 'Ef so be as you two children wants a home, bein' without one, ye can come and live along of me, and though it ain't a refined and ellygant abode'—ef any man was to say this to ye, and yer dad didn't particularly mind, what would you answer?"

The girl looked full in his face.

"Answer? Why, I'd collar the offer like chain-lightning—only"—she hesitated an instant—"only the old man never'd stand by and let me have such a good thing as that—never."

"He'll never bother you any more, my child," said Glanders. "Do ye feel very bad about it?"

"Bad?" she echoed.

"Yes. The old man has been took, as it were. He was killed, my child, and the man what offers to take ye into his home is the one as did it."

The young girl started back, and regarded Glanders with a strange expression. It was not a look of repulsion, or anger, or fright, but rather a look of astonishment. Presently, after peering into his eyes for some little time, she said:

"Then I don't believe it was your fault. You ain't the kind of man to do that sort of thing 'thout a cause. And as for me, it's astonishin' he hain't ketched it afore."

Glanders took a deep breath, which sounded like a sigh of relief.

"Then," said he, "we must be movin'."

In the morning the camp of Squatters' Gulch was surprised to see a huge emigrant waggon drawn up to the door of Glanders' cabin; and, later in the day, it was still further astonished to observe two children, a boy and a girl, playing about the place. Who they were, and where they came from, was a deep and absorbing mystery. That their advent was connected with the death of the stranger was not a theory which occurred to many of the citizens. One of the leading explanations put forward by those who conversed upon the subject was the proposition that Glanders' suppositious wife in the States—an appendage which was attached in a greater or less degree to the main bulk of the population of that salubrious locality—had forwarded her children to be cared for by their legitimate protector. But whatever Squatters' Gulch may have thought or expressed upon the subject, Squatters' Gulch did not carry its curiosity offensively near to Glanders, or his cabin on the hill.

Meanwhile, in the cabin itself there were some odd developments. The new residents had quietly domesticated themselves with that affluent confidence which is the distinguishing trait of that migratory childhood of the West, which, being cast this way and that by the changes which constantly occur in new countries, readily accustoms itself to fresh surroundings. One night, sitting before the fire, with his short clay pipe in his mouth and the children on the floor at his feet, dreamily regarding the coals, Glanders broke the silence.

"Sis," said he, "I don't want to pry into no family secrets of yourn, 'cos it ain't none of my business perticklery, but, at the same time, it ain't reasonable for me to go on always a-callin' of ye 'Sis,' and the young chap 'Bub.'"

"That's so, I reckon," promptly replied the young girl. "My name's Lucy Bryton. And his'n," pointing to the boy, "his'n is Robert. His t'other name ain't like mine, though, 'cause he's only a 'dopted brother. His name is Rathbun—Robert Rathbun. Hello! What's up, Mr. Tom?"

"Nothing?" replied Glanders, whose face had become rigid. "On'y I dropped my pipe, that's all. Go to bed, youngsters. I want to think. Hold up a bit. What became of yer mother, Bub?"

"Dead. Drowned in the Missouri overflow. I haven't seen her since I was a baby."

When they were gone, and for hours afterwards Glanders sat looking gloomily into the fire.

"Pore gal!" he muttered, after a long time. "Ef matters had come out a leetle different, that would hev bin my boy. Mine. Well, what's to hinder now?"

Having by some acute mental process convinced himself that nothing was to hinder, Glanders went thoughtfully to bed.

* * * * *

The soft autumn days, gilded by the clear and genial Colorado sun, melted slowly away into the crisp and vestal winter. Then came the budding spring, the lazy summer, and the blushing autumn again. So the weeks glided into months, and the months closed into years, until Squatters' Gulch, ashamed of its rough and uncouth name of other days, adopted the more exalted title of Clarion City.

There were other changes, too, in the general atmosphere surrounding the place. The rough and somewhat uncouth dwellings which formerly covered the steep sides of the ravine had almost entirely disappeared, and their places were filled with more sightly cottages. The business part of the town had grown commensurately with the other portions of Clarion City, and the place presented an altogether sightly appearance, cosily tucked away among the pine-clad foothills.

In a tasteful cottage, far towards the outer edge of settlement, lived Mr. Thomas Glanders and the

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members of his family, who have heretofore been described in this veracious narrative. It was a pretty place, and it was marked here and there by the unmistakable traces of a woman's presence. Neat white curtains hung in the windows, a hammock swung on the verandah, and a trailing vine grew up over the posts by the door.

One night, as the sun was climbing down across the western sky, the verandah was occupied by two young people. A strong, hearty young man was swinging in the hammock, while sitting beside him, idly moving the network backwards and forwards, was a lithe and graceful girl. She was blushing deeply, but not hanging her head. There was, indeed, in her large, blue eyes, a look of open frankness, which I do not think is often found about the faces of young women when they are discussing the subject which was at that moment occupying her attention.

"There is something which seems almost like sacrilege about it, Robert," she said with a touch of remonstrance in her voice. "I have grown to think you my brother in reality."

"But you love me, Lucy! You have told me so."

His voice was deep, and not unmusical to the ear. And it had about it, in the time of pleading, a persuasive tenderness which, I fear, more than one of the fluttering damsels of the Gulch had found it difficult to resist. But Miss Lucy was not of the common sort, and she did not heedlessly assent to the proposition advanced.

"What," she asked presently, "would he think?"

It was apparent that the young man did not require a more definite descriptive term to understand who was referred to.

"He would scarcely object, Lucy. You know he loves both of us very dearly, and his greatest happiness would be in making us happy."

"True," replied Miss Lucy thoughtfully. "But if—if he should rather we did not seek this kind of happiness. Robert—you know we owe him a very great deal! Our home, our rescue from an existence that would have left us both more to be pitied than if we were dead; our education—all were given us by him. We can scarcely do anything that may bring him pain, Robert."

The young man in the hammock was silent for a moment.

"Tell me," he said, in a little while, "why you suppose there is any reason that he would object."

Miss Lucy's face assumed a deeper scarlet.

"I—I—well, nothing. It is probably my imagination."

"Will you ask him?"

Another pause. Then, in a low voice:

"Yes, I will ask him to-night. If he consents, Robert, I will do all that you have asked."

"That's a dear, sweet Lucy!" exclaimed Robert, springing to his feet and kissing her lips. "We shall be very happy."

As he strolled down the hill, Lucy's eyes followed his retreating figure sadly. When he was gone, she drew a long and slightly tremulous breath, and laid her head against the post. She still sat thus with her eyes bent upon the ground, when a heavy footfall aroused her attention.

Mr. Thomas Glanders, returning from his office at the mouth of the Giant Mine. Not quite the Thomas Glanders we have known heretofore. His eyes were serener now than they were of old, and his tread had not that element of hesitation which formerly marked it. Thomas Glanders, mine-owner and operator, with a pretty home, and the benefits of solicitous female society, was rather inclined to be an ornament to his sex.

"Good evenin', Lucy," he said kindly, as he drew a chair up to her side, and seated himself so that the folds of her dress brushed against his knees. "I met Robert as I came up the hill. A fine boy that, Lucy. I'm as proud of him as if I had been his father."

A moment of silence, during which Miss Lucy breathed a trifle quickly. One hand lay unemployed in her lap. Glanders picked it up, and held it in his own. It looked so small, so white, so lovely, in his great palm, that he speedily covered it up by drawing his brown fingers about it.

"It's a whiter hand," he began, slowly and reflectingly, "though it ain't much bigger than it was when I first took it into mine, that night under the big tree. Ah, my girl, I didn't see then; and I didn't get to imagine that you would be so dear to me some day. I didn't know that in the course of time you would get to be—what you are to me. If I had——"

Another pause. This time Lucy was slightly trembling.

"If I had," he continued, "I should almost have been afraid to see you."

"Afraid!" The words came reluctantly and almost in a whisper.

"Afraid I might some time lose you—afraid that some other love but the regard you had for clumsy, poor-spoken old Tom Glanders might some day be stole away by a deeper, a greater regard for another man."

Mr. Glanders rose and walked to the other end of the verandah. Then he came slowly back, and placed his heavy hand, light enough now, upon the sunny head.

"Lucy," he began—"child, you are more to me than I can tell you—more than I know. There is but one happiness for me—but one rest after my day's struggle. And it has been a struggle, Lucy, that ain't always been easy for to get the best of. But, Lucy, I don't want to find fault, nor to complain, if it has brought me you. Eh? Why, child, you are cryin'! Dearie, if I've said anything that's grieved ye, don't mind me. Lucy, I'll never speak of it again, as long as I live. I take it all back, Lucy. I do!"

Mr. Glanders was down by her side, holding her hands and trying to soothe her. In a moment she became quite calm.

"You have been kind to me," she said, after a little while. "I was only a stranger's child—a stranger who would have taken your life. You took me in, and cared for me, and worked and toiled for me, so that I might have comforts and be happy. You took me, a ragged, rough, ill-bred child, and you gave me the chance to become a lady. You have earned my—my love, and——"

"Don't speak that way, Lucy. I didn't calculate to buy your heart. I didn't, Lucy, and I wouldn't take it like that."

"You didn't buy it, you—you won it. Tom, I love you very, very dearly. It may not be the kind of love you expect, just yet; but, by-and-bye, when we have grown used to each other, when we have forgotten that we were——"

"Father and daughter, almost," he broke in. "Are you sure, Lucy? Will you never regret this?"

"Never!" she cried impulsively. "But let it be quick. Do not wait a day, but have it done at once! It—it must be without delay, or—or——"

She did not finish the sentence, but with a sharp, convulsive kiss upon his brown cheek—a kiss which sounded like a gasp—she was gone.

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In the gloaming of his porch that night sat Mr. Thomas Glanders, a very happy man. Behind him lay all the gloom, and sorrow, and pain, that could never come to him now. In the future—what? He could not answer, though it seemed very bright.

* * * * *

It was quickly and quietly accomplished. Almost before the staid citizens of Clarion City were out in the streets, Mr. Glanders and his bride had walked to the little chapel down the ravine, and back again.

He had noticed that Lucy was very pale that morning, and that there were long, deep lines in her face. Clearly she had not slept. But Mr. Glanders attributed the fact to a weakness of the sex, and imagined that in a little time it would soon wear away. Robert did not come home during the night, having gone a twenty mile ride to visit some friends.

Mr. Glanders had wished to defer the quiet ceremony until his arrival, but Lucy had refused with a feverish haste, which her companion set down to the score of diffidence. It was some hours after the marriage, that Mr. Glanders, failing to stir up any enthusiasm in Lucy's breast regarding the various topics of conversation, kissed her tenderly, and strolled out for a walk among the trees.

"She's better alone for a time," he muttered apologetically to himself. "When I come back in half-an-hour's time she'll be as bright and cheery as ever."

For a long time after he went away, Lucy sat looking blankly at the wall. Then she rose and walked out upon the porch, and stood looking down the hill, where she had last seen Robert pass away. In a few moments she became conscious that some one was near her.

It was Robert, white as a ghost, and trembling nervously. She looked into his face, but could not speak. There was a deep, pathetic inquiry in her eyes, which spoke more plainly than words.

"Yes, I know," he said, in a strange and worried fashion. "I heard it as I came up the street. I shall not reproach you, Lucy, for, if he asked you to marry him, it was the only return you could make for all his more than fatherly kindness."

There was a footstep not far away, but it was not noted by the two young people.

"I have come, Lucy," continued Robert, in the same hurried and unnatural fashion, "to say good-bye."

"Robert!" she gasped, "do not—do not go away."

"I must," he said, in a strange tone, regaining a part of his own force as he saw a touch of weakness in the woman he loved. "There is no other course. It would break my heart to stay here and see you the wife of another. It would wear out my gratitude, my manhood. Day by day, all that is good about me would fade and fade away, until I died of shame and mental agony, or became a reproach to all the world. It must be, Lucy. We love each other too dearly to have it otherwise."

She was silent.

"Good-bye, Lucy," he said, quietly, taking her hand.

"Good-bye," she whispered, in a choking voice.

For a moment he held her hand in his. At the same instant a shadow that had been thrown by the sun across the ground almost at their feet, began slowly and stealthily to steal away.

"Try," said Robert, struggling hard to regain his composure, "try to forget me. You can only find happiness in that oblivion. Or, if you think of me sometimes, remember me only as the brother who grew up with you and loved you with—with only a—brother's love. Good-bye. God bless you, little sister!"

He turned on his heel, and took a step forward. The sharp report of a pistol from the rear of the house arrested his attention.

"What was that?" asked Lucy, turning a shade whiter.

In a moment they were both under the great pine tree which stood a few paces up the side of the hill. What they saw at that moment will never be forgotten by either.

Stretched upon the soft carpet of pine needles, with a look of ineffable gentleness in his fast glazing eyes, a smile on his lips, and her portrait on his heart, lay the rigid figure of the husband of the stranger's child. L. R.

POST-CARD COMPETITION, No. 18.

A GUINEA is offered this week to the reader who first names the noun of four or more than four letters mentioned most frequently on pages 551 to 560. Another guinea is offered to readers living more than 100 miles from London under the same conditions. *Post-cards only, please.*

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION, No. 16.

THE London guinea goes this week to Miss Strickland, 11, Park Walk, Fulham Road, S.W., and the provincial guinea to Miss Emma Bates, 26, Hunter's Vale, Birmingham. The sentence was: "She caught the girl's hand, and pressed a sovereign into it."

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION, No. 15.

SEVERAL competitors tied for the first place in this competition, and the £5 has gone to Miss Tomkis, 12, Portland Place, Leamington, whose solution was the first to hand with only three errors. As none of the Irish readers succeeded in getting within four numbers of being correct, the £2 is added to the remaining £3 and the total equally divided among the following readers: Mr. Siegfried H. Herkomer, Lululaund, Bushey, Herts; Miss Mannion, 16, St. George's Road, Ladbroke Grove, W.; Mr. Alan S. Holland, Llangathan, Oxford; Mr. G. V. Padmore, 2, Bedford Villas, Gerard Road, Weston-super-Mare; and Mrs. M. E. Wynne, 56, Algeron Road, Lewisham, S.E.

KEY.

51	30	252	2	141	21	154	88	106
145	143	191	76	133	198	268	8	7
258	4	155	69	124	108	236	111	211
86	122	255	251	55	92	224	33	95
130	181	186	247	96	15	188	66	125
56	153	39	221	97	132	217	75	225
227	31	180	136	22	213	9	245	139
223	194	265	37	168	157	152	131	114
148	10	195	205	138	87	176	123	150
140	253	94	44	165	189	109	82	210
248	112	34	57	65	242	246	115	54
98	6	45	90	201	156	182	52	89
64	266	144	261	40	80	216	93	204
117	59	202	60	244	61	228	270	91
70	254	84	81	229	256	121	185	163
220	231	3	260	239	16	11	207	32
19	203	25	196	222	240	103	104	47
41	250	79	197	206	164	24	14	101
13	226	36	199	159	257	135	49	151
23	175	263	243	238	172	116	214	127
73	53	167	27	209	126	171	48	184
78	85	38	142	190	193	77	233	110
149	50	264	267	129	46	161	12	107
118	234	230	177	74	120	183	147	29
26	235	241	137	17	99	62	35	119
219	262	128	134	249	160	71	200	218
63	215	102	58	259	100	67	212	83
269	208	18	146	178	166	68	20	237
158	187	28	43	162	169	105	179	5
42	170	1	173	72	192	174	232	113

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OR,

The Romance of a Lost Continent.

By **Geo. C. Wallis,** Author of *"The Winning of Gunhild,"* etc.

SUMMARY.

ARNON's memory of his early days begins at a time when he finds himself abandoned on the seashore, whence he discovers the cave of a band of pirates, by whom he is captured. Under the care of Didron the Chief he grows up as one of them, and on the death of the former he takes command. Viol is the daughter of Didron and marries Arnon, who, on one of his voyages, lands at Miropis and consults the Priest of the Spirit of Truth, from whom he learns that within a year and a half he will be a captive in a foreign land, and that he need not fear death until he has visited the Grotto of the Sleeper three times. On returning, he finds his ship burnt and men killed. After fighting he escapes, and meets and falls in love with Briseis, daughter of King Dulo X. of Atlantis, and to her he reveals his identity. Vichri, Briseis' cousin and lover, believes Arnon to be dead. For several months he lives at the Court; but the old roving spirit returns, and he sets out to discover the cave of treasure left by Didron and his band. On his return from an unsuccessful attempt, he finds his identity discovered by King Dulo, and is sent away as a galley slave. During his absence in a small boat up a creek on the Coast of Nubia, the ship is taken by rebels. Led by Arnon, the whole of the population, starving and fearing annihilation by the rebels, set out for another town. His followers are routed, and he is captured by Asos, an Egytian captain, by whom he is taken to Memphis. He saves from a leopard, Vesta, the daughter of a priest, and himself becomes a priest. While walking through the Temple he hears voices.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLOTTERS FOILED.

AT first no sound rewarded my anxious ears, but presently, their confidence being restored and their fears allayed, the unseen speakers breathed more freely, and began to talk among themselves.

"'Twas but a bat in the passages," said one, with a deep, gruff voice; "go on with your plan, and let us be away on our duty."

"Art hasty?" answered another in a thin, suspicious tone. "Wert ever so, Amasis? Lucky it will be for thee if it were only a bird of darkness, and not a spy of the King. But it hath gone, and now we may speak freely."

"Gone, indeed," thought I. "You do not know, my friend, that Arnon, the son of Didron, is behind this thin, deceitful wall."

"Then speak, and quickly as well as freely," said a third voice, in eager impatience, "for you know the time is short, and there is much to do."

"And thou, too, art hasty," said the gruff voice grumblingly, "and art like to spoil all if thou art not careful. Well, it is this I wish to say, *that after Menophres sleeps* you must draw your sword, calling on Osiris to witness that the King is dead, and the new king reigns. Pamonthes shall be waiting by the door of the banquet-room with a picked and well-paid band of armed men, and I shall be with him; and then it only needs that we bestir ourselves, and Pamonthes will be Pharaoh by to-morrow's sun, for the soldiers love him better than his elder brother. And then, my friends, our places in the land will be high, and thou, Amasis, shalt have the house and wealth of this fat old Mitres and his upstart, adopted son.

"Already, near the quarries of Silsilis, a secret army is drilling, and all is in readiness. See to it that you play your parts well, and victory is ours."

Well I knew now who the speaker was, and who the listener whom he called Amasis; the first a priest of the temple, who envied Mitres his place and fame, and the second a captain of the Royal Guard, a favourite of young and dissolute Pamonthes, the King's brother. The third, whom I could not make out, spoke next, answering Mexo.

"So far, good. But what is my task, and at what hour shall the blow fall?"

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"Thine it is to see that the Royal Guard, who will be making merry in another room, be well drugged in their cups, so that their Royal leader may call on them in vain when the plot is out. At midnight, when the revelry is at its height, and the sober citizens are a-bed, that is the time. Dost understand all instructions now?"

"One thing only," said Amasis, "the potent powder on which success depends——"

"Is here," replied the chief conspirator. "Take good care of it. And now to your posts; I shall not fail."

Vain boaster! little he recked of one well named the Iron-fingered!

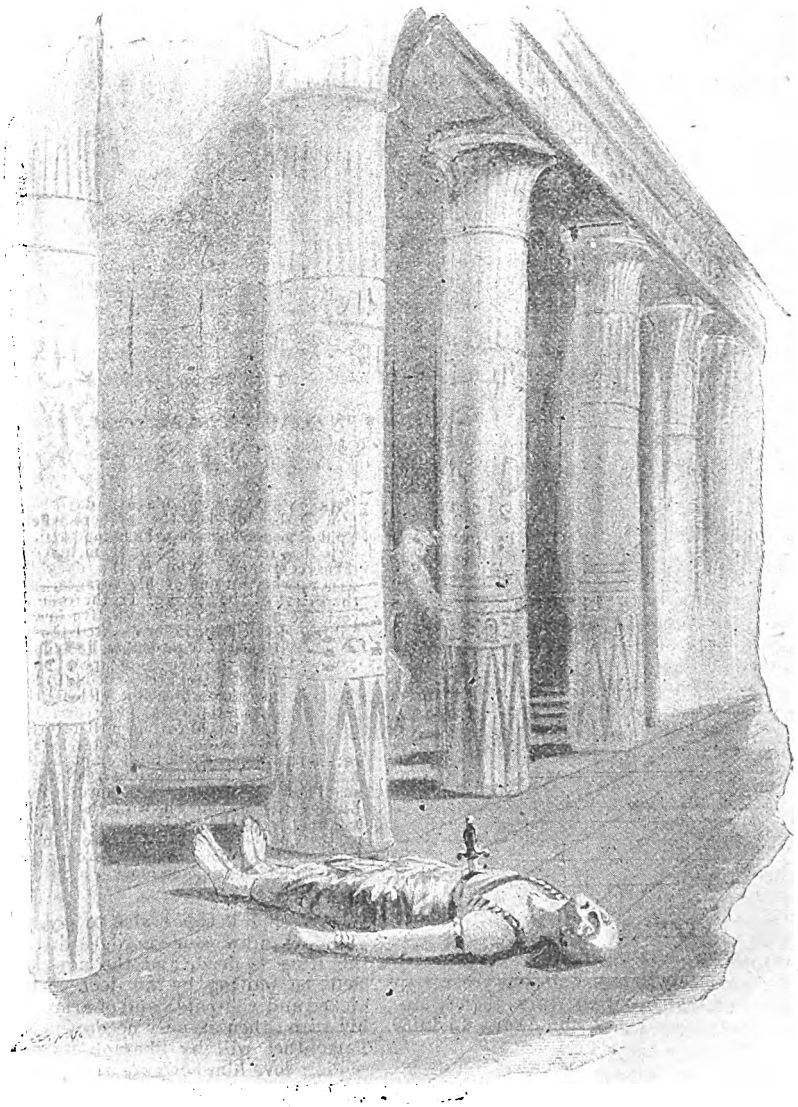
The retreating footsteps of his two confederates echoed down the stone-flagged court, and for a time Mexo paced slowly along the narrow passage, rendering it impossible for me to leave my secret recess without his knowledge, for, through a chink in the wall, I saw that the moon was now flooding the corridor with a garish light, where before had been darkness. I waited awhile, thinking how best to frustrate this murderous plot.

A great banquet was spread in the palace, I knew, and already it wanted but two hours of midnight; the guests would be sipping the first goblets of wine wherewith to whet their pampered palates, and it was a full hour's walk from the temple. Amasis had gained a good start of me with the deadly poison that was to be slipped unnoticed into the King's cup, and doubtless some time must elapse before the vile stuff could do its work. Meanwhile, the schemers of this nefarious plan were gathering their forces together. And not only was the King in danger, but Mitres, my host, and, judging from the bitter manner Mexo had spoken of me, my own life, perhaps, depended on whether I could reach the palace before the fatal draught was drunk.

Still that suspicious villain paced before my means of egress, seeming in no way disposed to leave the spot, and presently I discovered why.

As he walked up and down, I heard him muttering to himself:

"How much longer before they come? . . . . Surely Pamonthes is not delayed. . . . . The time is passing. . . . . I made him understand the place of meeting!"



So I left him.

Now I saw that at any risk I must escape, and that quickly, so as noiselessly as possible I slid back the stone and stepped into the corridor when his back was turned towards me. But as ill luck would have it, a bat flew noisily overhead, brushing the wall with his clumsy wings, and Mexo, starting, turned and saw me. Further secrecy was useless, so I greeted him with a derisive laugh.

"Seest that walls have ears, Mexo, when treachery is planned! Pamonthes will rail well at thee, when he comes, for a careless chatterer!"

"Or at thee, for a vile spy!" cried Mexo, rushing at me with uplifted hand, in which gleamed a short dagger. Not a muscle I moved, not a step I stirred, till that flashing point hovered just before my eyes, and then, with a lightning movement, I seized in an iron grasp the hand that held it, wrenching the wrist round with such sudden force that the bone snapped, the weapon fell from the nerveless fingers, and the arm hung useless at his side, whilst a cry of pain and rage burst from his lips.

In another moment my own dagger had done its work, and I dragged the traitor's body into the full light of the moon, leaving the blade stuck upright in him.

"There, disloyal wretch!" I said, "Pamonthes will find thee waiting for him patiently."

So I left him, and set forth for the palace in breathless haste. Down the echoing halls of that mighty temple,

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through the sacred groves, beyond the outer pylons, and down the giant avenue of sphinxes, five thousand paces long, I ran with flying feet, the clatter of my teak-wood sandals jarring on the still night air. Never before had that awesome avenue, with its huge, stolid heads gazing in grim indifference upon the doings of puny man, its wide, staring roadway void of sheltering shadow, and the buildings of the great city looming up as I neared the further end, seemed so interminably long.

Some priests coming up to the temple would have stayed me to inquire the cause of such unseemly speed, but there was that in my face made them give way for me, dallying not for any answer to their questionings.

On, on, I ran, till I came to the great arch that spans the roadway at the outer end, and there met those whom of all on earth I least wished to meet just then—Pamonthes and a troop of his followers. Fortunately, none of them knew me by sight.

"Whither now, in such haste, priest of Amun?" asked the Royal rebel suspiciously, whilst his men surrounded me.

"To one who sits at the banquet table of the King to-night," I answered quickly, ready-witted for once in my life, "with a secret message from one Mexo, *whom thou knowest.*"

"And the name of him to whom you take this message?" asked he, partly satisfied.

"Amasis," I replied, without hesitation, "a captain of the guard, who stands high in favour at Court, *and hopes by to-morrow's sun to stand higher still.*"

"It is well. Go on thy way swiftly, and it may be that thou shalt find a prouder post before to-morrow's sun has set," said Pamonthes, now reassured.

"I doubt it not, Prince," I answered, "and hearken, you will find Mexo, already armed, waiting for you in the great corridor of the northern hall."

Then, chuckling in anticipation of the angered astonishment of the conspirators when they should find how they had been tricked, I passed under the arch, and away to the palace. It now wanted less than an hour to midnight, and the fate of Egypt hung upon the swiftness of my feet.

Past noble dwellings, fertile, fairy gardens, deep, pellucid pools, stone-banked irrigation streams, where pilfering fishers cast their nets surreptitiously under the shade of the persea trees, past scores of humbler houses, crowded together in unhealthy closeness, and through the terraced flower-strewn walks of the Royal abode, thick-starred in their season with sweet-smelling roses, lowly violets, gorgeous chrysanthemums, fragile anemones, fragrant lotus, acinon, bay trees in bloom, and the twining flowers of the papyrus; past all these, without a thought for their strange beauty under the pale-faced moon, I ran, till I came to the portal of the palace, then, past the soldiers of the guard, roughly brushing aside the wardens of the brazen doors, and tearing costly hangings from their hooks in my hasty passage, to the horror of the Royal servants, I rushed on till I gained the banquet-room, and burst into the presence of Pharaoh, dressed in my priestly panther skins, with the golden scarabæus of office glowing on my forehead, the long, straight-handled censer-cup, with brazen hawk perched at the end, swinging loosely from my girdle, and the dagger of Mexo in my hand!

The assembled guests dropped their glasses on the groaning table and turned towards me, as I advanced up that gilded room, with surprise, annoyance, fear, and perplexity

Bending low, I whispered in his ear.

sweeping across their countenances, according as they were in the plot or ignorant thereof.

Grim, implacable, not heeding their dismay, I strode to the seat of Pharaoh, who was even at that crucial moment lifting a coloured goblet of fine Anthylla to his lips, and before the possibly death-laden draught could reach them I had hurled it out of his hand, smashing the brittle ware into a thousand fragments on the marble floor, and scattering the costly wine upon the unstained board.

"By the stone-toothed Fish of Sebek!" cried Menophres angrily, "an thou hast not good reason for this thou shalt die the death before the sun rise. What meanest thou?"

Bending low, I whispered in his ear:

"To save thy life, if it be not too late. Hast a trusty messenger?"

"Yes, by all the gods," said Pharaoh, and then, in a louder tone, "Hither, Plexis!"

A youth all gorgeous in silk and purple trappings came forward, bowing low. To him the King, at my desire, gave order to take his signet seal to Asos, the chief captain of the guard, bidding him command his men to instantly cease feasting and hold themselves in readiness by the door of the banquet-room, and also to close the doors without till word was sent to re-open them. As the fleet-footed youth sped away on his mission, Amasis, the plotter, rose from his seat, and was about to follow him, but quick as thought the King saw it, and in a stern tone called him back.

"Be seated, Amasis. I like not my guests to leave until the feast is over. Bethink thee of that pale, rich Teniotic thou hast not yet tasted."

With an ill grace the soldier obeyed the command, gulping down a deep draught to hide his desperation and chagrin.

"And now, priest, tell us the reason of this strange interruption to our festivity," asked Menophres.

"Another word for thine ear alone," I said. "Who passed

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thee that goblet of wine I dashed so roughly from thy lips?"

"Amasis," answered the King, "but saving a draught of zythus, which my own servants brought, it was the first drink of the night."

"Then thou art safe," I replied, "and as to my story, it were better told so that the company can hear it."

By this time the attendants had cleared away the spilt Anthylla wine, and carried off the red amphora from which it had been poured. Then as briefly as I could I related what had passed between the three conspirators in the temple, and their plans for carrying out their plot, omitting only their names; and all the time I spoke Amasis watched me with eyes half-fearful, half-threatening, and hand upon his sword. When I told how I had slain Mexo, a muttered oath burst from his lips, which the King noticed but ignored.

"And the names of the three wretches?" asked Menophres.

"He whom I slew was Mexo, the priest, the third I know not, save that he is among the Royal Guard, and the second is Amasis yonder," I answered, pointing to the culprit.

"Seize and bind the traitor!" cried the King, rising and flashing with wrath, "and to-morrow he shall lie on the bed of torment!"

But even as he spoke there came the sound of the clashing of swords and the cry of conflict from without, telling that Pamonthes and his armed men were attacking the palace, and, hearing it, Amasis drew his sword, calling upon all who favoured the young Prince to quit themselves like men and hurl the old tyrant from his throne.

Scores of the guests unsheathed their blades at once, and leaping back from the table, joined him, while the others gathered round the Royal chair, prepared to defend it to the death. And I saw that the parties were evenly balanced, so that not yet was the danger past.

"Fear not, my son," said a voice in my ear, "for the gods will surely fight for us this night. Take this sword and use it well—it is one of the two I always wear at royal feasts."

I turned at the familiar tone, and saw Mitres at my side, armed with a bright, broad-bladed knife of sacrifice, and his face beaming with a quiet glee. Ay, he was as merry as a merle that night. Then there came the shock of arms, and the din of strife within deadened the sounds of battle from without. It seemed as though a million of the evil spirits of Amenti were let loose to work havoc on earth, so fearful was the uproar, so terrible the confusion that reigned in that gilded room.

The great table, loaded with its costly viands and fine old wines, was overturned in the midst of the turmoil, stools and chairs were flung about in inextricable chaos, arrows whistled down the lengthy chamber, and were transfixed in the oaken beams of the walls and roof, spears flashed over our devoted heads, swords swung in deadly strokes, and through it all rang the piercing shrieks of the women, huddled trembling in a corner furthest from the strife.

Those who fought on the King's side now gained the better of the fray, and where stern Pharaoh's sword cut its way with wrathful fury, where Mitres used his bright, broad blade with grimmest joviality, and where I wrought with quickening pulse and savage joy, the rebels gave back terror-stricken, dismayed, and would have fled, but that the door was barred. In desperate strait, like rats driven to a corner, they turned again, and fought us doggedly, falling beneath our onslaughts one by one.

Amasis still lived, and to him, through all the press of men, I forced my way, till we were face to face, for all the lust of battle that had fired my pirate days came over me that night like a surging flood, drowning every other feeling in its mad and deep intensity.

"Now, plotter," I cried exultingly, "prepare to die as Mexo died!"

His face contorted with the evil passions that worked within, he answered me with a cry of rage and then a sweeping stroke of his sword, but stepping back a pace, I parried it, dealing him in reply a home thrust that sent my blade through armour and tunic and body, pinning the wretch to the wooden beam of the doorway.

He slain, the rest lost heart, and very soon we stood alone, the victors in that blood-stained room, but a dozen men all told, each cut and hacked and pierced with many wounds, and listening with bated breath for the sounds from outside to tell us whether friends or foes had triumphed there.

At last the King bade them open the door, and in rushed Asos, followed by the remnant of the faithful guards, leading a prisoner with hands bound behind him, sullen of mien, and hatred glaring from his blood-shot eyes.

"Pamonthes," said his elder brother sternly, "thou seest how vain it is to fight against the appointed of the gods. Now what is thy pleasure?"

"To ask no favour from *thee*, tyrant," was the only answer the rebel made, and that with taunting insult in his tone.

"Away with him!" cried Menophres, angered at his stubborn hatred; "nor let me see his face again alive."

So they took him, and he passed to his doom, and though it was on my tongue to ask him: "Didst find Mexo waiting for thee?" I forebore, so miserable it is to see a man going to meet his death that way, even when he goes to meet it as did this man, scowling and defiant.

The first glimmerings of dawn were now lighting up the ghastly relics of the chamber, so the King bade the attendants clear away the corpses, and prepare for a still more sumptuous feast on the morrow, to hold revel over the defeat of the traitors, commanding Mitres and myself to be present. He then dispatched a strong force under Asos to the quarries of Silsilis, with orders to attack the rebels there gathering, and slay them to a man without mercy; and having seen the loyal regiment start on its mission, we retired to our several homes.

The city was in a ferment of excitement for some time, many thousands of the disaffected needing little urging to break into open revolt, but the news that the plot had failed and Pamonthes was executed, together with the vigorous measures taken for keeping the peace, prevented the uproar from getting beyond bounds, and by noon the tumult had subsided and all fear was at an end.

CHAPTER X.

Love and Jealousy.

Night came, and the banquet, a feast more lavishly extravagant than any at which I had yet broken bread. The table glittered from end to end with the costly vessels of gold and silver and pattern-coloured glass; great earthern dishes held groaning weights of the richest food the land contained; on a hundred dainty platters, all temptingly arranged, reposed a hundred toothsome morsels—dear-bought luxuries, spices and fruits that far-off Ind had been ransacked for, and which stood for the ransom of many humble, toiling, unknown lives, and the weight of many of the gold and silver rings which the Egyptians use for money.

Of wine there was no end; nay, it seemed as though old Sihor himself were tapped and running into the vast chamber, so plentiful in number were the pointed amphora resting in their stone rings, that the servants were emptying and carrying away, only to bring in a fresh supply in return. In the outer hall, visible from the banquet table now that the doors were flung open, sat the soldiers of the guard, feasted and honoured for their brave defence of the night before, and the bands of musicians, hired jesters and dancing girls, these latter all gaily and scantily dressed.

Pharaoh Menophres was a medium-sized man, clean-shaven as a priest, liberal handed with what he had, no

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matter from whence or how it came, and, save when angered or in a sullen humour, merry of speech and jolly of countenance. Near him, on his right, sat I, with Mitres on one side and Itaska the wife of Asos on the other, and many were the bright, bold glances that the stately matron cast upon me whilst we talked, or when our hands met in passing the dishes on the board.

She was a great favourite with Queen Hamense, I perceived, and for all my fame and royal favour, I felt ill at ease that night beneath my mask of festive talk and gay demeanour.

"Come, my valiant priest!" cried Pharaoh, holding out his glass to be refilled, "pledge me in a draught of rare Anthylla, such as thou dashed from my lips but yestereve. I'll warrant thee it is not death-laden this time, but life-giving."

"I drink to thee, O King," I said, draining the cup, thing to ask, and a vision of the sea floated before my eyes as I pondered.

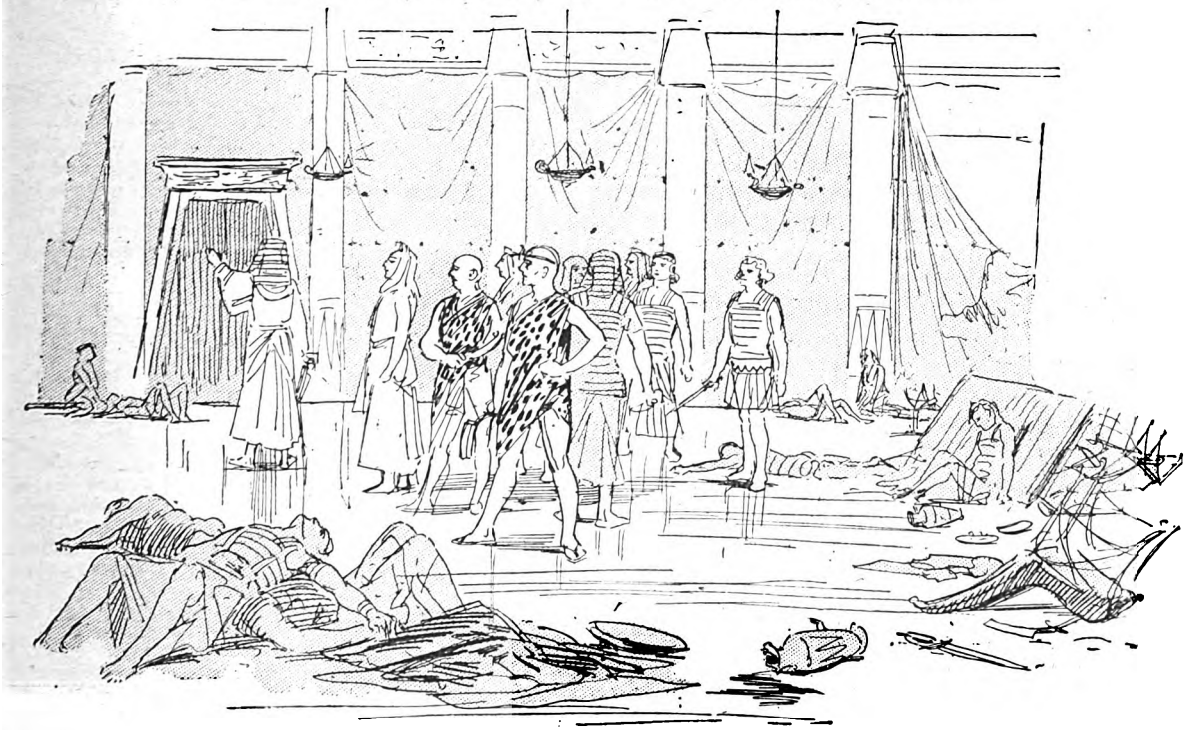
"Art slow of speech all suddenly," said the Queen.

"'Tis a weighty thing to ask boons of monarchs," I answered, "and needeth a wise head to make good choice."

"Perchance 'tis a matter of the heart, my priest!" said Pharaoh, with a broad smile, "and even so, speak on."

Before I could make reply Mitres struck in, quaking with his quiet jollity, and told the whole story of my fight with the leopard, and how his daughter owed her life to me. Itaska at my side drew off a space at this, frowning darkly.

"By Isis and Osiris!" cried Menophres, hugely amazed, "since the reign of the Timeless Kings there hath been no such man in Egypt. Out with thy wish, man, that I may grant it; for as to this maid of thine, Mitres, it seemeth that thou and herself and this priest can best settle that matter. Out with thy wish, Arnon!"



At last the King bade them open the door.

'but methinks a fill of the wine of Mareotis would be better." This, I knew, was his favourite.

"Hast sound sense, as well as quick wit, swift feet and a strong arm," said Menophres, "and shalt have thy wish. Thou, Mitres, I know, favourest most the pale Teniotic wine, and the Queen here, with Itaska, swears by the juice of the Thasian grape from the Sebennytic nome; but I and thou, Arnon, will drink together the elixir of Mareotis in preference."

Thereat they brought us an amplitude of the sweet, white-coloured liquid, which, though kept for a great time, has ever a light, fragrant aroma, and does not confuse the head like other wines, and we drank deeply of it to the destruction of all our enemies and to the increasing greatness of Egypt.

"Now ask of me," said Pharaoh, "what boon thou dost most crave, and it is much that I will grant thee, but for whom I had not been here to-night."

Now I thought awhile, racking my brain for the wisest

"Above all things," I said, "I desire a swift ship, that I may sail the waters of the great sea to the north, for it has ever been my longing to ride the wind-raised waves."

"Shalt have the swiftest ship in all my fleet!" answered the King, "and another on the Sea of Shari, that is to the east, if thou likest."

"Then am I well repaid for my duty," I answered, bowing to the throne-seat.

Then a draught of Thasian wine, such as the Queen liked best, was passed round the board, and all drank freely, so that many began to nod their heads, and men wandered in their talk. The King then spoke, in a voice growing husky with the liquor, slapping his thigh when he began.

"If thou art repaid, then I will grant thee still further guerdon, so that thou mayst be under obligation to me, and for that I shall demand of thee an act in return. I will make thee, with Mitres, my private counsellor, give thee one of my palaces in which to live, and as many of the

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golden rings as thou mayst want at any time, if thou wilt but fulfil me one desire."

"And what may that be, O King?" I asked, dazzled by the greatness he put before me.

"Only that thou take in marriage the daughter of Mitres here—Vesta—whom thou rescued from the leopard," he replied.

At this Mitres brightened, and, seizing my hand, pressed it warmly; but Itaska's face grew darker than before. I hesitated a moment, but by then the Thasian wine had reached my head, it hummed within my ears, it cast a whirling maze of colour before my eyes, it drowned the memory of a fair one far away, and, thinking that I could not do better than wed the sweetest maid I had seen in Khem, who loved me unreservedly, and feeling, moreover, the greed of wealth and power roused by the King's promise, I made answer that his request was more than acceptable to me, and that I felt overpaid for my services.

And so the matter was settled, and the feast wore on till daybreak, when the grim skeleton which had stood by the wall was removed, and we dispersed to our homes to sleep off the follies of the night.

Towards noon, when I woke from a troubled slumber, I found Vesta's father waiting for me in the tiled hall. He said that his daughter awaited the presence of her lord, for, she sent me word, how did *I* know that her hand was to be given in marriage so readily, who had never spoken with her concerning it?

"That is so," I said. "How should I know?"

"Nay, have no fear on that point, Arnon, my son," said the shaven priest; "her heart hath been set on you since that night your eyes first met, and I tell you plainly that nothing could please me better than this has done. Perhaps, you see now why I would have you a priest?"

"I see no reason," I answered, stroking my chin. "I was ever keener in sword-play than in wit."

"Seemeth so," said Mitres testily. "Well, this is the wherefore of it. It is customary for the daughters of priests to marry priests, though it may at rare times be otherwise; and after the death of the low-born serf whom Vesta fancied in her folly, I swore an oath by all the gods that she should wed a priest or go husbandless to the tomb. Seest now, O wise King's counsellor?"

"Light glimmers on the way," I replied, unmoved by his sarcastic tone; "thou wouldst have me a priest so that this thing might befall as it hath done?"

"Thou hast said it," he responded, the old quiet smile coming back as he spoke. "And now to thy prize, for I'll warrant me she counts the moments till you come." And as I turned to the room where Vesta daily sat sewing, the kindly soul went on his way to the temple, light of heart. The one desire of his life was given to him, now his daughter well betrothed, for he loved her as the apple of his eye.

For myself, my heart was not so light. There was but one whom I loved, and here was I, about to wed another whom I only cared for as a friend. It is true, as the Book of the Soul says, that a man's love is more to him than a woman's is to her; for a woman will wed a man who loves her, though she returns not his affection, trusting to the fire of his passion to warm both hearts as the years go on in wedlock, but a man will seldom desire a woman he loves not, though she worship him never so deeply.

So stood I to Vesta, but I had given my word to the King, wealth and power drew me on, I could not thwart the will of my friend Mitres, and least of all could I face Vesta herself with refusal on my lips.

I thought of the saying of Unim, the priest, in the grotto of the Sacred Sleeper; I called to mind the words of Isis that I had heard in my vision in the Temple of Karnac, and saw no way but to take what joy came to me, leaving to the Spirits the task of bringing their words true.

One thing I was glad of; that was that the great temptation Isis had warned me against was to be met in Atlantis, and not here in Khem, so that this marriage with Vesta could not be of evil influence upon my fate.

So, thus cogitating, I came to where Vesta sat, and talked with her, and so winsome a maid was she, so prettily she chid my clumsiness in making love, as she thought my hesitation, that I felt recompensed for my faithlessness to my other memory, and grew to think myself a fortune-favoured man that my steps had once been led to the place of tombs near Memphis.

In our happiness—for I was ever moved by Beauty's charms, and loath to go from Beauty's side—we lost our count of time, nor was it till Mitres, stern of face but merry of eye, came to tell us that the evening meal was ready that, she all rosy red with maidenly confusion, and myself calmer than I had been for many months, we woke to the consciousness that the round of daily life was still revolving on. One thing that I was glad of after, was that I told both father and daughter of the danger that threatened from Itaska's jealousy, for I knew that now she would be my enemy beyond a doubt.

I married my fair Egyptian.

My fame spread, as the days passed, from border to border of the land, from the confines of the Bugaitai Desert to the fortified city of Syene, from Pelusium to Aphtis; wealth flowed in upon me till I had more than I knew how to rightly deal with, and night after night I sat at meat with the King and his household.

In my ships I sailed down the Sea of Weeds and into the Sea of Shari, venturing far into the trackless ocean to the east, and in the swift vessel that rode upon the waters of the Great Sea into which old Nilus empties I visited many a fragrant isle where dates, and figs, and oranges, and lemons, and citrons grow in prodigal profusion, touched keel on many shores of the great mainland to the north, and once put through the narrow strait to the west, standing out a few leagues into the heaving sea beyond, and would have sailed further, but that my crew were seized with fear, being mostly river-sailors, and I must needs return.

I rated them heartily for a set of faint-hearted fresh-water crabs as we scudded back past the giant rock to the north of the strait,* where hovered, numberless as a swarm of bees, screaming and clanging hoarsely, a cloud of flying sea-birds, black, and grey, and white. We passed the channel swifter than I had ever sailed before, for the *Seamew* was a speedy vessel, being low in the water, with high masts

* The Rock of Gibraltar.

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and rigging fashioned in dainty lines, as though she were a fairy craft that skimmed the wave like a stormy petrel.

And when we cast anchor again in the Nile I sent the cravens about their business without more ado, engaging in their stead a goodly company of deep-sea sailors from the eastern shores of the land of Khem, weather-beaten, bronze-browed seamen who had dared tempest and wreck for many years between the ports of Egypt and of Ind.

A year and a little more had gone since the banquet of which I have told, when I married my fair Egyptian at the Festival of Burning Lamps. I thought at first that it would prove a loveless link to me, but Vesta confided in me so fully, hung upon my words as though I were a god, and was withal so fair and sweet, that I came to cherish her with a quiet affection, calm enough on the surface, but deep, too, as I found when harm threatened this lovely daughter of Khem, who was mine.

Of Itaska I ceased to take heed, though, for all the glamouring pretence of joy she made at the bridal feast, I misdoubted me much of her flashing eyes and evil smile; a smile such as the syrens of the sea are said to wear when they lure luckless wanderers to their weed-grown caves.

'Twas a peaceful life I led, those twice five years I lived as Vesta's lord in Egypt, and though our union was childless—for which I have since felt glad—we grew to cherish and love each other more, albeit, at times, another face, crowned by a wealth of darker hair than my bride's, would rise before me, and with mute gesture bid me to her side. I never dwelt on the vision then, for my love for Vesta was to my love for Briseis as the full glow of a risen sun is to the paleness of a clouded moon, and it grieved me to cause a moment's pain to one who thought I lived for her alone. 'Twas pleasant, those ten eventless years, to live in the lap of luxury, powerful as a prince, more famous than any of the generals of the King, and honoured wherever I chose to go.

Thus things went with me till the ten peaceful years were nearly run, and then I noticed a coolness in the King's manner towards me that I could not reconcile with his former gratitude, while Queen Hamense was as curt and cutting in her speech to me as if I had done her a grievous wrong.

Also, a priest named Sethos, who looked ever upon my greatness with a jealous eye, grew mocking in his tone whenever he spoke of me, calling me, in derision, Arnon the Priest-Slinger, for my skill in the use of that weapon; and this, in a land where even the husbandmen use slings to frighten birds away from the vineyards, was in itself an insult.

Once I dared this Sethos to mortal combat for his insolence, but he declined—the coward—saying that it was not meet for priests to slay each other without great provocation, which he did not know that he had given; and with that, as the King upheld his plea, I had to be content.

I took counsel with Mitres at last, telling him how all things stood.

"Sharp sword, slow wit," he said; "'tis as clear as noon to me, and an evil outlook, too."

"What is the reason of it?" I asked again.

"A plague on your dulness! Canst not see the hand of Itaska in all this? See not that she has won the Queen to her side, and has taken Sethos, who grudges you your fortune, into her confidence, and that the three of them are turning the King's mind against you? 'Tis clear as noon."

"By Neith, and so 'tis!" I answered; "what would you counsel?"

"To take no heed of it, and leave the matter to me," said Mitres. "This Itaska is a cool and calculating woman, or had worked her jealous ends long since. But she cares not to strike the blow herself, and so bides her time till she can make others the tools of her vengeance. Doth Asos know of her infatuation?"

"No, nor ever will from my lips," I replied, "for he is a worthy man, and I would spare him sorrow."

"Well spoken, Arnon," said Vesta's father; "and now I will tell you what I plan. Take no heed of this secret plotting, and I will cause a watch to be set upon the movements of these enemies, so that they may be caught in their own snare. Meantime, be ever on your guard against treachery. Promise me that you will ever wear that sword I gave you when we fought in the banquet-room, for it is a mighty weapon, forged, they say, on the anvil of the gods in Amenti. *Sunderer*, 'tis named, and a sunderer shall it be, so long as he who wields it keeps a stout heart within him."

I promised him to wear it ever, for I saw that the old man loved me as a son, and then we departed to our daily tasks, I, for my part, forgetting for a time the danger that threatened.

But one day—it was the second day of the month Mesoré, the last month of the year—my fair one's father came to me with a troubled face. I questioned him concerning his unusual gloom, rallied him for his stillness, and asked where his jollity had gone, but he only shook his head dolefully.

"This is an evil world, my son," he said at length, "and it will be well for many of us when we reach the shades beyond the tomb. It hath come to this, Arnon, that thou and I must soon part."

"Why so?" I ventured, a chill striking me. "Hast news of Itaska's plotting?"

He inclined his head, saying, "Even so." Then, after a pause, "Listen, while I tell thee all.

"As was my wont," he went on, "I betook myself to the Place of Counsel as the day broke, but few came for guidance. At last, just as I thought to turn away, Sethos entered, and seeing him, I withdrew behind the purple curtain before he had time to notice that anyone was within. He seated himself in my seat—for it is his turn after mine—and waited, impatiently, it seemed to me. Presently he moved as if hearing footsteps, and soon a voice—Itaska's voice—spoke through the hollow stone. I strained my ears to listen.

"'Art alone, Sethos?' said Itaska warily.

"'Yea, speak on in safety, lady,' answered he.

"'Then I have come to say that at last I know the history of this Arnon,' said the voice exultingly.

"I heard an exclamation of surprise from Sethos at the news, and listened with all the more intent.

"'He is no son of Egypt,' the voice went on, 'but a stranger from a far-off western land. This I have from the mouth of Asos, my husband, who had it from the Slinger himself at their first meeting in the wilds of Nubia. It has cost me great trouble to make Asos speak, but it is done, and methinks we have now a weapon wherewith to bring about the downfall of this stranger who penetrates the secrets of our wisdom and takes the daughters of our priests in marriage!'

"'True, lady,' said Sethos, 'and what is now thy will?'

"'That you go to Azil, the High Priest of On, and tell him the story, while I tell it to Queen Hamense, who will inform the King, and then, when he is called to trial by the head of the nation and the head of the priesthood, it shall be yours to swear that in secret the Slinger is unfaithful to the gods and mocks at their worship and hath led Vesta, his wife, to the same mind. Then his downfall and hers is assured, and you will surely take his place.'

"Sethos, lured by the bait of gold and power, held out to him, agreed to the compact, though he asked, curiously:

"'What hast thou to gain, lady, by this deed?'

"'That is my own business,' she answered, 'see thou to thy part and take no heed of me.'

"Then she went away and presently Sethos followed. Now I ask you, Arnon, is this tale true?"

"It is," I said, "and you must see why I have told it to none but Asos."

"Yes," he returned; and for some moments we stood there, facing each other in silence, scarcely knowing how to frame the words that both knew must be spoken.

(To be continued.)

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JUMBLED STORY No. 18.] [See Page 559.

DOING THIS FEAT OF PRINTING HE PUT DOHEE.

Scene,—An old-fashioned cottage verandah, with flowering to the ground. Miss Waring, in a light summer muslin frock. honeysuckle trained over a trellis, and a flight of steps leading on a small wicker table by her side. Enter John Gray, discovered "mending," with a large basket of work standing clad in riding coat, breeches, and boots.

Jane Waring (a spinster of twenty-seven years).
John Gray (a bachelor of thirty odd).

Miss Waring: "Well, I never heard of such a shameless way of begging an invitation!"

Gray: "Does that make any difference?"

Miss Waring: "Of course!" (Gray seats himself astonished.)

Gray: "Why not let me tell you that I think you altogether objectionable in a friend, but it is hardly true, honest, and, as I said before, old-fashioned? Sometimes that kind of behaviour might not be possible, why it should be perfectly proper for me to explain how it all happened; but, as he finished up and noting her mocking expression): "You don't let me tell you what I think of you?"

Miss Waring (ignoring the compliment): "No, notwithstanding that you possess all those virtues this very minute."

Gray: "What a nice little housewife you would average twice a week for the last three months? That I believe you to be careful, industrious, and anything else in the world. Won't you believe me?"

Miss Waring: "Hardly!"

Gray (doggedly, as he rises): "Evidently I do love you! Indeed—indeed I do! Oh, tell me how "why, 'the proof of a pudding is in the eating'!"

Miss Waring (resignedly): "If it gives you any which are ordinarily stigmatised as unattractive, I can prove it?" (Miss Waring slightly shrugs her arms, and the latter was submitting to being kissed as if to bid him good-bye): "The proof of the slice of pudding."

Gray: "Did you *really* make a pudding?"

Miss Waring (without rising, or looking up from sight of the Leghorn hat.) "Let me see—you arose with the lark; but, after toying playfully with a whole subject of conventionalisms, and find out, if a good manager—in short, everything that the old-fashioned books, you know; and you impress what I have been doing this morning."

Gray (with one foot on the steps leading to the kitchen and made a pudding, which is being boiled deliberately): "Yes—that I love you."

Miss Waring: "How can I prove it, then?"

Gray: "Why—why—you *must* believe me! I do not know how to show it, but I love you more than I find you charming? Why not let me tell the subject."

Miss Waring (looks at him more kindly; then, it should be very improper for me to dine with you, until it is time to go home, in a lazy sort of way, with the lark—that is the way girls used to do in copy-books say a woman should be? And, the thing I should expect from—from my lover."

Gray: "Then why try to correct me? Why not ride over to see the beloved object whenever there gone to town, and will not be back until after invitation to dine?"

Miss Waring: "Mr. Gray!"

Gray: "The eating."

Miss Waring: "I will not have any discussion on pleasure."

Gray: "What am I to do? It's too late to go dinner."

Miss Waring: "You are most incorrigible."

Gray: "Then I am not to be invited to dinner?"

Miss Waring (smiling): "I might send you out a light and delicate breakfast—What! No again? Have I not stayed? Have I not been unconscionably to sit here and talk with you all alone, or to go off continually in the room?"

Gray: "But why not? Why not discuss the shoulders.) "Have I not ridden over here on an flat basket over your arm, and sallied forth into the verandah): "Good-morning, Miss Waring."

Miss Waring: "Most certainly not. Mother has her work): "Good-morning, Mr. Gray. Have you else from her childhood up.)

Gray: "Yes. May I sit down?"

Miss Waring: "Does that mean you expect an garden to pluck flowers—the prettiest flower of them too, by Jove! What a treasure you will be to believe me?"

Gray: "Let me see." (Gazes about, and catches in a most complicated piece of darning. Gray slightly amused): "Are you quite sure about it?"

Miss Waring: "No!"

Gray: "Prove"—(then, with a happy thought)—Why, this will never do! After a heavy meal, you is nowhere else to go. Then to hang about the place not opening your lips for half-hours together. "No? Well, that is immaterial—you didn't arise the lark, then." (Miss Waring shakes her head.) pudding, Mr. Gray, is in——"

Miss Waring: "No; I will not discuss it."

Gray: "Does that mean I have got it?"

(She drops her work into her lap, and gazes at me as being distinctly old-fashioned—you arose with the proverb, John Gray held Jane Waring in his all."

Gray (innocently): "Quite sure." (Then, looking on steps.) "I do not believe that you can guess nothing half so romantic. I went down into the back to Woodlands."

Miss Waring (looking more astonished, and been riding?"

Gray: "Yes."

Miss Waring: "And is that your idea of love? To him, half frightened, half pleased, and wholly by him as if she had been accustomed to do nothing dull?"

Gray: "I don't believe it."

Miss Waring: "I *really* did."

Gray (who is looking at the toe of his boot, which suddenly notices the nature of her work.) "Darning, constructively alone, but with your servants and walk with you all alone in the woods, and yet put on your sun-bonnet and gauntlets, hung a big, make!" (Miss Waring becomes intensely occupied with a gleam of mischief in her eyes, as she also rises somebody, Miss Waring!"

(It would be quite impossible, in a stage direction, he flicks with his crop, while he adds very talking when you are so inclined, and frequently you that—that I love you?"

Gertrude Warner.

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By George Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Another Shattered Idol.

"Yes, mad—mad with love—mad with passion—maddened by being a constant witness of that man's brutality to you. Olive, my own, my darling, listen to me. Don't turn away like this. You know—you must have known—how I loved you, and that I have waited and striven to do all that man could do to honour him and his love for you; but the passion has grown too strong. Had he been a true husband to you I should never have uttered a word; but, knowing what I do—the neglect, the cruelty, the patient forgiveness, and the repeated insults thrown in your face—I—I—I say—who loved you from the first, should have been more than man if I had not spoken as I have."

"Ah!" she cried at last, as she struggled free and tried to fly from the room.

But Murray caught her hands again, and in her desperation she backed away from him, till with a sudden snatch she tore them away again.

"Oh!" she cried, "is there no such thing as faith and truth in this unhappy world? You—you whom I have trusted and believed in as a true gentleman, my father's, my husband's friend—the man to whom I have always turned as if he were my brother—you speak to me like this—these cruel words. Oh, you must be mad—you must be mad!"

"Yes," he cried, fiercely now, "mad; but no, you cannot be so heartless, so cruel, as not to listen to me. Olive, dearest, think, think of all this weary past, this hideous time of suffering for us both. What right have you to go on letting this man blast your life and force you to submit to his infamies? Love! Pah! he never loved you. A miserable, despicable *roué*, who, with his wretched, worldly-minded mother, had but one thought, your father's money, while he, poor trusting, loving heart, believed he was working for your benefit, proud to see the child he loved so well worshipped, titled, and the honoured of all. I tell you he has told me all this again and again."

"Yes," cried Olive wildly, "told you—the man he believed to be his friend. What would he say now if he could hear that same man tempting his helpless, despairing child to forget her honour, duty, to her husband. Oh, it is an infamy! You do not know what you are saying. It is all impossible from you."

"Impossible! Duty to your husband!—honour! What duty do you owe him who has broken all ties to you again and again?"

"I am a woman, sir—Lord Braetoun's wife. If he has sinned against me, it is against me alone."

"No—no—against all who love you."

"I say against me and my father, sir; and if we forgive him, and he repents, what is that to you?"

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"You have forgiven him," cried Murray passionately; "where is his repentance? Whose is the infamy—mine, or his?"

"Yours, for he trusted you. I, his wife, trusted you. My father has a hundred times said to me: 'If I am not near, and you are in trouble, there is Murray. You can trust him as you would me. He is the very soul of honour.' And, alas! that I should have to say it—that another idol I have worshipped should be cast down before me—where is that honour now?"

"Olive, for God's sake, have mercy," he cried, as he, as if to illustrate her words, threw himself at her feet, and caught her dress in his hands to press the hem against his lips.

"Yes, you are mad—you must be," she said softly now. "It cannot be you who spoke; it is too cruel—too horrible. I cannot crush you with bitter words. Your own heart will punish you enough. Please, go now, and let me think only of the friend I trusted, whom we all thought the soul of honour and truth."

"Olive," he cried piteously, "are those words from your heart? Is it you speaking now?"

"It is Lord Braetoun's wife, sir. I am a weak, helpless woman—alone with you here. My husband, who should be my defender, lies above us, stricken almost unto death. As a gentleman, sir, I ask you to leave me now, and go. We must never meet again."

"Olive, for mercy's sake, have pity on me!" he groaned, with his hands outstretched.

"I cannot have mercy. I cannot pardon you now. Once more, pray go."

He rose to his feet, and stood with one hand pressed to his forehead, gazing at her wildly, as if hardly able to grasp her words. But her attitude spoke volumes. There were pity—despair—agony—sorrow, all in the wild, dilated eyes which met his; while her left hand was outstretched toward the door, her right resting upon her breast, as if it were the only protector left.

And so they stood facing each other for some minutes. His lips moved again and again, but no sound came, and when he did speak his face seemed utterly changed, and his features were drawn and haggard.

"Go?" he said. "Go?" And he took a step or two toward the door. "Yes, go. My punishment for loving as man could hardly have loved before. Yes, go out into the cold, empty world alone."

There was a pathetic misery in his way of uttering the simple words that made his hearer tremble, and a look of pity beamed in her eyes; but they grew stern again, and did not shrink from his for a moment, as utterly crushed and humbled, he literally staggered from the room and down the stairs, supporting himself by the balustrade.

The calm, stern look left Olive's eyes the moment the door

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closed and she stood listening for a few moments; then gliding out, she darted upstairs, closed and locked the door behind her, and tottered to the bedside, where she fell upon her knees, caught Braetoun's hand in hers, and drew his arm about her neck, a violent hysterical fit of sobbing seizing her. But she felt safe, and by degrees the paroxysm passed away, to give place to a sense of loneliness and misery such as she had never suffered before.

And there she knelt till the rising sun shone through the window, but all looked to her cold and desolate, for another idol had been rudely broken, and lay shivered at her feet.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

His Straight Course.

Olive's experience of her husband's malady and the way in which it acted upon his shattered nerves was sufficient now to assure her that he was better that next morning; but she knew that much had to be done, and as she watched by his side her trouble and agitation increased.

For her position was terrible. She had no faith whatever in the result of calling in another medical man, for, however clever he might be, he would not have the slightest experience of Braetoun's constitution, and, though he might treat him admirably, the risk was terrible.

What should she do?

The nervous excitement was maddening, and the strain seemed more than she could bear. The fight, as it were, for life when Braetoun's delirium was at its height; the horror of Murray's declaration; and now the position in which she found herself.

"It is more than I can bear—it is more than I can bear," she sobbed, as she walked softly up and down the room, wringing her hands.

What to do?

If she sent for her father, his first question would be: "Why is not Murray here?" And then she must explain—tell him of the wild, excited declaration. She could not tell him—she dared not. It would be cruel to herself, a ten times greater cruelty to one who had saved her husband's life again and again. It was horrible, criminal, but how could she sit in judgment upon a man whose crime was that he loved her?

The blood flushed to her temples with the shame of the thought, and yet there was a feeling of misery and despair as she felt that they must never meet again, that she could never more frankly take the hand of the man for whom, in all innocence, she had felt a warm affection—the love she would have felt for a brother, even as her father looked upon him and treated him just as if he were a son. No, she could never look him in the face again, she told herself. It was an insult—an outrage. He must have been lost to all sense of respect and reverence for her—he must have been mad.

And for this to come at such a time, when she was so lonely, when she longed so for the help and counsel of someone whom she could trust. Her father? Yes, but she could not talk to him about her unhappy life; far less to Lady Braetoun.

Why, she ought to send for her at once, and tell her of her son's fresh attack; but how could she, when the first question would be: "Why is not Dr. Murray here?"

These thoughts rushed together through her brain till it grew chaotic; and there were moments when she felt that she must go mad. She was hedged in by difficulties, a very thorny tangle, out of which there appeared but one way of escape, and that was to send for Murray, and treat the scene of the past night as if it had never occurred.

"Impossible—impossible!" she moaned, as she flung herself upon her knees by the bedside, the blood once more flushing her temples, and the angry feeling of shame and indignation mastering everything else.

"How dared he?" she thought. What would he think if she sent for him? He would look upon her as weak, and ready to condone his offence.

It was impossible. Another medical man must be summoned at all hazards, and if—if—"Oh, Roderick," she moaned, "what shall I do? It is your honour, your life, for which I am fighting; tell me what to do? I want to love you dearly, my own husband. I forgive you the past. Take me to your heart and guard me. What have I done that you should have treated me so? Weak, inexperienced, I know all that, but I wanted to love you, dear. And now I dare not send for another; it is like risking your life. I dare not send for him; it is as if I were risking your honour. Roderick, dearest, I am your own weak, foolish wife; tell me, tell me what I am to do?"

She had taken his hand to press it to her burning forehead, and her softly-breathed words were full of tender love and reverence; but there was no reply. He lay in a state of utter insensibility more than sleep, and the black despair swept over the unhappy woman like a wave, as she moaned again and again:

"What shall I do—what shall I do?"

"I beg you pardon, my lady," said a soft voice at her side. "I'm afraid I've neglected you; but we were all so tired last night. How is his lordship this morning?"

Olive started to her feet, scarlet and then ghastly white, for the horrible thought flashed through her that the words she had uttered had been heard.

But the woman's face was grave enough, and there was no sparkle of curiosity in her eyes, only pity, for she knew well enough her lady's troubles—troubles which were pretty well canvassed all through the house—and she had not heard a word.

"Very, very ill, Melson," said Olive sadly; "but the terrible paroxysms are over. Oh, thank you. It was very good and thoughtful of you to bring that, but I could not touch anything."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, my lady," said the maid with quiet decision, as she set down the little tray of tea and toast which she had brought; "but you must, please. I went into the drawing-room, and you hadn't touched anything there, though the tea had been made. I don't believe you have had anything since yesterday."

Olive shivered as the maid's words brought up the scene in the night, and she saw once more Murray's wild eyes, listened to his passionate words; and she closed her eyes to shut out the horror.

"I thought so," said her maid to herself, and Olive started and uttered a wild cry, for she felt arms about her, and in her strangely exalted nervous state she gazed wildly in the eyes which looked into hers, and began to struggle, but resigned herself directly to the hands which lowered her into a lounge.

"I thought—I thought——" she faltered.

"Yes, my lady; it's because you are so nervous and overdone," said the maid, who hurried to the dressing-table and then bathed the agitated face with eau-de-Cologne before pouring out some tea. "Now try and drink this, my lady. Please, please."

Olive took the cup without a word, and sat back sipping a little from time to time, while her maid went softly about, arranging the disordered room, and glancing now and again at the cadaverous face upon the pillow.

Each glance she gave, though, was longer, and her brows contracted, while a look of anxiety deepened in her eyes, but she refrained from speaking till she had almost forced Olive to finish the tea. Then, as she took the cup away and began to bathe her temples again, she said gently:

"I don't want to alarm you, my lady, but his lordship's face looks very, very strange."

Olive uttered a cry, sprang up, and dragged back the curtain, as she bent over the pillow and then hurriedly felt Braetoun's temples, heart, and hands.

"I—I don't think he is different—he has been like this for some hours," she faltered.

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"Yes, my lady? But he looks very bad. Oughtn't you to send for Doctor Murray?"

Olive's eyes dilated with horror, and she stood panting and trembling.

"No, no," she said in a hoarse whisper; "impossible! I——"

"I didn't mean to frighten you, my lady. You know best. You've seen so much more of his lordship when he has had these fits—but I thought I ought to speak."

Olive's eyes seemed fixed upon the speaker as if she were unable to turn away, while the agitation in her brain was extreme, and she went quickly through all the agonising struggle again.

At last, though, her looks were so wild that the maid caught her arm and shook her.

"Oh, my lady, my lady," she cried, "don't look like that; you frighten me."

Olive uttered a moan, and turned to the bed again, to see what struck her as being a terrible change in the ghastly countenance, and she flung herself upon her knees.

"He's dying—he's dying," she wailed. "Fetch Doctor Murray. Go yourself, and tell him I beg and pray of him to come—for God's sake to come back with you at once, and——"

The words froze upon her lips, and she turned slowly round, white as marble now, conscious that somebody had thrust the maid aside on hearing her words.

"I am here, Lady Braetoun: has there been some change?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Father and Child.

Olive's lips parted as she gazed in the dark, questioning eyes which met hers, but no words came. She could only point to the bed, and Murray threw back blind and curtain and bent over the patient, while, with a sigh of relief, Olive threw herself into the arms extended to her, as she saw that someone else was present, someone who had followed Murray into the room.

"Oh, father! dear father!" she moaned, as she clung to him. "Thank God you are here!"

"My poor, poor darling," whispered Emsworth, "are you to always suffer like this? I ought to have been told. Murray came to me at six, and roused me up. He said he was coming on here, and he told me about how bad Braetoun had been. He wished me to come with him. He said he was here till four. What a good fellow he is!"

"What a good fellow he is!" seemed to echo in Olive's breast, and, in spite of all, her resentment was for the moment somewhat quelled as she waited, panting, to hear him speak; but she shuddered and trembled, for the thought came, as if to crush her and make the shield of none effect: "He must have heard every word you said—your message praying him to come back."

There was some relief for her directly. Murray turned away from the bed, and said in short, decisive tones:

"He looks very bad, Lady Braetoun, but you need not feel alarmed. He was sure to turn like this. He must have a couple of nurses this time—one for day, and the other to relieve her at night."

"I shall"—began Olive hastily.

"Excuse me, Lady Braetoun," said Murray coldly; "it would be better not. Lord Braetoun needs the calm, unemotional nursing of a couple of trained persons. I should prefer that, if you please."

She did not speak, but her heart beat fast. Was this the same man as he who had addressed her in those words of passion in the night?

Even then she would gladly have freed herself from his presence, but she knew that it was impossible.

"I was afraid, from what you said, that matters would be worse," said Emsworth, with a sigh.

"They could not well be, Mr. Emsworth," said Murray. "He will get over this, and be about again; but these fits are weakening, and each one grows stronger. It is a pity. He has it in his own hands, not to enjoy good health, but to avoid these attacks. If he will bring them on by his folly, he must suffer. There, you must excuse me now."

"But Braetoun — what about him?" said Emsworth anxiously.

"I will come in and see him last thing to-night. Will you be here, so as to have the last report?"

"Yes—no. Come and dine with me, and we will come on together."

"Not to-night, Mr. Emsworth," said Murray coldly. "I will call at the institution, and send on the nurses, or at all events one. I will try and send Nurse Jennett for the night duty, if she is not engaged."

"Then you do not think that there is immediate danger?" said Emsworth quickly.

"No, there is none," said Murray abruptly. "He looks very bad, but his stupor will gradually give way to a very long sleep, and then probably he will wake in his right mind. Good-morning, Lady Braetoun," he added coldly, but without extending his hand. "Will you come down with me, Mr. Emsworth?"

He bowed, and left the room, the stern, firm physician, and Emsworth followed humbly behind, impressed by him, but not reading, as his daughter read, the firm, hard fight he had fought over self, and apparently to win.

She sighed, and waited anxiously for her father's return, ready to question him with her eyes.

"Yes, gone," he said. "Ah, my darling, if I could only take you back home with me! But what a man Murray is! I never felt so much respect for him before."

Olive was looking at him with her eyes full of the resentment she felt, but he did not notice it, and went on.

"We have been fortunate to find such a friend, and in the future, my dear, when I'm taken away, I can go feeling that I leave my affairs in the hands of a just steward, who will watch over your interests, and be ready to protect you, come what may."

"Father, father!" whispered Olive, as she buried her face in his breast; "don't, don't; you can't tell what agony you are giving me. You'll break my heart."

"My own darling!" he cried. "Well, well, I'll never talk to you like that again. But it is the truth, pet. I'm getting an old man, now, and work and worry, and failures of plans, and not seeing you as happy as I could wish, have told upon me. There, I won't die yet, though."

"Father, father!" whispered Olive, as she knelt before him and laid her hands upon his breast, "don't talk of going. I want you always to think of me, not as Lady Braetoun and Roderick's wife, but as your own little girl, who used to be so happy with you, and whom you used to pet and spoil. Hah!" she sighed, nestling to him as his strong arms clasped her; "like that—like that. I feel so safe and happy now. Yes, stay with me; why not come and stay with me always?"

"Eh? Stay with you always? I should only just like to. But no, no, no, it wouldn't do, my dear. There's someone else to study, someone else who wouldn't like me to stay here. And besides, I'm a very hard, harsh, disagreeable old man, and soon put out of temper; and when sometimes I saw little things that I didn't like I'm afraid I should be showing my teeth, and then somebody else would be showing his teeth, and there would be a fight, and your father would get the worst of it—a foolish old dog for interfering in another dog's kennel!"

"Oh, father, father!" sighed Olive.

"And oh, Olive, Olive!" sighed the old man; "things are best as they are. I mustn't quarrel and find fault, whatever I see, and I mustn't come and live with you, but I may visit you as often as I like, eh? And, yes, we'll have good times together after all, just as we used, and you must get Murray here as often as you can."

"No, no," she cried quickly.

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"Eh? Well, then, we will not have him to come between us, and make us think of physic. You trust me, my pet; I'll come as often as I can, and make you feel safe and happy. There, now, a hot breakfast will do us both good. Come, wipe your pretty eyes, and let's have a smile. Braetoun's very ill, and it was all very dreadful, but you know he is getting better, or Murray wouldn't have taken it so coolly and been so cross. Enough to make him, after a long day with patients, to be kept up all night by a man who has been drinking himself mad. All right; I won't say another word about it. Fried sole for me, my pet, if it can be had. If not, I'll have an omelet."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" said Emsworth, as he went home an hour later, "he'll end by making her loathe him. I believe it's begun now, or she wouldn't beg of me to stay with her, and cling to me, and talk of feeling safe in my arms. Married so short a time, too. There's a look in her eyes I don't like. She's no longer a girl, but a woman—a thoughtful woman, and it's just as if something fresh were waking up in her brain. No, I don't like the look in her eyes, and if he don't mind he will some day wake to the fact that he has gone too far."

CHAPTER XL.

Murray Has a Telegram.

Olive was seated one afternoon alone in her despair, dwelling upon her position, and asking herself whether she was wanting in any way as to her duty toward her husband.

He had pretty well recovered from his last attack, but his manner toward her grew daily more cold and distant.

Was she cold and distant to him? she asked herself. She thought not; but by slow degrees it dawned upon her that, in spite of all her efforts, she did not feel the same to him as of old. And how she had tried to be unaltered, ceaseless in her efforts to cheer him when he suffered from the terrible fits of depression that came over him, begging him to take her to some place of amusement, in the hope that it would divert his thoughts!

At times, too, when she would gladly have shut herself up in her chamber to sit and sob, reading to him, going to the piano to sing one of his favourite ballads, and making one brave fight to ignore the past, so as to teach him that her love was unchanged.

On one occasion Olive's lips had parted to tell her husband all, but it was months since that terrible scene in the drawing-room, and Murray's manner to her had undergone a complete change.

It was the following of his conduct the next morning; and when he came to attend Braetoun it was always the stern medical man who addressed her, while he hurried away as soon as he could.

Hence she arrested the words that struggled to escape her lips, and told herself that the time was gone by for speaking—confessing, she called it. It had been impossible for nearly a month after, in consequence of Braetoun's state of health, and she felt that now it was madness to revive the trouble and cause enmity between her husband and him to whom he owed his life.

She was thinking of that and similar scenes on this particular afternoon. She was in lower spirits than usual, for the feeling was growing stronger that in spite of all her efforts she could never wean her husband from his old life.

Some day repentance might come, and then——no, the old girlish love never could return, but she prayed for help to do her duty as his wife.

Something more than ordinary was wrong, and she trembled for fear that Braetoun might have another of his outbreaks. She dared not ask him what was the matter—old experience had taught her that she must not question him—but she could pretty well tell from his eager examination of the newspapers, the telegrams he received, and the constant reference to his pocket-book, that the mental trouble was caused by his turf transactions.

He had gone out that morning soon after breakfast, looking more than usually careworn and haggard; and when she had spoken affectionately, asking him if he would not lie down for an hour first, he turned upon her angrily, and told her to mind her own business.

"It is of no use," she sighed, for perhaps the thousandth time; "he never liked me; it has all been one great mistake."

The door opened, and the servant announced Dr. Murray; and for the first time since the night of his mad declaration they were face to face, alone.

In spite of her self-control, Olive started, and the blood suffused her face, and then retreated to her heart, which began to beat wildly, as she motioned the visitor to a chair, trembling for fear that he should notice her agitation.

But she might have known that he would in the quick comprehensive glance he directed at her, with eyes whose study it had been for years to read the faces of those he saw.

"I am sorry to have to come," he said; and his tones brought relief to her directly, and she felt that she had nothing to fear.

The feeling was momentary. She had been thinking of herself, but the visitor's words must refer to someone else. Something was wrong—Roderick—some sudden seizure?

She sprang to her feet with a faint cry; the room began to glide round, as the horrible deathly sensation of faintness began to creep over her, till she was conscious that Murray had sprung forward.

His touch was galvanic; a wave of strength swept through her, and she recovered herself, repulsing him, and her eyes flashed as he drew back, slightly shrugging his shoulders, and his face looked hard as steel.

"It has gone now," she said, as she clutched the back of a chair. "Tell me the truth. I'll try and bear it. Where is he?"

"I was about to ask you that question, Lady Braetoun."

"What? My husband—is he ill?"

"I presume so by your telegram," said Murray, drawing a paper from his breast, and reading: 'Very bad. Come on at once.—Braetoun.' You sent this?"

"I? No!" cried Olive excitedly. "Roderick went out at eleven. Then he has been taken ill somewhere, and sent the message himself. Is there no address?"

"None. The name was considered enough, I suppose."

"Too ill to think," cried Olive wildly. "Oh, Doctor Murray, what shall we do?"

The hard look faded from his face, and her distress evoked his pity and compassion, while he felt a strange emotion as her tones told him that she was appealing to him once more for help—as of old.

It was all momentary, passing like a flash, and her eyes fell upon the telegram.

"Ah, yes," she cried, for mutual sympathy directed her thoughts in the same channel as his.

The postmark would show whence it was sent, and, perhaps, afford some clue.

But as she made a quick movement to snatch the paper from his hand, he crushed it angrily, and stood frowning.

(To be continued.)

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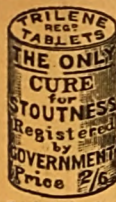

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Permanently cured in a few days by a simple, inexpensive self-treatment. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. A. M. CURTIS, York Chambers, Adelphi, London, W.C.

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CURED INSTANTLY BY

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Prevents Decay. Saves Extraction. Sleepless Nights Prevented. Neuralgic Headache and all Nerve Pains Removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 1½d.

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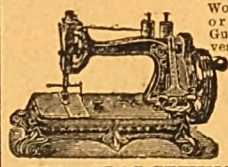

Works by hand or treadle. Guaranteed 4 years. Equal in quality and size to any machine. To ensure satisfaction, we will send machine on receipt of 5/- P.O. for ONE MONTH'S TRIAL. Balance can be paid 5/- Monthly. Call or write for designs and Samples of work.

39/-

THE ATLAS SEWING MACHINE CO., 188B, High St., Camden Town, London, N.W.; 63, Seven Sisters Rd., N.; 14, High Rd., Kilburn.

SULPHOLINE LOTION,

For clearing the skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

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HAIR DESTROYED.

A lady who has permanently destroyed Superfluous Hairs on herself, will be happy to forward free, to all similarly afflicted, full particulars of a simple, inexpensive and harmless self-treatment. Send stamped addressed envelope in confidence to Mrs. "T. D.," 87, Strand, London.

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See Illus. Guide and Catalogue (.59 pages), 3d. "How to Open a Cigar Stores, from £20 to £2,000." TOBACCONISTS' OUTFITTING CO., 185, Euston Road, London. (Over 50 years' reputation.) Manager, H. MYERS.

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If so, wear the "A D" Invisible Elevators (Regd.). Will increase your height up to four inches; the only approved means; detection impossible; simple, inexpensive. Send stamped envelope for particulars to the ORIENTAL TOILET CO. (B 5 Dept.), 87, Strand, London.

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DISTRIBUTION OF VALUABLE PRIZES.

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GIVEN AWAY Free of Charge to our Customers, 100 Golden Sovereigns, 100 Half-Sovereigns, 100 Five-Shilling Pieces, 100 Real Silver Watches, 500 Framed Oil Paintings, 500 Clocks, 500 Keyless Watches, 500 Real Gold Brooches, 500 Real Gold Rings 500 Silver Brooches, 500 Silver Rings, 500 Silver Pins.

We guarantee at least One Prize to every ten persons entering into our grand Bonus Parcel scheme.

Each Parcel contains a pair of very handsomely carved Wall Brackets, one representing a blacksmith at work shoeing, and the other in the form of a magnificent stag; a beautiful Miniature Photograph, mounted in Ivorine frame, representing Old Father Christmas, with powerful magnifying glass complete; Glass Mirror in frame; large carved-out model of a Tramcar, made to take to pieces and put together again, and which moves along the ground; Yacht Race Game, consisting of a coloured board representing the sea, some little movable model yachts, and either dice or revolving pointer for playing; a large size figure of a Mechanical Clown; Nanky Po, the real Japanese Doll, from Yokohama; splendid coloured figure One of England's Brave Defenders, standing 15-in. high, and which sells at 6d.; six of Raphael Tuck's Christmas Cards; large Scrap Book in colours, with a variety of Scraps included; coloured Story Book of the Ten Little Nigger Boys; the popular game of Blizzard, with board, revolving disc, and balls complete; packet of Black Peter, a card game for any number of players; beautifully coloured packet of cards for Snap; 100 Japanese Fairy Fire Stars; The Magicians' Album, which can be shown full of blank leaves, and at word of command changes to animals, then is found full of letters of the alphabet, these change to butterflies and again to plain leaves—about 12 different transformations; real Japanese Fish Game, containing 12 Japanese Fish and two double-jointed fishing rods; complete game of Lotto; Marvellous Swimming Frog, which, when placed in water, goes along; also a packet of Fortune-telling Cards, Grand Family Card Game of Robinson Crusoe, The Flutina Bagpipe (the New Japanese Musical Instrument), The Magic Maze, The Square Card Puzzle, The Maltese Cross Puzzle, The Magic Scissors Trick, The Performing Egg Trick, and the curious Optical Illusion of the Coster and the Obstinate Donkey.

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In each parcel is a Prize Coupon, which entitles you to a chance of obtaining one of the valuable prizes which we give away at the end of this year.

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Ladies, Real Gold Brooches, 3/6. Fancy Dress Rings, all Gold, 4/6. Ladies' Silver Watches, 10/6; best quality 18/6. Gold Watches, 26/6 Gents' Silver Watches, 10/6.

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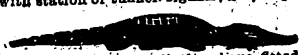
Centre Second Chronograph Watches, with instantaneous stop movement, 10/6. Silver Pencil Cases, 1/3 Silver Brooches, 1/3. All best jewellery far below store prices.

MECHANICAL NOVELTIES.—Performing Leotard 1/6. Jumping Horse, 1/3. Mouse, 3d. Rat, 1/3. Circular Train, 1/3; on Lines, 1/6, 2/3, 4/6; with station or tunnel, signals, &c., large size, 7/6, 10/6, 15/0, 21/0, 30/0. Fisherman and Boat moving along and Fishing, 1/3. Blacksmith's Forge with Smiths at work, 1/6. All the above fitted with best mechanism and guaranteed. Pair of Wrestling Figures, 1/3. Flying Bat, 1/3. Moving Beetle, 1/3. Mechanical Models for Window Attractions, &c. Set of Working Signals, 1/4; large size, 2/10.



ELECTRIC COILS, with Battery complete, 1/3; larger, 2/9, 5/6 Electric Motor, same prices. Powerful Gas Engines, 12/6, 35/0. Hot-Air Engines, 5/6, 8/6, 15/0. Electric Bells, 2/9. Electric Lamps, 1/3; with Two Batteries, 3/6. Electric Telegraph Instruments, 1/3 per pair; 3/0 complete with Connecting Wires, Batteries, &c. Pair of Real Telephones, 10/6.

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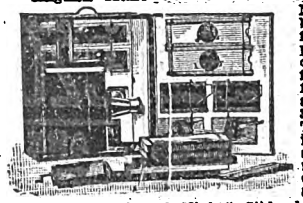
English Make throughout. Splendid Value.



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A GLANCE AT PAGE 604 MAY MEAN £5 TO YOU.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 410. FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 7TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

AH! AH! THE MILDNESS OF THE SEASON HAS DONE THIS.

100,000 LADIES' LUXURIOUSLY HANDSOME, RICH DARK BROWN

OPOSSUM FUR NECKLETS.

The SHORT STORIES SPECIAL NECKLET COUPON. 7/11/96. On receipt of this Coupon and P.O.O. or stamps for amount, we guarantee to send goods as above (carriage free this week only) to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. Cash returned in full if not satisfied. (Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

Sale Price 4/6 each. Worth Double.

With Life Imitation Natural Head combined; a most elegant and soft fur, quite equalling in style anything offered at 15s. 6d. each, and for durability not to be surpassed. Similar to illustration.

All Orders dispatched same day in rotation as they arrive by post.

F. HODGSON & SON, Manufacturers, Importers, and Merchants, Woodsley Road, LEEDS.

Telegraphic Address—"Eclipse, Leeds." Telephone No. 948.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

"OH, YES, REVENUES FROM ECONOMY ARE ENORMOUS."

The **richest** provision in **knowledge** made **absolutely easy** for the **accumulation** of this **income**. Write to Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, who will provide you with full **information**, posting **you free** (if, when writing you mention this paper) a large, amazingly interesting, valuable, instructive, and detailed illustrated "Pioneer" Reduction Catalogue, showing you what you can save, what to buy, and where to buy Carpets, Mats, and Hearthrugs of every manufacture, including Wilton, Plush, Brussels, Velvet, Antique, Foreign, and Furs, also QUEEN'S ROYAL HOUSEHOLD, PRUDENTIAL, ECLIPSE, and ALARM CARPETS and HEARTHRUGS (REGD.). Also Blankets, Curtains, Sheetings, &c., and a thousand other articles wanted in every household. (Copyright.)

REMARKS.—A lady customer writes complaining that we send out too large a Carpet for the money. Be this so or not, we send out no Carpet measuring less than 6ft. by 9ft.—even for 2s. 11d. **TEST THEM. THEY WILL SURPRISE YOU.**

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(*Registered*). **GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.**

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For the Immediate Production of

BOTANIC BEER.

A Nine-gallon Cask of Alcoholic Beer from a Brewery will cost you 10/6, but Eight Gallons of Beer made from

Mason's EXTRACT of HERBS

Can be obtained for 6d., plus a pound or two of Sugar and a little Yeast.

THE FINEST BEVERAGE IN THE WORLD.

Inventors and Manufacturers:

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"SHORT STORIES" best suit the mood of this eager, restless age, so

THE JOHN NOBLE HALF-GUINEA COSTUMES,

Ready-made and to measure, may be briefly and simply set down as

"ABSOLUTELY the BEST VALUE in the WORLD."

MODEL 583 is one of the latest up-to-date designs made in that ideal fabric, The John Noble Cheviot Serge. It has a smart well-cut Bodice, with the back shaped to the figure and the front pleated at the waist.

10/6. There is a pretty Yoke Collar, and the whole is very daintily trimmed. The Skirt is a full, wide, tailor-made design. Price, for complete Costume, only 10/6; safely packed and sent carriage paid for 9d. extra.

SKIRT ONLY, as sketched, 5/6; carriage 6d. extra.

SIZES IN STOCK fit figures 34in., 36in., and 38in. round bust, under arms; skirts being 38in., 40in. and 42in. long in front. Larger or special sizes made to measure, 1/6 extra.

COLOURS. — Black, Brown, Navy, Myrtle, Bronze-Green, Ruby, Cinnamon, Electric Blue, Fawn, Grey, and Petunia.

John Noble's Knockabout Frocks,

With long full sleeves, saddle top, and pocket.
Sizes 21 24 27 30 33 36 38 42 45in.
Prices 1/6 2/- 2/6 3/- 3/6 4/- 4/6 5/- 5/6
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AN UP-TO-DATE FASHION VOLUME, containing numerous choice designs of Ladies' and Children's Costumes, sent, together with Patterns, post free on application. PLEASE MENTION "SHORT STORIES."

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BEECHAM'S PILLS

FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,

SUCH AS

Sick Headache, Constipation,

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ANNUAL SALE SIX MILLION BOXES.

In Boxes, 9½d., 1s. 1½d., and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

Prepared only by the Proprietor,

THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

SULPHOLINE LOTION,

For clearing the skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

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THE "SURPRISE" WHISTLE.

A Piercing, Penetrating, Nerve-Racking, Ear-Splitter!

The rubber bulb on the end makes it capable of producing 1,000 different effects, from purling or muffled tones up to a great swelling, booming, two-mile piercing note, that will equal a steamboat or locomotive whistle. A PERFECT DOG OR QUAIL CALL. Cyclists will find the "Surprise" a magnificent road clearer. Post free 13 stamps.—MILLARD BROS., Dept. 9, 123, HOUNDSDITCH, LONDON, E.C.

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PEARSON'S
£100
COUPON.
No. 45
Nov. 7, 1896.
S.S. S.S.

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On receipt of stamped addressed envelope a lady will send to those afflicted with Superfluous Hairs, free particulars of a simple remedy which *permanently* removed a large growth from her sister's face without injuring the skin. Address, in confidence, Miss E. R. DALE, 20, Belvedere Rd., Lambeth, London.

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Particulars of a self-treatment for a permanent cure, as prescribed by eminent physicians of the U.S.A., forwarded free to all sufferers on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. B. F. FIELD, 15, York Buildings, Charing Cross, London, W.

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ARSENICAL TOILET
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The greatest beautifier in the World. Produces a lovely skin and complexion, and cures spots, pimples, redness, and freckles. The finest and purest soap made. For Eczema and all irritations it is the most emollient and soothing. Absolutely harmless. But beware of the many worthless imitations. Have Dr. Mackenzie's or none. At all Chemists and Stores, 6d. and 1s. a tablet.

Madame Adelina Patti writes from Craig-y-Nos Castle: "I find Dr. Mackenzie's Arsenical Toilet Soap most excellent."

NEW HARRISON Swift Gold Medal KNITTER.

KNITS Stockings ribbed or plain, Gloves and Clothing in Wool, Silk, or Cotton. Instructions Free. Lists free per post. 25 Triumphant Awards, including 7 Gold Medals, for the "Harrison" and Sun Machines.

Harrison Knitting Machine Co., Ltd. Works: 48, Upper Brook St., Manchester.

A SUM of from 10s. to 20s. per week offered for spare time to either sex, everywhere; work can be done evenings.—Send addressed envelope to Box 60, Eclipse Works, 92A, Aldersgate Street, London.

All Wool Underclothing.

HAWICK HOSIERY is the BEST.
Lamb's Wool Shirts and Pants, 3/6 each.
Men's Socks, 1/6 each.
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CARRIAGE PAID.

THE TEVIOT TWEED CO., HAWICK, N.B.

WHY SUFFER FROM CORNS, BUNIONS, OR ENLARGED TOE JOINTS, when a packet of Thompson's Celebrated French Corn Plasters will cure you? It is thin as silk, and can be worn with tightest boot. Post free for 14 stamps from M. F. THOMPSON, Homœopathic Chemist, 17, Gordon St., Glasgow. *Thompson's Guide to Health* post free

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Permanently cured in a few days by a simple, inexpensive self-treatment. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. A. M. CURTIS, York Chambers, Adelphi, London, W.C.

TOO STOUT

If you require a reliable remedy for the relief of superfluous fat, send for a box of my "H.D." Pills. No starvation required; you may eat and drink what you like, yet I guarantee to either sex a permanent reduction of 5lb. to 7lb. weekly. They are a harmless vegetable preparation; successful in the most stubborn cases, and improve health and figure. Their action is rapid, certain, safe, tasteless, and highly recommended. Prices, 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d., and 11s., post free, plain wrapper. PROFESSOR F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 410.] For the Week ending November 7th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

THE STORY OF THE THREE BEAUTIFUL PRINCESSES.

IN olden times there reigned a Moorish King in Granada, whose name was Mohamed, to which his subjects added the appellation of El Haygari, or the "Left-handed." Some say he was so called on account of his being really more expert with his sinister than his dexter hand; others, because he was prone to take everything by the wrong end, or, in other words, to mar wherever he meddled.

Certain it is, either through misfortune or mismanagement, he was continually in trouble; thrice was he driven from his throne, and, on one occasion, barely escaped to Africa with his life, in the disguise of a fisherman. Still, he was as brave as he was blundering; and, though left-handed, wielded his scymitar to such purpose that he each time re-established himself upon his throne by dint of hard fighting.

Instead, however, of learning wisdom from adversity, he hardened his neck, and stiffened his left arm in wilfulness. The evils of a public nature, which he thus brought upon himself and his kingdom, may be learned by those who will delve into the Arabian annals of Granada; the present legend deals but with his domestic policy.

As this Mohamed was one day riding forth with a train of his courtiers, by the foot of the mountain of Elvira, he met a band of horsemen returning from a foray into the land of the Christians. They were conducting a string of mules laden with spoil, and many captives of both sexes, among whom the monarch was struck with the appearance of a beautiful damsel, richly attired, who sat weeping on a low palfrey, and heeded not the consoling words of a duenna who rode beside her.

The monarch was struck with her beauty, and, on inquiring of the Captain of the troop, found that she was the daughter of the Alcayde of a frontier fortress, that had been surprised and sacked in the course of the foray. Mohamed claimed her as his royal share of the booty, and had her conveyed to his harem in the Alhambra. There everything was devised to soothe her melancholy; and the monarch, more and more enamoured, sought to make her his queen. The Spanish maid at first repulsed his addresses—he was an infidel—he was the open foe of her country—what was worse, he was stricken in years!

Everything was devised to soothe her melancholy.

The monarch, finding his assiduities of no avail, determined to enlist in his favour the duenna who had been captured with the lady. She was an Andalusian by birth, whose Christian name is forgotten, being mentioned in Moorish legends by no other appellation than that of the discreet Kadiga—and discreet in truth she was, as her whole history makes evident. No sooner had the Moorish King held a little private conversation with her, than she saw at once the cogency of his reasoning, and undertook his cause with her young mistress.

"Go to, now!" cried she, "what is there in all this to weep and wail about? Is it not better to be mistress of this beautiful palace, with all its gardens and fountains, than to be shut up within your father's old frontier tower? As to this Mohamed being an infidel, what is that to the purpose? You marry him, not his religion; and, if he is waxing a little old, the sooner will you be a widow, and mistress of yourself; at any rate, you are in his power, and must either be a queen or a slave. When in the hands of a robber, it is better to sell one's merchandise for a fair price than to have it taken by main force."

The arguments of the discreet Kadiga prevailed. The Spanish lady dried her tears, and became the spouse of

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Mohamed the Left-handed; she even conformed, in appearance, to the faith of her royal husband; and her discreet duenna immediately became a zealous convert to the Moslem doctrines; it was then the latter received the Arabian name of Kadiga, and was permitted to remain in the confidential employ of her mistress.

In due process of time the Moorish King was made the proud and happy father of three lovely daughters—all born at a birth; he could have wished they had been sons, but consoled himself with the idea that three

All three peeped cautiously through the lattice.

daughters at a birth were pretty well for a man somewhat stricken in years, and left-handed!

As usual with all Moslem monarchs, he summoned his astrologers on this happy event. They cast the nativities of the three Princesses, and shook their heads. "Daughters, O King!" said they, "are always precarious property; but these will most need your watchfulness when they arrive at a marriageable age; at that time gather them under your wings, and trust them to no other guardianship."

Mohamed the Left-handed was acknowleaged to be a wise king by his courtiers, and was certainly so considered by himself. The prediction of the astrologers caused him but little disquiet, trusting to his ingenuity to guard his daughters and outwit the Fates.

The three-fold birth was the last matrimonial trophy of the monarch; his queen bore him no more children, and died within a few years, bequeathing her infant daughters to his love, and to the fidelity of the discreet Kadiga.

Many years had yet to elapse before the Princesses would arrive at that period of danger—the marriageable age. "It is good, however, to be cautious in time," said the shrewd monarch; so he determined to have them reared in the royal castle of Salobreña. This was a sumptuous palace, incrusted, as it were, in a powerful Moorish fortress on the summit of a hill that overlooks the Mediterranean Sea.

In this delicious abode, in a propitious climate, and under a cloudless sky, the three Princesses grew up into wondrous beauty; but, though all reared alike, they gave early tokens of diversity of character. Their names were Zayda, Zorayda, and Zorahayda; and such was their order of seniority, for there had been precisely three minutes between their births.

Zayda, the eldest, was of an intrepid spirit, and took the lead of her sisters in everything, as she had done in entering first into the world. She was curious and inquisitive, and fond of getting at the bottom of things.

Zorayda had a great feeling for beauty, which was the reason, no doubt, of her delighting to regard her own image in a mirror or a fountain, and of her fondness for flowers and jewels, and other tasteful ornaments.

As for Zorahayda, the youngest, she was soft and timid, and extremely sensitive, with a vast deal of disposable tenderness, as was evident from her number of pet flowers and pet birds and pet animals, all of which she cherished with the fondest care. Her amusements, too, were of a gentle nature, and mixed up with musing and reverie.

Years rolled on smoothly and serenely; the discreet Kadiga, to whom the Princesses were confided, was faithful to her trust.

The castle of Salobreña, as has been said, was built upon a hill on the sea coast. One of the exterior walls straggled down the profile of the hill, until it reached a jutting rock over-hanging the sea, with a narrow, sandy beach at its foot, laved by the rippling billows. A small watch-tower on this rock had been fitted up as a pavilion, with latticed windows to admit the sea-breeze. Here the Princesses used to pass the sultry hours of midday.

The curious Zayda was one day seated at one of the windows of the pavilion, as her sisters, reclining on ottomans, were taking the siesta, or noon-tide slumber, her attention had been attracted to a galley which came coasting along, with measured strokes of the oar. As it drew near, she observed that it was filled with armed men. The galley anchored at the foot of the tower; a number of Moorish soldiers landed on the narrow beach, conducting several Christian prisoners.

The curious Zayda awakened her sisters, and all three peeped cautiously through the close jalousies of the lattice, which screened them from sight. Among the prisoners were three Spanish cavaliers, richly dressed. They were in the flower of youth, and of noble presence; and the lofty manner in which they carried themselves, though loaded with chains and surrounded with enemies, bespoke the grandeur of their souls.

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The Princesses gazed with intense and breathless interest. Cooped up as they had been in this castle among female attendants, seeing nothing of the male sex but black slaves or the rude fishermen of the sea-coast, it is not to be wondered at that the appearance of three gallant cavaliers, in the pride of youth and manly beauty, should produce some commotion in their bosoms.

"Did ever nobler being tread the earth than that cavalier in crimson?" cried Zayda, the eldest of the sisters. "See how proudly he bears himself, as though all around him were his slaves!"

"But notice that one in green!" exclaimed Zorayda "What grace! what elegance! what spirit!"

The gentle Zorahayda said nothing, but she secretly gave preference to the cavalier in purple.

The Princesses remained gazing until the prisoners were out of sight; then, heaving long-drawn sighs, they turned round, looked at each other for a moment, and sat down, musing and pensive, on their ottomans.

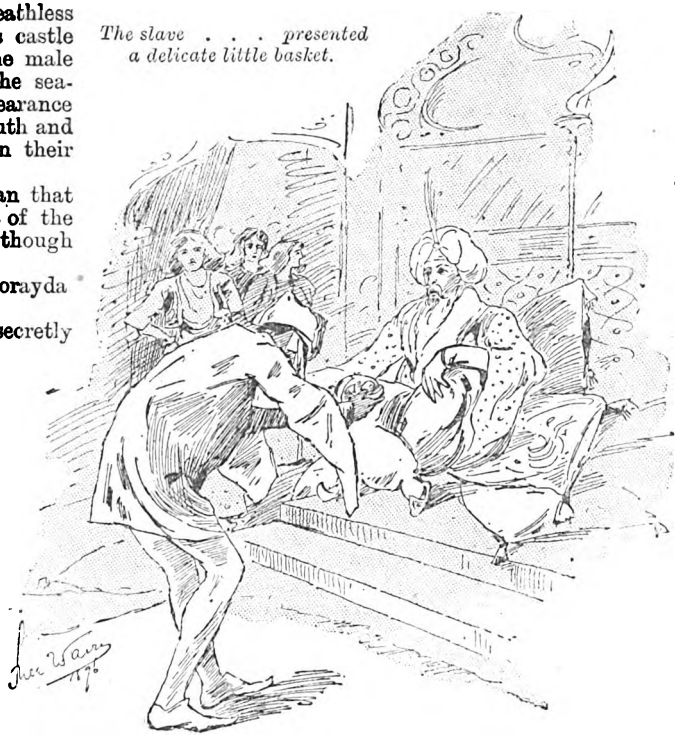
The discreet Kadiga found them in this situation; they related to her what they had seen, and even the withered heart of the duenna was warmed. "Poor youths!" exclaimed she, "I'll warrant their captivity makes many a fair and high-born lady's heart ache in their native land! Ah! my children, you have little idea of the life these cavaliers lead in their own country. Such prankling at tournaments! Such devotion to the ladies! Such courting and serenading!"

The curiosity of Zayda was fully roused; she was insatiable in her inquiries, and drew from the duenna the most animated pictures of the scenes of her youthful days and native land. The beautiful Zorayda bridled up, and slyly regarded herself in a mirror, when the theme turned upon the charms of the Spanish ladies, while Zorahayda suppressed a struggling sigh at the mention of moonlight serenades.

Every day the curious Zayda renewed her inquiries, and every day the sage duenna repeated her stories, which were listened to with profound interest, though with frequent sighs, by her gentle auditors. The discreet old woman at length awakened to the mischief she might be doing. She had been accustomed to think of the Princesses only as children; but they had imperceptibly ripened beneath her eye, and now bloomed before her three lovely damsels of the marriageable age. It is time, thought the duenna, to give notice to the King.

Mohamed the Left-handed was seated one morning on a divan in one of the cool halls of the Alhambra, when a slave arrived from the fortress of Salobreña with a message from the sage Kadiga, congratulating him on the anniversary of his daughters' birthday. The slave at the same time presented a delicate little basket decorated with flowers, within which, on a couch of vine and fig-leaves, lay a peach, an apricot, and a nectarine, with their bloom and down and dewy sweetness upon them and all in the early stage of tempting ripeness. The monarch was versed in the Oriental language of fruits and flowers, and readily divined the meaning of this emblematical offering.

"So," said he, "the critical period pointed out by the astrologers is arrived; my daughters are at a marriageable age. What is to be done? They are shut up from the eyes of men; they are under the eyes of the discreet Kadiga—all very good!—but still they are not under my own eye, as was prescribed by the astrologers. I must gather them under my wing, and trust no one else."



The slave . . . presented a delicate little basket.

So saying, he ordered that a tower of the Alhambra should be prepared for their reception, and departed at the head of his guards for the fortress of Salobreña, to conduct them home in person.

About three years had elapsed since Mohamed had beheld his daughters, and he could scarcely credit his eyes at the wonderful change which that small space of time had made in their appearance. During the interval they had passed that wondrous boundary line in female life which separates the crude, uninformed, and thoughtless girl from the blooming, blushing, meditative woman.

Zayda was tall and finely-formed, with a lofty demeanour and a penetrating eye. She entered with a stately and decided step, and made a profound reverence to Mohamed, treating him more as her sovereign than her father.

Zorayda was of the middle height, with an alluring look and swimming gait, and a sparkling beauty, heightened by the assistance of the toilette. She approached her father with a smile, kissed his hand, and saluted him with several stanzas from a popular Arabian poet, with which the monarch was delighted. Zorahayda was shy and timid, smaller than her sisters, and with a beauty of that tender, beseeching kind which looks for fondness and protection. She was little fitted to command, like her elder sister, or to dazzle like the second, but was rather formed to creep to the bosom of manly affection, to nestle within it, and be content. She drew near her father with a timid, and almost faltering step, and would have taken his hand to kiss, but on looking up into his face, and seeing it beaming with paternal smiles, the tenderness of her nature broke forth, and she threw herself upon his neck.

He prepared for his return to Granada by sending heralds before him, commanding everyone to keep out.

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of the road by which he was to pass, and that all doors and windows should be closed at the approach of the Princesses. This done, he set forth, escorted by a troop of black horsemen, of hideous aspect, and clad in shining armour.

The Princesses rode beside the King, closely veiled, on beautiful white palfreys, with velvet caparisons, embroidered with gold, and sweeping the ground; the bits and stirrups were of gold, and the silken bridles adorned with pearls and precious stones. The palfreys were covered with little silver bells, that made the most musical tinkling as they ambled gently along. Woe to the unlucky wight, however, who lingered in the way when he heard the tinkling of these bells!—the guards were ordered to cut him down without mercy.

The cavalcade was drawing near to Granada, when it overtook, on the banks of the river Xenil, a small body of Moorish soldiers with a convoy of prisoners. It was too late for the soldiers to get out of the way, so they threw themselves on their faces on the earth, ordering their captives to do the like. Among the prisoners were the three identical cavaliers whom the Princesses had seen from the pavilion. They either did not understand or were too haughty to obey the order, and remained standing and gazing upon the cavalcade.

The ire of the monarch was kindled at this flagrant defiance of his orders. Drawing his scymitar, and pressing forward, he was about to deal a left-handed blow, that would have been fatal to, at least, one of the gazers, when the Princesses crowded round him, and implored mercy for the prisoners; even the timid Zorahayda forgot her shyness, and became eloquent in their behalf. Mohamed paused, with uplifted scymitar, when the Captain of the guard threw himself at his feet. "Let not your Majesty," said he, "do a deed that may cause great scandal throughout the kingdom. These are three brave and noble Spanish knights, who have been taken in battle, fighting like lions; they are of high birth, and may bring great ransoms."

"Enough!" said the King. "I will spare their lives, but punish their audacity—let them be taken to the Vermilion Towers, and put to hard labour."

Mohamed was making one of his usual left-handed blunders. In the tumult and agitation of this blustering scene, the veils of the three Princesses had been thrown back, and the radiance of their beauty revealed; and in prolonging the parley, the King had given that beauty time to have its full effect. In those days people fell in love much more suddenly than at present, as all ancient stories make manifest; it is not a matter of wonder, therefore, that the hearts of the three cavaliers were completely captured, especially as gratitude was added to their admiration; it is a little singular, however, though no less certain, that each of them was enraptured with one of the beauties. As to the Princesses, they were more than ever struck with the noble demeanour of the captives, and cherished in their breasts all that they had heard of their valour and noble lineage.

The cavalcade resumed its march; the three Princesses rode pensively along on their tinkling palfreys, now and then stealing a glance behind in search of the Christian captives, and the latter were conducted to their allotted prison in the Vermilion Towers.

The residence provided for the Princesses was one of the most dainty that fancy could devise. It was in a tower somewhat apart from the main palace of the Alhambra, though connected with it by the main wall that encircled the whole summit of the hill. On one side it looked into the interior of the fortress, and had at its foot a small garden filled with the rarest flowers. On the other side it overlooked a deep embowered ravine that separated the grounds of the Alhambra from those of the Generalife. The interior of the tower was divided into small fairy apartments, beautifully ornamented in the light Arabian style, surrounding a lofty hall, the vaulted roof of which rose almost to the summit of the tower.

The Princesses had been represented as always cheerful when in the castle of Salobreña; the King had expected to see them enraptured with the Alhambra. To his surprise, however, they began to pine and grow melancholy, and dissatisfied with everything around them.

The King, who was somewhat of a testy, tyrannical disposition, took this at first in high dudgeon; but he reflected that his daughters had arrived at an age when the female mind expands and its desires augment. "They are no longer children," said he to himself, "they are women grown, and require suitable objects to interest them." He put in requisition, therefore, all the dressmakers, and the jewellers, and the artificers in gold and silver throughout the Zacatin of Granada, so that the Princesses were overwhelmed with robes of silk, and of tissue, and of brocade, and cashmere shawls, and necklaces of pearls and diamonds, and rings, and bracelets, and all manner of precious things.

All, however, was of no avail. The Princesses continued pale and languid in the midst of all their finery, and looked like three blighted rosebuds, drooping from one stalk. The King was at his wits' end. He had, in general, a laudable confidence in his own judgment, and never took advice. "The whims and caprices of three marriageable damsels, however, are sufficient," said he, "to puzzle the shrewdest head." So, for once in his life, he called in the aid of counsel.

The person to whom he applied was the experienced duenna.

"Kadiga," said the King, "I know you to be one of the most discreet women in the whole world, as well as one of the most trustworthy; for these reasons I have always continued to keep you about the persons of my daughters. Fathers cannot be too wary in whom they repose such confidence; I now wish you to find out the secret malady that is preying upon the Princesses, and to devise some means of restoring them to health and cheerfulness."

Kadiga promised implicit obedience. In fact, she knew more of the malady of the Princesses than they did themselves. Shutting herself up with them, however, she endeavoured to insinuate herself into their confidence.

"My dear children, what is the reason you are so dismal and downcast, in so beautiful a place, where you have everything that the heart can wish?"

The Princesses looked vacantly round the apartment, and sighed.

"What more, then, would you have? Shall I get you the wonderful parrot that talks all languages and is the delight of Granada?"

"Odious!" exclaimed the Princess Zayda. "A horrid screaming bird, that chatters words without ideas; one must be without brains to tolerate such a pest."

"Shall I send for a monkey from the rock of Gibraltar, to divert you with his antics?"

"A monkey! Faugh!" cried Zorayda; "the detestable mimic of man. I hate the nauseous animal."

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Zorayda . . . warbled a little Arabian air.

"What say you to the famous black singer, Casem, from the royal harem, in Morocco? They say he has a voice as fine as a woman's."

"I am terrified at the sight of these black slaves," said the delicate Zorahayda; "besides, I have lost all relish for music."

"Ah, my child, you would not say so," replied the old woman slyly, "had you heard the music I heard last evening from the three Spanish cavaliers whom we met on our journey. But, bless me, children! what is the matter that you blush so, and are in such a flutter?"

"Nothing, nothing, good mother; pray proceed."

"Well, as I was passing by the Vermilion Towers last evening, I saw the three cavaliers resting after their day's labour. One was playing on the guitar, so gracefully, and the others sang by turns; and they did it in such a style, that the very guards seemed like statues, or men enchanted. Allah forgive me! I could not help being moved at hearing the songs of my native country. And then to see three noble and handsome youths in chains and slavery!"

Here the kind-hearted old woman could not restrain her tears.

"Perhaps, mother, you could manage to procure us a sight of these cavaliers," said Zayda.

"I think," said Zorayda, "a little music would be quite reviving."

The timid Zorahayda said nothing, but threw her arms round the neck of Kadiga.

"Mercy on me!" exclaimed the discreet old woman; "what are you talking about, my children? Your father would be the death of us all if he heard of such a thing. To be sure, these cavaliers are evidently well-bred and high-minded youths; but what of that? They are the enemies of our faith, and you must not even think of them but with abhorrence."

There is an admirable intrepidity in the female will, particularly when about the marriageable age, which is not to be deterred by dangers and prohibitions. The Princesses hung round their old duenna, and coaxed, and entreated, and declared that a refusal would break their hearts.

What could she do? She was certainly the most discreet old woman in the whole world, and one of the most faithful servants to the King; but was she to see three beautiful girls break their hearts for the mere tinkling of a guitar? Besides, though she had been so long among the Moors, and changed her faith in imitation of her mistress, like a trusty follower, yet she was a Spaniard born, and had the lingerings of Christianity in her heart. So she set about to contrive how the wish of the Princesses might be gratified.

The Christian captives, confined in the Vermilion Towers, were under the charge of a big-whiskered, broad-shouldered renegado, called Hussein Baba, who was reputed to have a most itching palm. She went to him privately, and slipped a broad piece of gold into his hand.

"Hussein Baba," said she, "my mistresses, the three Princesses, who are shut up in the tower, and in sad want of amusement, have heard of the musical talents of the three Spanish cavaliers, and are desirous of hearing a specimen of their skill. I am sure you are too kind-hearted to refuse them so innocent a gratification."

"What! and to have my head set grinning over the gate of my own tower! for that would be the reward if the King should discover it."

"No danger of anything of the kind; the affair may be managed so that the whim of the Princesses may be gratified, and their father be never the wiser. You know the deep ravine outside the walls that passes immediately below the tower. Put the three Christians to work there, and, at the intervals of their labour, let them play and sing, as if for their own recreation. In this way the Princesses will be able to hear them from the windows of the tower, and you may be sure of their paying well for your compliance."

As the good old woman concluded her harangue, she kindly pressed the rough hand of the renegado, and left within it another piece of gold.

Her eloquence was irresistible. The very next day the three cavaliers were put to work in the ravine. During the noon-tide heat, when their fellow-labourers were sleeping in the shade, and the guard nodding drowsily at his post, they seated themselves among the herbage at the foot of the tower, and sang a Spanish roundelay to the accompaniment of the guitar.

The glen was deep, the tower was high, but their voices rose distinctly in the stillness of the summer noon.

The Princesses listened from their balcony; they had been taught the Spanish language by their duenna, and were moved by the tenderness of the song. The

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discreet Kadiga, on the contrary, was terribly shocked. "Allah preserve us!" cried she, "they are singing a love-ditty, addressed to yourselves. Did ever mortal hear of such audacity? I will run to the slave master, and have them soundly bastinadoed."

"What! bastinado such gallant cavaliers, and for singing so charmingly!" The three beautiful Princesses were filled with horror at the idea. With all her virtuous indignation, the good old woman was of a placable nature, and easily appeased. Besides, the music seemed to have a beneficial effect upon her young mistresses. A rosy bloom had already come to their cheeks, and their eyes began to sparkle. She made no further objection, therefore, to the amorous song of the cavaliers.

When it was finished, the Princesses remained silent for a time; at length Zorayda took up a lute, and with a sweet, though faint and trembling voice, warbled a little Arabian air, the burden of which was, "The rose is concealed among her leaves, but she listens with delight to the song of the nightingale."

From this time forward the cavaliers worked almost daily in the ravine. The considerate Hussein Baba became more and more indulgent, and daily more prone to sleep at his post. For some time a vague intercourse was kept up by popular songs and romances, which in some measure responded to each other, and breathed the feelings of the parties.

By degrees, the Princesses showed themselves at the balcony, when they could do so without being perceived by the guards. They conversed with the cavaliers also, by means of flowers, with the symbolical language of which they were mutually acquainted; the difficulties of their intercourse added to its charms, and strengthened the passion they had so singularly conceived, for love delights to struggle with difficulties, and thrives the most hardily on the scantiest soil.

The change effected in the looks and spirits of the Princesses by this secret intercourse surprised and gratified the left-handed King; but no one was more elated than the discreet Kadiga, who considered it was all owing to her able management.

At length there was an interruption in this telegraphic correspondence; for several days the cavaliers ceased to make their appearance in the glen. The three beautiful Princesses looked out from the tower in vain. In vain they stretched their swan-like necks from the balcony; in vain they sang like captive nightingales in their cage; nothing was to seen of their Christian lovers; not a note responded from the groves. The discreet Kadiga sallied forth in quest of intelligence, and soon returned with a face full of trouble.

"Ah, my children!" cried she, "I saw what all this would come to, but you would have your way; you may now hang up your lutes on the willows. The Spanish cavaliers are now ransomed by their families; they are down in Granada, and preparing to return to their native country."

The three beautiful Princesses were in despair at the tidings. The fair Zayda was indignant at the slight put upon them, in thus being deserted without a parting word. Zorayda wrung her hands and cried, and looked in the glass, and wiped away her tears and cried afresh. The gentle Zorahayda leaned over the balcony and wept in silence, and her tears fell drop by drop among the flowers of the bank, where the faithless cavaliers had so often been seated.

The discreet Kadiga did all in her power to soothe their sorrow.

"Take comfort, my children," said she, "this is nothing when you are used to it. This is the way of the world. Ah! when you are as old as I am, you will know how to value these men. I'll warrant these cavaliers have their loves among the Spanish beauties of Cordova and Seville, and will soon be serenading under their balconies, and thinking no more of the Moorish beauties in the Alhambra. Take comfort, therefore, my children, and drive them from your hearts."

The comforting words of the discreet Kadiga only redoubled the distress of the three Princesses, and for two days they continued inconsolable. On the morning of the third, the good old woman entered their apartment, all ruffling with indignation.

"Who would have believed such insolence in mortal man," exclaimed she, as soon as she could find words to express herself; "but I am rightly served for having connived at this deception of your worthy father. Never talk more to me of your Spanish cavaliers."

"Why, what has happened, good Kadiga?" exclaimed the Princesses in breathless anxiety.

"What has happened?—treason has happened; or what is almost as bad, treason has been proposed, and to me, the most faithful of subjects, the truest of duennas! Yes, my children, the Spanish cavaliers have dared to tamper with me, that I should persuade you to fly with them to Cordova, and become their wives!"

Here the excellent old woman covered her face with her hands, and gave way to a violent burst of indignation. The three beautiful Princesses turned pale and red, and trembled, and looked down, and cast shy looks at each other, but said nothing. Meanwhile, the old woman sat rocking backward and forward in violent agitation, and now and then breaking out into exclamations: "That ever I should live to be so insulted!—I, the most faithful of servants!"

At length, the eldest Princess, who had most spirit, and always took the lead, approached her, and laying her hand upon her shoulder, said: "Well, mother, supposing we were willing to fly with these Christian cavaliers—is such a thing possible?"

The good old woman paused suddenly in her grief, and looked up.

"Possible!" echoed she; "to be sure it is possible. Have not the cavaliers already bribed Hussein Baba, the renegado captain of the guard, and arranged the whole plan? But, then, to think of deceiving your father—your father, who has placed such confidence in me!"

Here the worthy woman gave way to a fresh burst of grief, and began again to rock backward and forward, and to wring her hands.

"But our father has never placed any confidence in us," said the elder Princess, "but has trusted to bolts and bars, and treated us like captives."

"Why, that is true enough," replied the old woman, again pausing in her grief; "he has, indeed, treated you most unreasonably, keeping you shut up here to waste your bloom in a moping old tower, like roses left to wither in a flower-jar. But, then, to fly from your native land!"

"And is not the land we fly to the native land of our mother, where we shall live in freedom? And shall we not each have a youthful husband in exchange for a severe old father?"

"Why, that again is all very true; and your father, I must confess, is rather tyrannical; but, then," relapsing into her grief, "would you leave me behind to bear the brunt of his vengeance?"

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"By no means, my good Kadiga; cannot you fly with us?"

"Very true, my child; and, to tell the truth, when I talked the matter over with Hussein Baba, he promised to take care of me, if I would accompany you in your flight; but, then, bethink you, my children, are you willing to renounce the faith of your father?"

"The Christian faith was the original faith of our mother," said the eldest Princess; "I am ready to embrace it, and so, I am sure, are my sisters."

"Right again!" exclaimed the old woman, brightening up; "it was the original faith of your mother, and bitterly did she lament, on her death bed, that she had renounced it. I promised her then to take care of your souls, and I rejoice to see that they are now in a fair way to be saved. Yes, my children, I, too, was born a Christian, and have remained a Christian in my heart, and am resolved to return to the faith. I have talked on the subject with Hussein Baba, who is a Spaniard by birth, and comes from a place not far from my native town. He is equally anxious to see his own country, and to be reconciled to the Church; and the cavaliers have promised, that, if we are disposed to become man and wife, on returning to our native land, they will provide for us handsomely."

Gave way to a violent burst of indignation.

In a word, it appeared that this extremely discreet and provident old woman had consulted with the cavaliers and the renegado, and had concerted the whole plan of escape. The eldest Princess immediately assented to it; and her example, as usual, determined the conduct of her sisters. It is true the youngest hesitated, for she was gentle and timid of soul, and there was a struggle in her bosom between filial feeling and youthful passion; the latter, however, as usual, gained the victory, and with silent tears and stifled sighs she prepared herself for flight.

The rugged hill on which the Alhambra is built was in old times perforated with subterranean passages cut through the rock, and leading from the fortress to various parts of the city, and to distant sally-ports on the banks of the Darro and the Xenil. They had been constructed at different times by the Moorish kings as means of escape from sudden insurrections, or of secretly issuing forth on private enterprises.

Many of them are now entirely lost, while others remain, partly choked up with rubbish and partly walled up; monuments of the jealous precautions and warlike stratagems of the Moorish government. By one of these passages Hussein Baba had undertaken to conduct the Princesses to a sally-port beyond the walls of the city, where the cavaliers were to be ready with fleet steeds, to bear the whole party over the borders.

The appointed night arrived; the tower of the Princesses had been locked up as usual, and the Alhambra was buried in deep sleep. Towards midnight, the discreet Kadiga listened from the balcony of a window that looked into the garden. Hussein Baba, the renegado, was already below, and gave the appointed signal.

The duenna fastened the end of a ladder of ropes to the balcony, lowered it into the garden, and descended. The two elder Princesses followed her with beating hearts; but when it came to the turn of the youngest Princess, Zorahayda, she hesitated, and trembled. Several times she ventured a delicate little foot upon the ladder, and as often drew it back, while her poor little heart fluttered more and more the longer she delayed. She cast a wistful look back into the silken chamber; she had lived in it, to be sure, like a bird in a cage; but within it she was secure; who could tell what danger might beset her should she flutter forth into the wide world? Now she bethought herself of the gallant Christian lover, and her little foot was instantly upon the ladder; and anon she thought of her father, and shrank back.

In vain her sisters implored, the duenna scolded, and the renegado reviled beneath the balcony; the gentle little Moorish maid stood doubting and wavering on the verge of elopement; tempted by the sweetness of the sin, but terrified at its perils.

Every moment increased the risk of discovery. A distant tramp was heard. "The patrols are walking the rounds," cried the renegado; "if we linger we perish. Princess, descend instantly, or we leave you."

Zorahayda was for a moment in fearful agitation; then loosening the ladder of ropes, with desperate resolution she flung it from the balcony.

"It is decided!" cried she, "flight is now out of my power! Allah guide and bless ye, my sisters!"

The two eldest Princesses were shocked at the thought of leaving her behind, and would fain have lingered, but the patrol was advancing; the regenado was furious, and they were hurried away to the subterranean passage. They groped their way through a fearful labyrinth, cut through the heart of the mountain, and succeeded in reaching, undiscovered, an iron gate that opened on the outside of the walls. The Spanish cavaliers were waiting to receive them disguised as Moorish soldiers of the guard, commanded by the renegado.

The lover of Zorahayda was frantic when he learned that she had refused to leave the tower; but there was

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"Allah guide and bless ye, my sisters."

no time to waste in lamentations. The Princesses were placed behind their lovers, the discreet Kadiga mounted behind the renegado, and all set off at a round pace in the direction of the pass of Lope, which leads through the mountains towards Cordova.

They had not proceeded far when they heard the noise of drums and trumpets from the battlements of the Alhambra.

"Our flight is discovered," said the renegado.

"We have fleet steeds, the night is dark, and we may distance all pursuit," replied the cavaliers.

They put spurs to their horses, and scoured across the Vega. They reached the foot of the mountain of Elvira, which stretches like a promontory into the plain. The renegado paused and listened. "As yet," said he, "there is no one on our track, we shall make good our escape to the mountains." While he spoke, a pale fire sprang up in a light haze on the top of the watch tower of the Alhambra.

"Confusion!" cried the renegado, "that fire will put all the guards of the passes on the alert. Away! away! Spur like mad—there is no time to be lost."

Away they dashed—the clattering of their horses hoofs echoed from rock to rock, as they swept along the road that skirts the rocky mountain of Elvira. As they galloped on, they beheld that the pale fire of the Alhambra was answered in every direction; light after light blazed on the Atalayas, or watch-towers of the mountains.

"Forward! forward!" cried the renegado: "to the bridge! to the bridge, before the alarm has reached there!"

They doubled the promontory of the mountains, and arrived in sight of the famous Puente del Pinos, that crosses a rushing stream often dyed with Christian and Moslem blood. To their confusion, the tower on the bridge blazed with lights and glittered with armed men. The renegado pulled up his steed, rose in his stirrups and looked about him for a moment; then beckoning to the cavaliers, he struck off from the road, skirted the river for some distance, and then dashed into its waters.

The cavaliers called upon the Princesses to cling to them, and did the same. They were borne for some distance down the rapid current, the surges roared round them, but the beautiful Princesses clung to their Christian knights, and never uttered a complaint. The cavaliers attained the opposite bank in safety and were conducted by the renegado, by rude and unfrequented paths, and wild barrancos, through the heart of the mountains, so as to avoid all the regular passes.

In a word, they succeeded in reaching the ancient city of Cordova; where their restoration to their country and friends was celebrated with great rejoicings, for they were of the noblest families. The beautiful Princesses were forthwith received into the bosom of the Church, and, after being in all due form made regular Christians, were rendered happy wives.

In our hurry to make good the escape of the Princesses across the river, and up the mountains, we forgot to mention the fate of the discreet Kadiga. She had clung like a cat to Hussein Baba, in the scamper across the Vega, screaming at every bound, and drawing many an imprecation from the whiskered renegado; but when he prepared to plunge his steed into the river, her terror knew no bounds. "Grasp me not so tightly," cried Hussein Baba; "hold on by my belt and fear nothing." She held firmly with both hands by the leathern belt that girded the broad-backed renegado; but when he halted with the cavaliers to take breath on the mountain summit, the duenna was no longer to be seen.

"What has become of Kadiga?" cried the Princesses in alarm.

"Allah alone knows!" replied the renegado; "my belt came off when in the midst of the river, and Kadiga was swept with it down the stream. The will of Allah be done! but it was an embroidered belt, and of great price."

There was no time to waste in idle regrets; yet bitterly did the Princesses bewail the loss of their discreet counsellor. That excellent old woman, however, did not lose more than half of her nine lives in the stream; a fisherman, who was drawing his nets some distance down the stream, brought her to land, and was not a little astonished at his miraculous draught. What further became of the discreet Kadiga the legend does not mention; certain it is that she evinced her discretion in never venturing within the reach of Mohamed the Left-handed.

Looking mournfully towards the mountains.

Almost as little is known of the

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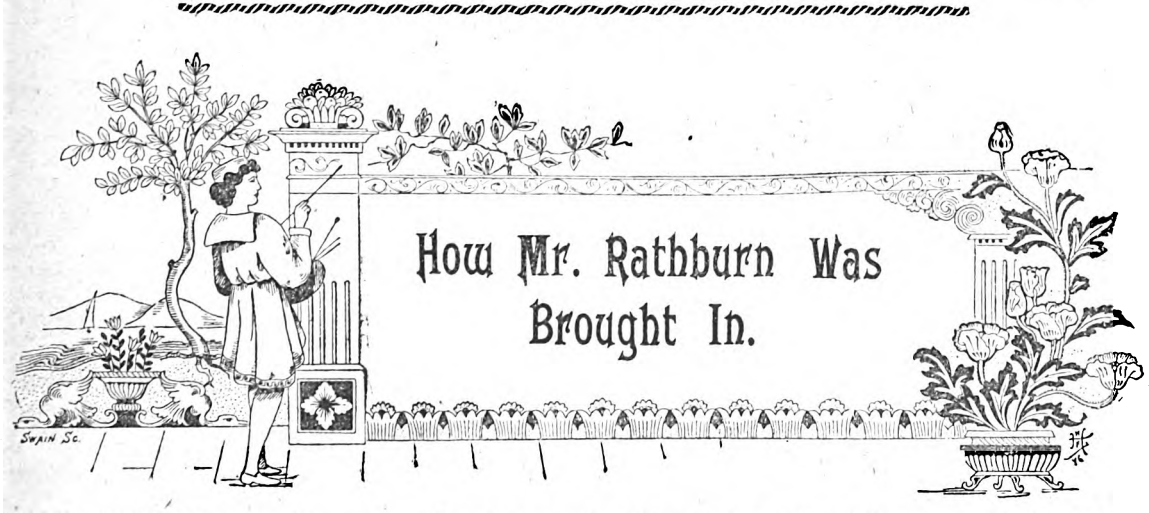
conduct of that sagacious monarch when he discovered the escape of his daughters, and the deceit practised upon him by the most faithful of servants. It was the only instance in which he had called in the aid of counsel, and he was never afterwards known to be guilty of a similar weakness.

He took good care, however, to guard his remaining daughter, who had no disposition to elope; it is thought indeed, that she secretly repented having remained behind.

Now and then she was seen leaning on the battlements of the tower and looking mournfully towards the mountains in the direction of Cordova, and sometimes the notes of her lute were heard accompanying plaintive ditties, in which she was said to lament the loss of her sisters and her lover, and to bewail her solitary life.

She died young, and, according to popular rumour, was buried in a vault beneath the tower; and her untimely fate has given rise to more than one traditionary fable.

BADEM GOUGE.



RATHBURN paced the room with noiseless tread, now and then stopping to look at the tossing figure of the boy upon the cot or to listen to the words he spoke in his delirium.

Once he thought he caught the sounds of hoofs upon the trail, and he halted abruptly as his hand stole beneath the tails of his long English coat.

Mr. Rathburn's nerves were unstrung by the strain imposed upon them by recent and painful events. As he had expressed it to himself half a hundred times that day, "The gentleman who brings me in, whether it's afoot or in a pine box, goes just five thousand dollars to the good," and each time his thoughts had reverted to the powerful inducement the general public had to "bring him in," his hand had stolen beneath the tails of his long English coat; and the comfort he derived from so doing enabled him to say, "It won't be the first who tries, nor the first six who try, but the seventh gets the pot."

Mr. Rathburn had left Denver the morning previous in great and pressing haste, and with a careful avoidance of human kind. He had never been a social man, and the reward of five thousand dollars which was "out" for the man who would bring him in only served to intensify the natural austerity of his character.

The difficulties which beset Mr. Rathburn arose indirectly out of a quiet little game of poker, when the stakes had been high, and when the game had ended (two gentlemen going broke), the tempers of all concerned had been even higher than the stakes.

Mr. Rathburn's honour had been called into question. Certain remarks, chiefly notable because of their extreme brevity and almost brutal frankness, had been directed at him.

What followed was hasty and unpremeditated.

Now that time had given opportunity for reflection, Mr. Rathburn consoled himself with the thought that it was in self-defence. In his view of the matter he stood at variance with that of the public, which was "wilful murder."

Fear of public sentiment had, however, never been a potent factor in Mr. Rathburn's career, but now, for the first time in his life, this sentiment of disapproval was backed by money, and he was aware that several bands of men were patrolling the country, and that the various individuals composing those bands were anxious to get within speaking, or, to be more exact, shooting distance of him.

Rathburn had been making the best of his way over the range that afternoon in the usual unostentatious manner of a man fleeing from justice, when young Gordon saw him from his ranch near the trail and rushed in pursuit. Young Gordon will never know how near he was to death, for Mr. Rathburn turned and faced him, his hand beneath the tails of his long English coat. As a general thing, when people saw Mr. Rathburn's hand disappear behind him, they left precipitately, for that motion and the one which followed it were known to be singularly fatal to human life.

Young Gordon, in ignorance of this fact, had continued his approach, which after all was the best and safest thing he could have done, for Rathburn got a view of his face, and being a student of faces, he instantly decided that young Gordon was not looking for trouble.

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The news of Mr. Rathburn's latest shooting affray had not reached the Foot Hill Ranch, and young Gordon did not know that the Governor of Colorado had deemed it expedient to offer a large reward to the man who would put a check upon Mr. Rathburn's further independent action and hand him over to the proper authorities in Denver. Whether or not Mr. Rathburn was to be turned in alive or dead was left to the taste and judgment of his captor; the prevailing tone of the proclamation suggested, however, that Mr. Rathburn dead was easier to handle than Mr. Rathburn alive, and at present there were bets pending as to the probable appearance Mr. Rathburn would present to the community when on view at the undertaker's shop; for the opinion that he was a "goner" was strong.

Young Gordon's face, white and drawn with sorrow and apprehension, was more eloquent than any words. His brother was sick—dying for all he knew. Would Rathburn remain at the ranch while he went for a doctor? He dared not leave his brother alone. Would Rathburn remain until morning?

Mr. Rathburn had looked down the trail. He was quite sure that somewhere behind him were a number of enterprising gentlemen, and that the reward of five thousand dollars had stimulated a degree of activity which would be his ruin if he lingered. He looked at the mountains beyond, which, when reached, promised safety, and they were very near.

An elevation and generosity of conception characterised many of Mr. Rathburn's acts. Outside of his profession, and when removed from the unworthy and corrupting influence of the flesh, he was not without a certain nobility of soul.

He cast one longing look at the mountains, wavered, and was lost.

Just ten minutes later young Gordon was galloping down the trail at breakneck speed, while Mr. Rathburn remained in attendance upon the sick boy.

As long as there was light in the sky he had turned frequently to the window, and followed with his eyes the dusty streak of grey across the range which marked the windings of the trail, but from without the distance there came neither sound nor sight of life.

By turns, as the night wore on, Mr. Rathburn was nervous and reflective, now sitting in a chair beside the cot, now pacing the floor restlessly. The present experience was a new one for him. To be sure, at various periods of his eventful and not entirely blameless life he had found it both safe and necessary to deprive certain localities of his presence. Perhaps the necessity would again occur if he succeeded in spite of the delay in making good his escape; but he was not prying into the future, the present was enough for him.

It was not long before he had forgotten his own troubles in his interest in the boy upon the cot, and it was borne upon his consciousness that the boy was very ill indeed, and that his fever had reached a crisis that unless a change for the better came before morning he would no longer need the doctor's aid.

The boy was very young, sixteen or seventeen at most.

Mr. Rathburn smoothed his pillow with gentle touch, and seating himself beside the cot took the boy's hand in his own. The boy tossed to and fro, his eyes open and glassy, his skin hot and burning. Mr. Rathburn placed his disengaged hand upon the boy's brow and set himself to work to control and quiet his ravings by his own force of will.

The hours wore on. One, two, three. The little clock on the shelf beside the door ticked them off; still the boy tossed from side to side. But the watcher noticed that from time to time there came moments of quiet to the sufferer. They grew in length and frequency as the hours passed.

"We are getting the better of it," murmured Rathburn hopefully.

"On the whole I am not sorry I stayed."

The hands of the clock were pointing to four, and the cold grey of dawn was stealing over the range shot with rays of light in the east, when Mr. Rathburn pushed back his chair.

The boy was sleeping peacefully, his breath coming soft and regular. For the first time that night Mr. Rathburn discovered that he himself was both tired and sleepy.

He pushed back his chair until he reached the centre of the room, then bringing his feet to an equal elevation with his head by means of a table, he, too, slept.

The sunlight was streaming into the room when sounds on the trail aroused him.

He awoke with a start.

His first glance was at the boy, who was still sleeping. Then he rose and walked to the door.

Four men were cautiously approaching the house, while a fifth held the horses of the party.

Mr. Rathburn recognised the sheriff of Arapahoe County and his deputies, and his hand stole beneath the tails of his long English coat.

He remembered the sleeping boy upon the cot.

Mr. Rathburn stepped into the yard.

"Hush. Don't shoot," he said softly, "I give myself up."

VAUGHAN KESTER.

KEY TO JUMBLED STORY.—No. 16.

110	233	14	57	222	25	174	240	182
181	125	74	160	156	63	138	29	239
237	163	38	45	227	165	67	122	154
59	104	66	197	241	184	180	209	35
198	17	103	23	169	194	202	224	90
52	82	13	119	229	211	60	80	49
186	127	2	129	120	166	200	179	71
75	30	175	203	28	147	215	141	83
116	51	1	192	226	86	94	143	126
231	195	6	22	232	133	7	81	213
140	32	46	53	167	212	85	199	41
68	89	204	149	135	123	44	69	70
58	78	21	100	230	12	189	168	130
54	79	24	42	19	117	107	176	164
173	16	210	159	188	193	144	225	37
27	65	161	43	216	187	162	151	39
47	93	26	177	18	5	155	50	153
158	56	62	136	92	132	190	142	205
9	76	114	11	220	185	105	221	36
10	118	73	106	178	235	217	97	148
150	91	112	109	170	201	113	234	214
124	102	8	108	96	15	48	208	137
98	219	61	171	207	55	157	238	146
223	34	101	20	145	99	131	152	218
3	139	64	236	4	121	33	128	72
228	40	115	88	196	191	172	206	242
87	84	134	183	111	31	95	77	

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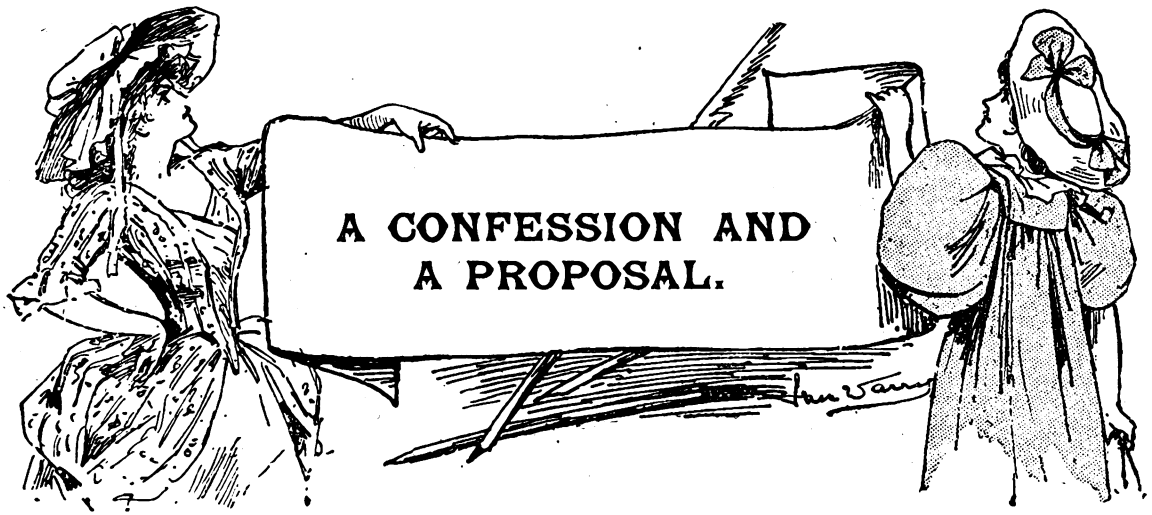

A CONFESSION AND A PROPOSAL.

"ONE of these powders at bed-time, and, if the patient sleeps well, do not disturb him. I will call round in the morning. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied the nurse; and I, Stephen Marsh, physician, buttoned my overcoat closely about my neck, preparatory to facing a sharp, blustering, wintry wind, that was sweeping through the streets of the little town of Baley and moaning about the corners and the chimney-tops with that peculiar sound which heralds the arrival of winter.

My patient was an old man, rich and single, and eccentric. He lay helpless and lonely in his great house, attended by hired servants, and looked in upon occasionally by a maiden sister, scarcely less sour and cold than himself, who shared his home. The cheerless grandeur of the house oppressed me. And the unsympathetic attendance of the hired nurse aroused my impatience, and it was with a feeling of gloom that I took my way homeward through the early shades of the tempestuous night.

Homeward did I say? Well, if a bare, cold room, with a fire-place, chair, and table, could be called home, then I was going home; for I lived in lodgings.

Reaching my own particular den, I turned on the gas at full glow, kicked the smouldering fire into a blaze, tossed my overcoat into a closet, and throwing myself into a chair, placed my feet upon the table, and proceeded to extract comfort from a cigar, while I ruminated upon the baseness of mankind, and the hollow and unsatisfactory conditions of things generally.

I was a bachelor, though I had no idea then that I was an object of commiseration on that account, and though I had been ten years in practice in the town, the marriageable women that I could be said to know socially I could count on my fingers; and not one of them had ever caused my heart to beat a whit faster, nor had their charms filled me with any desire for possession.

My profession was my world; my home my wife, and my books and cigars my children; and, hitherto, they had been adequate to my needs.

But somehow the gruesome image of that old man, lying there amid his cheerless luxury, unloved, unloving, and despised even by his servants, clung to my mind, and I fancied myself at his age in the same situation.

What was to hinder? Here I was at middle age even now growing selfish and morose. Hoarding money too; already there was a goodly pile of it to my credit at the bank, and it was with a great feeling of satisfaction that I added generous sums to it from time to time. What I was going to do with it? Build a hospital? Lose it in the interest of science?

Something suggested, "Build a home with it." What! a home like a miser? "No, a home with wife and children in it." Bah! I ran over in my mind the women I knew. Extravagant display of charms; affected manners, effusive small-talk that bores one to death. Oh, no; their society would drive me frantic.

"Give it to the poor," suggested the voice. The poor! What poor? The whining mendicant at the corner? The pilfering, profane gamins of the street? The bleareyed old women of the stalls, smelling of tobacco and whisky? The labouring class who are out of work? The worthy poor? working girls, widows with children? Their woes are exaggerated; the girls are well-dressed, impudent, saucy. They are comfortable, even if they cannot have everything they want. No; my money is my own. Women are silly, children are an abhorrence. I will not be bothered with either. I will found an institute and spend my money in the interest of medical science. And, throwing away the stump of my cigar, I scowled at the hearth, where the fire had gone out, and picking up my hat I started to seek diversion in the streets, and, perhaps, something else to drive away the blues that had got such a fast hold of me. Just as I reached the stair-landing a shrill scream rang out from a room beyond the hall; a door opened, and a girlish form came hurriedly towards me.

"Oh, Doctor," she cried, "do come to our rooms. My mother—oh, come quickly."

I followed her as she returned through the door, into a cosy-looking room. A grey-haired, regal-looking woman was lying upon a couch apparently in a dead swoon. I went at once to her assistance, while the girl, with a look of pathetic terror on her face, assisted me with brave but trembling hands. Meanwhile she told me that her mother had been ailing for some weeks with a nervous prostration, but that she had never been like this before.

"I am so thankful," she exclaimed, when the invalid had been restored to consciousness, "that you were so near."

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"I am very glad, indeed," I replied, "that you met me in time. I was just going out."

"I thank you so much for your assistance," she said sweetly. And then I noticed, as she looked up at me, what great, pathetic, soulful eyes she had, and what a sweet, brave, patient face.

Just then the invalid opened her heavy eyes and looked up, and asked faintly:

"What is it, Agnes? Did I faint?"

"Yes, mother dear: but you are better now. This is Dr. Marsh, mother. I was a little frightened, and called him in."

"You were very kind, sir; I hope I am not going to be ill," said the invalid, speaking to me.

"I think not, madam," I said, as hopefully as I could. "Your system seems a trifle weakened, as by some over-exertion. I think that a few days of entire rest, a good nourishing diet, and a few simple medicines which I will prepare for you to-morrow, will restore you."

As I spoke I caught a swift glance as it passed between mother and daughter, a glance which seemed to express a trifle of dismay and much of anxiety.

As I lingered a few moments to note the symptoms of my patient, I glanced about the room with feelings of curious interest in these newly-found neighbours. The room was exquisitely cosy, and full of sweet feminine touches; but my masculine mind could not distinguish whether the lace curtains at the windows were of silk or cheap cotton, or whether the bright carpet was moquette or an imitation.

I knew that everything was in perfect order, and pervaded with a home-like air, that no bachelor with millions at his disposal could produce. But I had a vague idea that it was cheap, very cheap. I knew the girl's dress was of calico, and yet there was a fit, a hang, a what-do-you-call-it air about it that many a tea-gowned girl might strive vainly to attain. Yes, they were poor, I concluded—comfortably poor.

Evidently they had seen better days, for no two such queenly and self-possessed women could ever have known any real grinding poverty, such as hunger, cold, and the like. Such poverty degrades, and these women bore the stamp of highest culture and refinement.

I finally rose to go, finding no further excuse for lingering.

"And what is your fee, sir?" asked Agnes, looking up at me with such a strange sensation of uneasiness somehow.

"Ten-and-six," I said, simply, because I could think of no way to refuse the customary fee.

She took a tiny purse from her pocket, and handed me two little coins as carelessly as though there were thousands at the back of it.

But there was no rattle of any other in the purse, and it was too small to contain any notes. I took the money mechanically and bade her summon me if her mother grew worse, and said "good-night."

"Good-night," she said with a smile, "and thank you for coming."

Ere I crossed the hall I found I had left my cane. I turned back at once. The door was ajar. I lifted my hand to knock, when I caught sight of Agnes, standing by the table in the lamplight, the little purse in her hand, and a look of absolute terror on her face.

"The last sixpence!" I heard her murmur, as she threw the purse on the table. "Oh, what shall I do?"

I hurried away to my rooms. The two little coins were still in my hand burning and stinging my palm. How I hated them and myself at that moment. How could I return them to her? I must do it some way at once.

Stepping back into the hall, I tramped loudly, and, approaching her door, knocked.

"Pardon me!" I said, as Agnes appeared; "but I believe I left my cane."

"You did," she replied, handing it to me.

I took the cane. "Miss—ah! Miss," I stammered; and as the girl raised her face to listen, it seemed as though she were looking down upon me. "I hope—I—that is—I trust you will not—hesitate to call me if your mother should grow worse in the night."

"I will not, I assure you, and thank you."

I went back to my rooms, feeling somehow that I had grown some inches smaller in stature. Heavens! how that hateful money burned in my hand. And yet, for my life, I could not have offered them to that proud girl. They were mine. I had earned them. She would have regarded them as nothing less than charity, and I could scarcely dare offer that to either of those women.

They were comfortably poor—ah!

I went to bed to toss and dream, and listen, at intervals, half hoping to hear a timid knock at the door; I was not called, however.

Neither was I the next day.

I hung around my room nearly all the morning, but received no summons from the neighbours across the hall, nor did I catch any glimpse of Agnes. In the afternoon I went to call on Anson Sprague, and found him grim and gloomy as ever. I made my visit short.

When I returned I met Agnes on the stairs, and but for the experience of the previous evening, I should have taken her for the cherished daughter of some aristocratic family. I inquired after the mother, and was informed that she was not much better. And I could see that the girl was anxious and troubled, yet she did not ask me to call. How could she, when she knew I should demand ten-and-six, and she had already given me her "last sixpence"?

She carried a package in her hand, and as she passed out into the street, I followed. I kept her easily in sight for several streets, until she crossed a bridge which led into a different portion of the town. I still followed, and was not surprised when at last she entered a pawnshop. When she came out again she no longer carried the parcel. Turning homeward again, she entered a grocer's, and later emerged, carrying several small bundles.

I went back to my rooms and determined upon a plan of action. After a while I heard her climb wearily up the stairs and pass into her room.

I waited an hour and then went to their door and knocked. Agnes admitted me, seeming half glad, half embarrassed, and led me at once to her mother, who still lay upon the couch.

By her side stood a little table, upon which I noticed a dish or two, which Agnes hurriedly carried away. The mother looked pale and distressed; but Agnes's proud face betrayed no emotion except concern for the invalid.

"As you have not sent for me," I said carelessly, "I have taken the liberty of calling in a neighbourly way."

"You are very kind," said Agnes, with a smile that lit up the seriousness of her face like sunshine.

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The mother smiled too, a very languid, tired smile. She had the same high-bred countenance as her daughter, and her hair lay in silver masses above her white temples.

She was a very beautiful woman, but such an expression of utter weariness I had never seen on a human countenance.

"Will you please tell me what you think of mamma's case, doctor?" asked Agnes.

"Looks like a case of"—starvation I had almost said—"entire prostration—over-work—over-worry—something of the kind. It is a case in which little medicine is required or desirable. Plenty of indulgent nursing, entire absence of care, and the most nourishing food that can be procured." Here I caught a look of pain on Agnes's face, but I went on heartlessly: "Some choice wine would be beneficial, and fruits, if it is necessary to tempt her appetite. She seems much debilitated, and needs a toning up."

Agnes remained silent, but the mother spoke with a forced cheerfulness:

"I am sure I shall do very nicely. Agnes is a capital nurse, and I have no doubt I shall be entirely recovered in a few days. Thank you for your advice."

I rose to go. Agnes rose too, still silent, and avoided my eyes.

"I will prepare a mild stimulant, which your mother will find beneficial," I said. "Will you come for it in the morning at nine?"

"Yes, I will come," she answered.

She came punctually at nine, half to my surprise—came in with a brave smile, strangely at variance with the dark shadows and the tired look about her eyes. I handed her a chair, but she refused to sit down.

"Sit down, please," I said rather peremptorily. "I have something to say to you—a confession to make; and I hope you will willingly absolve my crime, for I assure you it was unintentional."

"A confession!" she exclaimed, dropping into the chair.

"Yes. You will remember that I went back after my cane the night I first called to see your mother?"

"Yes."

"Well, I overheard your exclamation, as you stood with your purse in your hand, from which you had just given me 'the last sixpence.'"

"You did!" she exclaimed, while her face flushed hotly.

"I did. And, further, when you went out yesterday I had the meanness to follow you. You went to a pawnshop, you stopped at a grocer's to purchase food, you returned home."

"Well, sir, and what is all this to you?" she exclaimed, with angry eyes and quivering lips. "What business had you following me?"

"None, whatever," I said. "I told you I committed a crime, and asked you to forgive me at the start. Please be calm and hear me out, and I will try to convince you that I did not act with any desire to pry into your private affairs."

Under the force of my stronger will and my sincerity she sank back in the chair.

"Miss Agnes," I said, "if you are in embarrassed circumstances, I assure you that both you and your mother have my warmest sympathy, and I would be only too glad to do you any service." The half-sovereign and the sixpence lay on the table. "If you knew how I hated the sight of them," I said. "If you knew how small—how miserably mean I felt; how they haunted me and taunted me the whole night after I heard you say that, I am sure you would forgive my seeming impertinence.

"Miss Agnes, I could never clothe my meaning in seductive words. If a man is dying and asks me for the truth, I give it to him. I am nothing if not blunt, or, at least, plain; but I claim to be an honest man and a gentleman, and if you care to give me your confidence, you will not find it misplaced. The causes of your mother's present condition are over-worry and poor living. She needs all that I have told you, and must have it. If you desire it I will take her case professionally, furnish all medicines and other necessities, and you can repay me at your leisure."

I paused, and waited for a reply.

"You are extremely kind, doctor, and I believe you sincere," she said, in a voice which tried hard not to break down. "You must pardon my hasty temper. We are extremely poor, mother and I, but heretofore I have made comfortable wages at my occupation as bookbinder, but a change in the firm a few weeks ago threw me out of employment. But I am still searching every day. I will find something to do, surely, and if you will attend to mamma, it will take such a load off my heart; and, oh! doctor, I thank you so much. I never could tell anybody before," and the proud head went down on the table with a sob, while I—well, I felt as any man does, I suppose, when he sees a woman cry.

It didn't last long. She lifted her face with a smile, and rose to go, after again expressing her thanks.

"Stay," I said. "Would you go and read to an invalid—one of my patients—for a few hours each afternoon, for a compensation?"

"Ah, yes," she replied eagerly. "Indeed I would be glad to."

Accordingly, after that each afternoon found Agnes reading sonnets and love-stories to old Anson Sprague, at the rate of a good round sum per hour, and the old man thrived so well under this new treatment that I found myself in a fair way to lose my wealthy patient.

It happened sometimes that we walked home together; and to atone, as it were, for leaving the mother alone so much through the day, we gave her double company in the evening.

One chill night, as we hurried home through the wind, walking close together that we could better breast the storm, Agnes told me with a little embarrassed laugh that Anson Sprague had that day asked her to be his wife.

I stopped her short in the middle of a crossing.

"Heavens! What did you tell him?"

She laughed again—a tantalising little laugh that she had learnt of late.

"I told him," she said (though I could never quite believe her), "that you had constituted yourself my guardian; I would consult you about it, and abide by your decision."

"You did well, Agnes," I replied greatly relieved. "Darling, you are the sunshine of my life. I once made a confession to you, and now I make a proposal. Sweet one, do I ask in vain?"

* * * * *

We were married; and, what with the building of a home, with the dainty furnishings of an invalid's chamber, with milliner's bills, and something aside for the future little shoes and stockings, and my wife's increasing demands for charity funds, the medical institute is still a castle in the air, and the blues have gone to inhabit it.

ESTHER NOANES.

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HOW MADAME PERROTT'S HAIR TURNED WHITE.

It was in Paris, in the year 18—, Madame Perrott, twenty years of age, sat waiting impatiently for her maid, whose task it was to undo the wonderful superstructure of hair which had excited so much admiration at the dinner from which the lady had just returned.

Every hair of all those golden braids and puffs grew on Madame Perrott's own head. It was the envy of every woman who really believed in it, and it was too great a task to unbind and comb it for the night with her own hands.

"Where was Felice? Why did she not come? She knew her duty; she had always been at her post before."

Madame Perrott rang the bell again.

"Send Felice to me at once," she said, as the servant opened the door.

"I have been searching for Felice ever since I received madame's directions," said the woman, in rather an injured tone. "I do not think that she can be in the house. Indeed, if madame will permit me, I think I can guess. The other servants have been talking for some time. Felice is in the habit of going out of evenings. Felice has a lover."

"Indeed," said Madame Perrott, who had some idea of propriety. "Well, pretty girls generally have *beaux*. Only she should not find him so fascinating as to forget her duties."

"If madame will permit a few more words, the servants say that this *beau* of Felice's is a gentleman—not a man of her own position," continued the old woman, "and that—but no matter; it is none of my business, only young girls were more prudent in my days."

"I will speak to Felice," said madame. "It was right of you to mention it."

Then she sank back in her chair and waited a little longer. She did not wait patiently, however, and she remembered afterwards that she felt very strangely. She was not a nervous person, her imagination was not strong, and she was in her own cosy room, pretty with paint and gilding, portraits of pretty women and china statuettes of *belles* and *beaux* in the costume of Louis the Fourteenth. Lace-curtained and gas-lit, the least ghostly place that one could fancy; and yet a gloom and dread, for which she had no words, began to settle down upon her. She shuddered, she grew cold, she dared not look behind her, she fancied strange voices were borne to her on the breeze, that lifted the curtains over the open windows.

In the darkest, most uncanny place, she could not have suffered more from these vague terrors, which were more poignant because she was totally unused to them.

In the adjoining room Monsieur Perrott and some old friends drank wine and played *écarté*.

She would have gone to them had she dared, but she dreaded the long corridor too much. She absolutely did not dare open the door.

Perhaps, indeed, she said to herself, these terrible feelings were really premonitions of evil. Someone who knew the value of the jewels she had worn that day might have followed her home, might be lurking outside the door, might be hidden even in the chamber—for instance, behind the great bed, with its lace hangings, or in the tall wardrobe. The idea of a black-visaged ruffian was so terribly vivid that Madame Perrott actually gave a little scream, and, seizing the small silver handbell which stood upon the table near her, rang it violently.

It was in this way that she was wont to summon Felice from her own little room. The servants only answered the bell which communicated with the kitchen, but Madame Perrott had now become too nervous to cross the room to touch it.

She rang the little silver bell. Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle! its voice rang in the air; tinkle, tinkle, tinkle! clink! as she dropped it on the table again; but as she did so, and looked over her shoulder towards the door, hoping that someone had heard it, the door opened and Felice entered slowly.

Her face was very pale; her large dark eyes were darker than ever. She made her little curtsey, and stood before Madame Perrott with her hands folded together.

"You have been a long while in coming," said Madame Perrott; "I have been waiting for you two hours. This must never happen again."

"No, madame," said Felice in a low voice, "never again."

"See that it does not," said madame, tossing her jewels upon her toilet-table, and beginning to disrobe herself. "My dressing-gown, Felice."

The girl already held it in her hands. Usually she was brisk and active in her movements; to-night she was strangely slow and solemn.

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"If it were my shroud you could not be graver over it," cried Madame Perrott. "There, comb my hair and go; you are too frightfully solemn to endure any longer."

Felice took the comb in her hand, but did not smile.

"Is it madame's will that I should comb her hair?" she said.

"Of course," cried Madame Perrott.

"It is madame's will?" repeated Felice.

"Have you gone crazy, Felice?" cried Madame Perrott. "Have you not done it every night for a year?"

"If it be madame's will I must do it," said Felice in the same strange way, as she stepped behind the lady's chair.

Slowly the great masses of golden floss fell about the lady's shoulders. Softly the maid gathered them under her hands and began to pass the comb through them. As she did so Madame Perrott experienced such a shock as one receives from an electric battery.

"What a strange feeling!" she cried.

Again the comb entered her hair. Again she experienced the singular sensation.

"What are you doing to me, Felice?" she cried, starting to her feet. "What are you doing to me? You——"

But there was no one there; the door had not opened or shut. Felice had been standing behind her the instant before. Now she was gone. Gone where? Gone how? Madame Perrott turned. The dread of she knew not what was heavier than before; and, besides that, every hair on her head seemed to be rising at its roots, and she seemed conscious of every nerve in her body. She could neither scream nor run.

All that she could do was to drag herself to the bed and draw the coverlet over her head. Whether she fainted or lost consciousness she never knew.

It was late when she awoke; the sun streamed across the room. The hands of the alabaster clock upon the mantelpiece pointed to the hour of ten; but instead of the usual domestic rounds of the hour she was conscious of a strange bustle and confusion.

Resting her elbow on the pillow, she listened. She could distinguish her husband's voice and the shrill notes of the woman who had talked with her about her maid the night before, and she thought she heard the name Felice repeated in tones of horror more than once. At last she was certain. Felice, Felice—they were all talking about Felice. What was it? Why did he not come to her and tell her?

In a moment more the door opened, and Monsieur Perrott, wrapped in his quilted dressing-gown, came in. His face was very grave.

"You are awake, my love?" he asked.

"Yes, I am awake. What has happened?"

"You heard the noise, then? Yes, something has happened—something terrible. Your maid Felice is dead; she has taken poison. Her mother, a washerwoman, lives in the Rue St. Cyr. She went there yesterday afternoon, and this morning she was found dead in bed. The lamentations of the poor woman wakened me. She had brought a note which Felice had left for you Shall I read it?"

"Yes, *mon ami*," said Madame Perrott, trembling violently.

The husband went towards the window, and drew up the blind.

"Adored madame,"—(he began) "I shall never dress that beautiful hair again. I knew it when I arranged it an hour ago. When you return home, Felice will be dead. She is too miserable to live. Ah, madame, when you touch that little bell I have obeyed so long, it seems to me that my spirit must hear it, and come to you again. Amongst the strange thoughts in my distracted mind this one is very strong. Yes, it is possible I may return to you, though never in the flesh. Adieu, beloved mistress; pray that the soul of the miserable Felice may repose in peace."

"Henri!" cried Madame Perrott, with a scream. "Oh, Henri, this is terrible! Felice undressed my hair herself, at midnight. Felice, who was then dead. Come to me! Let me touch you! Save me from this great terror that is gathering about me!"

Monsieur Perrott flew to his wife's side. The light from the open window fell across the pillow. and over the beautiful head that lay upon it. He stared at it for a moment.

"*Mon Dieu!* my child!" he cried, amazed and horrified. "What has happened? Your hair has turned white!"

It was true; in all those flowing locks not one thread of gold now lingered. They were as white as snow.

And this is how Madame Perrott's hair turned white at the age of twenty, and she did not bleach it, as some folks pretend.

AGNES JEWLY.

You have probably noticed - - - - On the Second Page of Cover - A Coupon. -

This coupon may mean a difference of £100 to you, or to your neighbour. A similar one has appeared regularly every week in *Short Stories* and *Pearson's Weekly* since the beginning of January, and will continue to appear until the end of December.

Cut each of them out and keep them.

For to the reader who, on the 1st of January, 1897, sends in the greatest number, we are going to give

ONE HUNDRED SOVEREIGNS.

The best way to preserve them is to paste them into an exercise book, on one side of the paper only.

DO NOT SEND ANY IN BEFORE THE 1st OF JANUARY, 1897.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION. NO. 17.

THE first correct solution to hand was received from Mr. C. J. Lewis, jun., 7, Tonsley Place, Wandsworth, S.W. The provincial guinea goes to Mr. Geo. Humphreys, 19, Colville Street, Nottingham.

POST-CARD COMPETITION. NO. 19.

A GUINEA is offered to the first reader who discovers the longest word on pages 605 to 608, the letters of which will form an anagram of two words. Another guinea goes to the reader living more than 100 miles from London under the same conditions. Example: ELAPSED—*Sad Peel*.

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Or, THE ROMANCE OF A LOST CONTINENT.

By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

SUMMARY.

ARNON'S memory of his early days begins at a time when he finds himself abandoned on the seashore, whence he discovers the cave of a band of pirates, by whom he is captured. Under the care of Didron the Chief he grows up as one of them, and on the death of the former he takes command. Viol is the daughter of Didron and marries Arnon, who, on one of his voyages, lands at Miropis and consults the Priest of the Spirit of Truth, from whom he learns that within a year and a half he will be a captive in a foreign land, and that he need not fear death until he has visited the Grotto of the Sleeper three times. On returning, he finds his ship burnt and men killed. After fighting he escapes, and meets and falls in love with Briseis, daughter of King Dulo X. of Atlantis, and to her he reveals his identity. Vichri, Briseis' cousin and lover, believes Arnon to be dead. For several months he lives at the Court; but the old roving spirit returns, and he sets out to discover the cave of treasure left by Didron and his band. On his return from an unsuccessful attempt, he finds his identity discovered by King Dulo, and is sent away as a galley slave. During his absence in a small boat up a creek on the Coast of Nubia, the ship is taken by rebels. Led by Arnon, the whole of the population, starving and fearing annihilation by the rebels, set out for another town. His followers are routed, and he is captured by Asos, an Egytian captain, by whom he is taken to Memphis. He saves from a leopard, Vesta, the daughter of a priest, and himself becomes a priest. He defeats a plot to dethrone the King, thereby gaining the favour of the latter, who is in ignorance of Arnon's former pirate life. Itaska, a woman whose love he rejects, discovers the story of his past, and is about to reveal it to the King, when Mitres, the father of Vesta, now married to Arnon, hears of her intention, and consults with Arnon.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE STORMY SEA.

AT last I broke the spell, saying:

"There is no way out of the danger save by taking ship and leaving Khem, going I care not whither, so long as Vesta and yourself are with me."

"Take Vesta and go," the old man said, in a choking voice, "you have a swift ship on the great sea and can sail hence without suspicion, for the plotters will wait to act till you return, and I shall wish them joy of their waiting."

"But why not come with us?" I urged.

"I am a priest of Amun, a native of Egypt, and I should count it blackest treason to turn my back upon my King and country," he replied, with quiet dignity. "Nay, hear me out. Go, seek liberty and happiness in some other clime, with my daughter as your wife, and I will bide here to the end, for no man hath aught against me, and I would fain be embalmed and lie with my fathers."

Just then the door swung softly open, and Vesta entered, clad in a robe of faultless white, her fair hair rising from her head in a graceful crown, and love shining from her eyes. Her father groaned when he saw her.

"What ails thee, father, dear?" she asked, twining her soft arms round his grizzled neck.

"Only this, daughter," he said, "that to-morrow I say farewell to thee for ever."

"Wherefore?" said my fair, looking at me wonderingly.

I told her all my story, and what her father had overheard that morning in the Place of Council, and that we must sail thence on the morrow.

"But whither?" asked she.

Then I told them of the isles I had passed in the sea that we in Atlantis called the Eastern Ocean, but which from Egypt was to the south-west, and which could be reached, I doubted not, through the western strait of the Great Sea. I said that thither I would sail, and there, among that gentle race of islanders, find a safe haven in which to live and die in peace.

"And thou wilt go with me?" I asked of Vesta, though I had small need.

"Where thou goest, there will I go, husband," she answered. "It grieves me, though, that my father will not travel with us."

"Grieve not for me," said Mitres, though his face was hard set to hide his emotion, "I am safe and you two are in danger, so I must needs bear the sorrow when you are gone, and it will be tempered by the knowledge that I have saved you."

I left them, then, to go to the palace, where I sat at table with Pharaoh for the last time, and never before had I been so jovial in his presence, and never before so attentive to false Itaska, whose coldness melted swiftly under my flattering phrases. Asos was away on a distant mission, and the Queen but newly delivered of a son, so that the feast was not over-thronged that night.

As midnight neared, Mitres entered, and he, too, was never so brimful of quaint sayings and quaking mirth as at that last banquet I attended in the gilded room. I drank little wine but that of Mareotis, and once, when pledging Itaska in a draught of her favourite Thasian, I murmured:

"Seemeth that never till to-night have I looked on love with love's eyes."

She started out of her stately calm at that, her face flushing with the import of the words, and her hand sought mine, yet she said nothing.

"Did you know, fair one," I asked, "that to-morrow I sail for a pleasure cruise with my wife?"

She did not, and seemed surprised.

"Would you be glad," I whispered under my breath, "if this priest's daughter, of whom I am weary, were left behind in the sea-depths, that I might come back alone to bask in your smile?"

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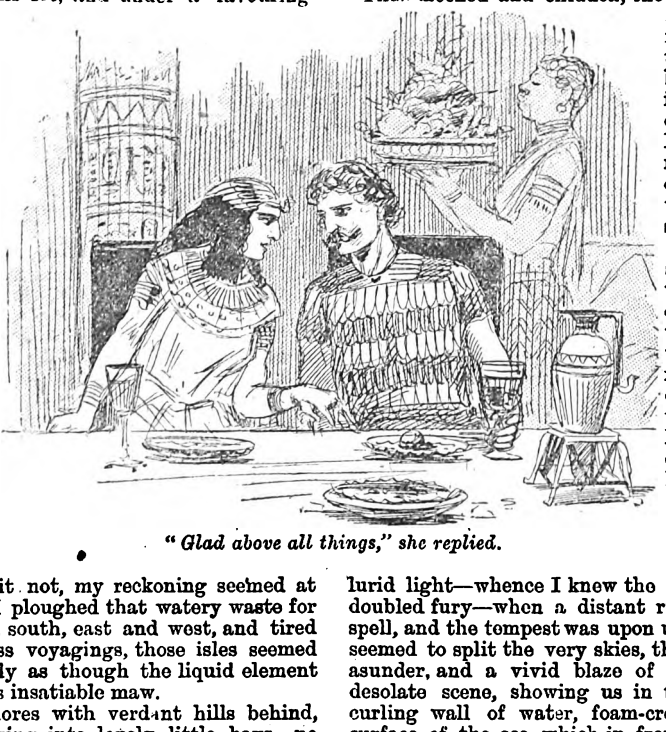
Her eyes flashed fire, and the hand that clasped mine burned with a sudden heat.

"Glad above all things," she replied, speaking low. "Art a bold wooer when you do begin, though tardy at beginning!" and then we said no more, except in the general talk.

Next morning I snatched a short sleep, and before the most of the citizens were abroad, took boat adown the Nile to where the *Seamew* lay. I shall never forget the mute sadness of that parting between Vesta and her father on the shore of the sluggish stream. Tears rolled down the old man's face as he embraced his daughter for the last time and saw us drifting away, leaving him alone in his land of mighty monuments and spacious temples. Down the river we swept with the current, Vesta and I, and that was the last we saw of him, standing there on the bank, waving his hand to us as long as our eyes could see. Then he was out of sight, and sweeping on, we came in due time to my vessel.

The crew were soon aboard and at their places, the anchor raised and the sails set, and under a favouring wind we stood out from the westernmost of old Nile's many mouths, and after coasting along the shore for a time, struck out northward, taking our last glimpse of the land of Khem as the evening sun sank beneath the leeward horizon in a blaze of golden glory.



"Glad above all things," she replied.

Then on sped the *Seamew*, ever keeping west by night and day, the men marvelling at my hurry, till we reached and passed the huge rock that rises up to the north of the strait, and emerged upon the boundless waters of that trackless sea upon whose bosom, somewhere I knew, reposed those fairy isles I sought, wherein to be at peace.

But as it had happened nearly a dozen years ago, when I searched for the treasure-cave and found it not, my reckoning seemed at fault again, and though I ploughed that watery waste for many weary weeks, north, south, east and west, and tired out my men with ceaseless voyagings, those isles seemed to have vanished as utterly as though the liquid element had gathered them into its insatiable maw.

No land, no shelving shores with verdant hills behind, no rippling streams pouring into lovely little bays, no mimic breakers on low, grey cliffs, no tiny boats nor long canoes with fair-skinned oarsmen, darting out of shady creeks, no smoke arising from the household fires of island villages.

Everywhere was water, water, water, until at last I lost my reckoning of the way we had gone, and the crew murmured openly as each day plunged us deeper in the unknown waste.

Then one day a gale arose. The wind blew with unabating force, and the *Seamew* shot forward like the bird whose name she bore, the spray flying from our stem and falling in harmless showers across our bows, the wind whistling through our rigging.

On we flew on the wings of the gale, the ropes singing in the breeze, and the spars humming.

The gale still grew in strength, veering round slowly to the north-east, that day and the next, and with the third sun had risen to a tearing tempest more terrible than any other I have known; so fierce its vigour, so high its rollers, so angry its hissing spray.

Our sails were furled and the helm lashed to keep the ship's head to the wind, and thus, bare-poled, wave-swept, reeling and staggering under the buffetings of the curling masses of white-flecked water and the mighty gusts of wind, the *Seamew* held her way, driven like a feather before the storm, her light hull now half-buried under the green billows, now falling headlong into the trough of the sea, now climbing the foaming crest of a liquid mountain, but ever righting herself and ever speeding on, with creaking timbers and straining cords.

My men, for the most part, had now lost heart, having never seen so wild a sea before, and Vesta clung to me in terror as the little vessel rocked and tossed, a helpless mite in the grasp of the cruel flood, but reckless as ever, now that I was in my element, I lashed my fair-haired dear to the stern-post, and stood by the helm, rallying my crew on their cowardice, and anon singing the rolling chant I had known in my early roving days.

Thus mocked and chidden, the Egyptians waxed wrath, many of them reviling me for having led them into the danger and going below to drown their fear in strong liquor, while others, amongst whom was Macis, remained on deck, mute, white faced, holding on to what came nearest to them, taking my scathing sneers in silence.

Now the wind ceased suddenly, the clouds thickened in an arch o'erhead, a patch of sky on the eastern horizon glowed with lurid light menacingly, and the air grew dreadfully oppressive in the darkening stillness. It was then, as near as I could calculate, about the hour of noon.

I had barely time to unlash the helm and put it hard round to bring the ship facing the point of lurid light—whence I knew the gale would come with redoubled fury—when a distant rumbling burst the awful spell, and the tempest was upon us with a mighty roar that seemed to split the very skies, the cloud-masses were riven asunder, and a vivid blaze of light lit up the wild and desolate scene, showing us in that one instant a great, curling wall of water, foam-crested, rushing along the surface of the sea, which in front was flattened down by the impetus of the hurricane's breath.

A few great drops fell pattering on the deck; then the thunder rolled again, the lightning flashed, and the roaring wall of water overtook us, shook us in its grip as an angry dog shakes a rat, and then passed on.

At last, having drunk themselves into a frenzy, the thirty Egyptians who had gone below came up, blaspheming and threatening as they staggered across the slippery deck, three of them, maddened into courage by drink and terror, flourishing their daggers at me as they came.

It was a fearful moment, for if I left the helm to swing loose we should be capsized, without a doubt, while to defend myself whilst holding it was impossible. Vesta swooned with fear.

"Back, madmen!" I cried hoarsely, "and sheath your knives! And you who are sober—seize them, for all are doomed if I let go the rudder."

The three wretches paid no heed to my entreaty, and the

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others were too fearful of their skins to stir a step upon the wave-washed boards.

"Your blood be on your own heads, then!" I cried, "put one foot forward and I let go!"

It was true that but for me they would not have come to this pass, but the misfortune fell on me equally with them. Had I reached the fair islands of my quest, I would have rewarded them handsomely, but fate having decreed otherwise, it was so ill to turn on me when I was doing my best, that I felt no pity for them when they put my life in danger.

With mocking laughs, and pitching steps, the three came on, knives uplifted, eyes glaring wildly; the others looking on in stupefied despair, not budging a step to my relief.

"Your blood be on your own heads!" I cried again, letting the tiller fly as it listed, drawing "Sunderer" from its sheath and laying the foremost traitor dead at my feet with one swift stroke.

The second hurled his dagger at me, and, passing my ear with an angry hiss, it was transfixed in the stern-post—for I was between him and the stern, then—and there stuck, but the length of a finger above Vesta's head. That wretch the sword made short work of, but the third crept round the mast with the cunning of insanity and was about to plunge his weapon into my back with all his force, when, like an intervention of the spirits, a brilliant blaze of light lit up the heavens, the mast was split from top to bottom with a loud crash, a strong smell of sulphur filled the air, and a lambent flame played on my sword and on the upraised dagger that I saw with a backward glance and shone upon the blade that gleamed above my dear one's head.

A moment only I saw all this, and the figure of the traitor, clothed in fire, when the blackness blotted out all sight, the thunder rolled, and with a grinding crash the guideless *Seamew* struck on a sunken rock!

She heeled over, began to fill rapidly, and a heavy sea washed across the slanting deck. To save myself I drove the sword into the timber on which I stood, and held on to it with all the strength of my iron fingers, and so good was "Sunderer's" steel, so powerful my grasp, that when the flood had drained away, I still hung there, safe.

That great flash and thunder roll was the climax of the storm, I think, for the sea calmed and the wind went down a short time after the ship struck.

I had now time to look around me, and saw Vesta standing where I had bound her—the dagger still sticking in the stern-post above—alive, but in an agony of dread. As for the crew, not one was left on board, all were swept into the pitiless sea, gone under for ever, lost through their own malice or apathy.

Assured of this and of the temporary stability of the vessel, I crept to Vesta's side, unloosened some of the cords, chafed her cold, wet hands, and seeing her eyes open, looking into mine with recognition, spoke words of courage and of comfort in her ear.

Night passed, and the day dawned, calm, smiling, sunny, as though the sky and sea had never worn an evil face, but had always been as they then were—bright and beautiful in their blue immensity. Not a sail was visible on the broad expanse, so that we two were alone with our thoughts on the solitary wreck.

"'Twere folly to stay here," I said, "for if the next storm does not send this smitten ship to the bottom, we shall die of thirst and hunger. We must make a raft as best we can."

Vesta assented to my plan, and so, after a good meal and a rehabilitation of our attire from the ship's store, we set to work in earnest, and it was wonderful how deft my Vesta's slender fingers were at tying the most incomprehensible knots in the thongs and cords with which we bound the decking planks together.

Having laden our new sea-going craft with as much food and water as she could carry—which was scanty enough—we put forth on the unknown waters, steering, by the sun and stars, a westerly course.

The sea continued calm, and the sky unclouded, and the straight downpouring of the burning solar rays told me that we moved in the tropic regions. Day succeeded night, and night followed on the heels of day, the sun curved slightly to the south at noon, showing that we drew north as well as west, and still the ring of sky and sea remained unbroken by a passing sail or a speck of land.

I rowed while Vesta steered, save when a favourable breeze let us put up our little sail to gain a spell of rest; and ever our stores lessened and lessened, till the water was well nigh gone.

Yet my fair Egyptian made no murmur, no complaint, bearing it all with a fortitude that amazed, and at the same time served to cheer me, for if a frail woman, born in the midst of luxury, could brave this hardship so well, surely I who had looked death in the face half-a-dozen times already could keep a stout heart through it all?

But at last one drink of water alone remained, and after that—all the horrors of unquenched thirst, or the fierce madness that follows on a draught of the salt-laden waves that danced about us in tantalising mockery.

Over that last drop of water we strove for a day, each desiring that the other should take it as the last chance of survival, and in the end, in consequence of my pleadings and violent threats, Vesta yielded to my wishes, though she did it grudgingly.

During the coolness of the night that followed I endured the thirst fairly well, but the next day, under the scorching heat, without a shadow beneath which to shelter, the agony became terrible, and Vesta, too, was little better than myself.

The sky seemed an arch of burning brass, and the sea a bath of molten silver, coruscating on the tops of its emerald hillocks with insufferable brilliancy, and dazzling our jaded eyes with its unceasing restlessness.

Two more days passed in excruciating suffering, and with throats parched, tongues blackened, and eyes bloodshot with straining over the changeless seascape, we sat upon our raft, food gone now as well as water, hope gone too, care nearly vanished, desperation bordering on frenzy the one remaining emotion that held us. Despite my warnings Vesta made several efforts to snatch a drink of the briny flood, and only my stronger arm prevented her.

Her head upon my arm in those sad, last moments—calm now the end was near—she lay and looked into my agonised face with love shining still from her sweet, confiding eyes.

"Say, darling," she whispered, her voice so low that I must bend to hear it, "say that you love me—now."

"Now more than I have ever done," I answered, the tears falling fast upon my cheeks, and scalding grimy paths down the brine that crusted them, "but tell me, Vesta, my dear one; tell me that you forgive me for bringing you to this."

She answered me, her tones scarce audible.

"'Tis not your doing, husband—but if it were—I would—forgive——" and the sentence died away.

I held her still, watching the changing of her features, which told as well as words how the spark of life flickered slowly to its end.

"It will not be a long farewell, sweet one," I said, "for soon I shall follow you."

Presently her frame quivered, her lips opened, and her eyes sought mine beseechingly.

"What is it?" I asked, bending low.

"Water! water!" she gasped, with a great effort.

Despairingly I shook my head, and then she seemed to recollect the melancholy situation.

"Husband—love—" she said, faintly, slowly, brokenly, "farewell—farewell——" and the soul fled to its home in the Shadow-Land. Frantically I called her name, vainly I begged for but one other word, hoarsely I cried aloud for help in my solitude and distress, but the dead answered

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not, and the murmur of a cooling, vaporous eastern breeze that now sprang up only served to mock my misery.

Then I arose upon the raft with clenched hands and blazing eyes, and shaking my arms at the sky I cursed the spirits and the gods with all the energy that my frenzied tongue could use; I cursed them again and again, blaspheming horribly; I cursed all whom I had known—the false Briseis, the treacherous Sothi, the rebel Nubians, Itaska the wife of Asos, Sethos the plotter, and most of all the coward drunken crew whose act had brought things to this pass: long and fiercely I stood and raved, till my throat refused to utter the words that strove for speech, till the sweat stood in beads upon my body, till my head seemed in a whirl of fire, and I sank, exhausted, upon the raft, in a deathlike stupor.

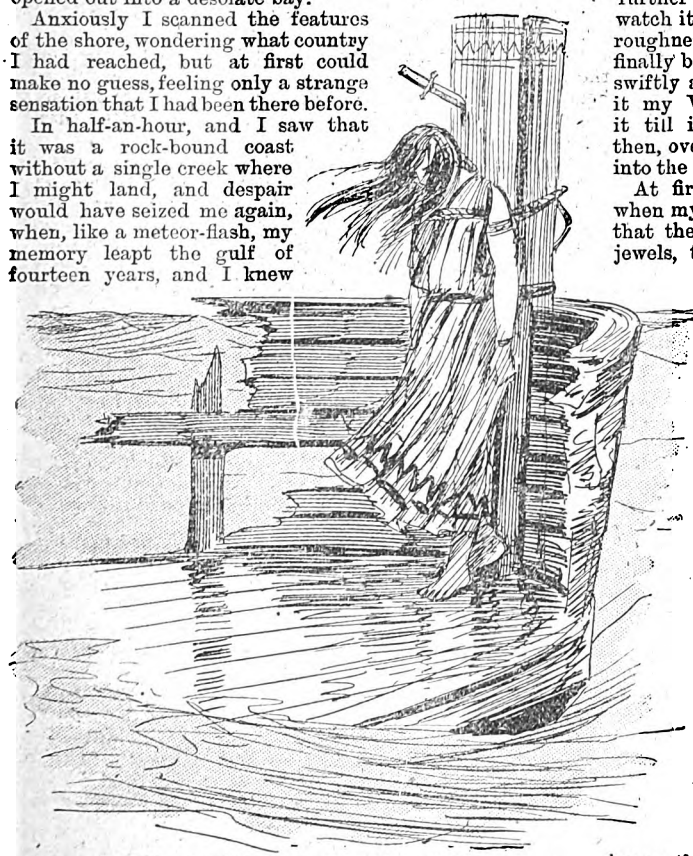
CHAPTER XII.

The Princess of Aidè.

I woke from the stupor to find the noonday sun blazing down upon me with maddening fierceness, and the dark outlines of a coast of some sort looming up out of the waters right ahead. Hope, which had left me, now returned, and looking not at *that* which lay on the raft beside me, I pulled with all my strength towards the land, which, as I neared, opened out into a desolate bay.

Anxiously I scanned the features of the shore, wondering what country I had reached, but at first could make no guess, feeling only a strange sensation that I had been there before.

In half-an-hour, and I saw that it was a rock-bound coast without a single creek where I might land, and despair would have seized me again, when, like a meteor-flash, my memory leapt the gulf of fourteen years, and I knew that I was in the solitary bay where the pirate's secret treasure cave was!



Vesta standing where I had bound her.

Well enough, then, I remembered those curving rocks, stretching out into the sea on either hand in sullen greyness, well I knew those frowning crags, and well recalled those rough-hewn stairs on the steep cliff-face! Here, after many years of wandering, I was cast up by the sea, finding, now I sought it not, the object of a fruitless quest.

Nearer and nearer drew the raft, and then I saw what made me rub my eyes and stare again with sheer amazement. The tide was just on the turn at that instant, and instead of merely washing the lowest step, as it had used when I knew it last, now covered the topmost stair but two, and I could reach the cave floor from the flat craft on which I stood!

Wondering, and for the moment forgetting all else in my curiosity, I pulled myself into the cool cavern and looked round. Truly, the sea had risen or the land sunk, for the two outstretching arms of that deserted bay were scarcely half their former length, and even when the tide was at its lowest ebb the waves must have dashed, not upon the narrow strip of sand that had once been there, but against the rugged stones above.

Glancing down I saw to my dismay that the raft, being unfastened, was slowly sheering off the rock and tossing perilously near the current, which, as of old, swept into and out of the bay in a mighty curve under the beetling crags.

I made a great effort to reach it with my foot, in vain! I let down a cord with hook attached, which I found in the cave, but by then the raft had veered round still further out of my grasp, and I was forced to stand and watch it drifting slowly away, now nearing some projecting roughness in the cliff, now recoiling with the shock, and finally being caught in the outgoing current and carried swiftly away into the vastness beyond my ken, bearing with it my Vesta, sleeping her last, long sleep. I watched it till it faded into the indistinguishable distance, and then, overcome by the pangs of thirst and hunger, turned into the cave.

At first I saw only the glitter of precious stones, but when my eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, I perceived that the wooden shelves, the earthern jars, the boxes of jewels, the bars of solid gold, the bales of costly drapery, were all there, undisturbed by aught save the hand of time, since I had last seen them.

Eagerly I searched the earthern jars for water, but found none, so was forced to grope my way to the inmost recesses of that gloomy retreat, to drink out of the slimy little pool in the lowest part where the rain that percolated through the rocky roof collected.

This I drank with infinite relish, thereafter making a scanty meal of such of the stored nuts as were not dried to dust, then falling into a long, sound sleep, to wake invigorated, refreshed, hopeful, and ready for whatever fortune the future might hold for me.

I was not at all concerned regarding my means of exit from the cave; it was only needful to dig a slanting tunnel upwards at the back, with some of the implements ready to my hand, for at one point, judging from the position of the cave and the trend of the cliff-top, the thickness of the roof could not be more than the height of a man.

There I attacked the rock when my strength had somewhat returned, and after a spell of arm-aching labour, dragged myself into the outer air through the narrow hole I made.

A single glance sufficed to show that the tunnel emerged upon a wind-swept, treeless plateau, covered with a kind of low-growing brush, thick upon the ground. Not a human dwelling was in sight, not a sign of human presence or existence was visible on that far-stretching waste, and I felt sure, now, of keeping the entrance to my treasure-hoard unknown.

I was rich now, with wealth untold, and the world was before me to enjoy my good fortune to its full extent.

"Away with bitter memories and sad reflections!" I cried aloud to the winds as I stood on that solitary plain. "Away

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with care and sorrow! I will press out the juice of this World-Grape and drink it with pleasure unalloyed!"

Then I crept back down the tunnel and prepared to set forth. I donned a military costume—one of many that were stowed snugly away in the recesses, finding it a perfect fit, from leathern helm and doublet to wooded sandals—girded on the sword "Sunderer," a keen, short dagger, and a stout sling with a pouch of leaden bullets, secreted about my attire as many of the jewels and coins as I could conveniently carry, and, taking a last glimpse of the heaving sea with a sigh of half regret, scrambled out of the cave, concealed the place of egress with some of the thick-growing shrubs, and turned my footsteps inland.

Dragged myself into the outer air.

A day's journey brought me to the verge of the uninhabited region, and at nightfall I stole past the first hamlet, picking my way well among the shadows of the broad-leaved cactus trees and helping myself to fruit as I went, for I did not wish it to be known from what direction I had come.

I held on my way northward, thus, for three days, and then, resolving to secrete myself no longer, stalked boldly into the next village, and sat down in the drinking room of the little house of rest, where weary travellers are refreshed at their own cost. The house seemed deserted when I entered, for no one came to attend my wants, not even when I called for food, and tapped the floor impatiently with my foot.

Enraged at this scurvy treatment, and hungry as a ravening wolf withal, I drew "Sunderer" from its sheath, and struck three thunderous, resounding blows with the flat of it upon the empty board.

At this, some slight stir was perceptible in the house, and presently a little, fat, greasy man with a scared face, came into the room, bowing and making a profusion of eloquent apologies, rubbing his rounded hands t gether the while in nervous excitement.

"Bring me a meal for three! and let it be a sumptuous one," I demanded, in a tone that struck terror to his weakling heart, showing him at the same time the colour of a gold piece to increase his alacrity. In a trice he was gone, putting the whole place into an uproar with his bustling and fidgeting haste. I smiled to myself as I sat back on the wooden bench, thinking that it must have been some time since the little man had seen the glint of a traveller's gold.

After a while, the viands not forthcoming, I set to work polishing the brightened parts of my "Sunderer's" sheath, rubbing the jewels with which it was inlaid till it sparkled like a shaft of light, and while thus occupied noticed the doorway darken, and a soldier, travel-worn, step in, taking a seat just opposite to mine.

"Greeting, comrade!" I said, looking up from my work.

"Greeting!" he answered, looking at me curiously.

I looked at him again; there was something peculiar about him that I could not define at first. Ah! I saw it now. *One ear was missing!*

"Vichri!" I cried. "By all the spirits!"

"And you are Arnon the Pirate, if I mistake not," said he, no less surprised.

"'Tis some time since we two met," I remarked, smiling grimly at the remembrance.

"Yes, much has happened in the meantime," he returned, leaning forward and speaking confidentially; "much that you had better know before you stir far in this stricken land."

"Pray tell me this needful and ill news," I asked, "for I would fain make a comrade of you, who are so worthy of my steel; that is, if you can pardon me for slicing off your ear. 'Twas done in the heat of strife."

"Freely," answered Vichri, to all appearance with sincerity, "freely. What do you first wish to know?"

"How fares it with your cousin Briseis, whose perfidy has exiled me these many years?"

"Exceedingly well," said he, with nevertheless a shade of hesitation in his tone; "exceedingly well as for herself, but badly as for the realm she rules and the people she governs."

"Governs!" I repeated, interrupting him. "Of what province is she the head, then?"

Vichri looked at me strangely. "Is it news to you," he asked in surprise, "that Dulo X. is dead, and that Queen Briseis reigns in his stead?"

It was news to me, to whom Atlantis and all its doings had been blank for a dozen years and more. "Yes," I replied, "but what has this to do with me?"

"Everything, methinks," said one-eared Vichri; "the story of your adventures and exploits as a pirate, of your escape from Miropis, of your love for the Princess Briseis, of your search for treasure, and subsequent capture and condemnation to the slave-galley, was in all men's mouths when I returned to Court a short time after the deed was done."

"Then you had no hand in my degradation?" I cried, starting forward, my fingers clutching "Sunderer's" hilt. "Swear it!"

He did so instantly. "I was no party to that despicable trick," he said, "nor wished to be." I sank back upon the bench. He went on: "But when my cousin took the throne, after Dulo died, by advice of the priests and at the cost of severe struggles with other claimants, she issued a proclamation of great harshness against all pirates and all who aided or sheltered them, particularly one Arnon, the son of Didron, otherwise known as Phrena, the Iron-fingered. A great reward was, and is still offered for your capture, alive or dead, if you set foot on the shores of Atlantis. You see now why I have warned you. It will be well if you take another name before showing yourself in or near any of the great cities."

"It will, indeed, be well," said I thoughtfully, "and for this service, Vichri, I am indebted to you."

My tardy host now brought in the repast for which I longed, and I fell to forthwith. My comrade seemed to have no appetite—a strange thing for a soldier on a journey—and so I had to demolish the victuals myself, which proved an easy task in my famished condition.

By the Athor! it was enough to make a sphinx smile to see the look of consternation on the face of the little innkeeper as dish after dish was emptied, and vessel after vessel was drained into my unsatiated interior!

At last, when the board was nearly as bare as when I first sat down, when his look of dismay had deepened into unutterable terror at my capacity, and Vichri himself was moved to ejaculations, I pushed the seat away, sitting awhile to rest.

"Now, tell me," I asked my one-eared comrade, when our host was gone, "how it is that the land is stricken, as you said."

"It is cursed alike by its own folly and by the hands of the spirits," he replied. "The first trouble has been stayed after much bloodshed, for the people in general have rallied round their Queen and her priests, enabling her to defeat

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all her enemies, but the spirits are still pressing hardly upon us. The sea has overflowed its coasts, and much of the land is now lost beneath its rising waves. So Briseis has but poor fortune with her kingdom."

Something of this I expected, remembering the height of the water in the bay where the cave was, but the thought of the continued hatred of the Queen, who had once thrown her arms about my neck in love's abandon, rendered me careless of other things than her incomprehensible inconstancy.

"And what is your counsel for myself?" I asked. He thought a moment, then said:

"If you want active service, I would ask you to come with me. I am on my way to take arms under Quitzaal, the governor of Ulmeca, our colony in the western land. He is on no friendly terms with the Queen; indeed, 'twould need little to set them at the sword-point, and so revive the flame of civil war." ("Surely," thought I, "Vichri is on no very civil terms with his cousin.") "Either in that case, or against the Red Barbarians, I can promise you good work for your weapons."

I shook my head. "I shall not fight against the Queen," I answered, "come what may."

His face fell at this, but, recovering, he went on: "There is another chance, for you, then. The Princess of Aidè, of Thinæ, the province next to this to the north, is raising a regiment of soldiers to clear the hill country of the bands of robbers that infest it, and needs good officers for her force sadly. Methinks you would make her a right man. And if you say that I have sent you, your acceptance will be assured."

"Agreed!" I cried, longing once more to be a leader of men and drown my sadness in the stir of battle; "I will set out for Thinæ this very day."

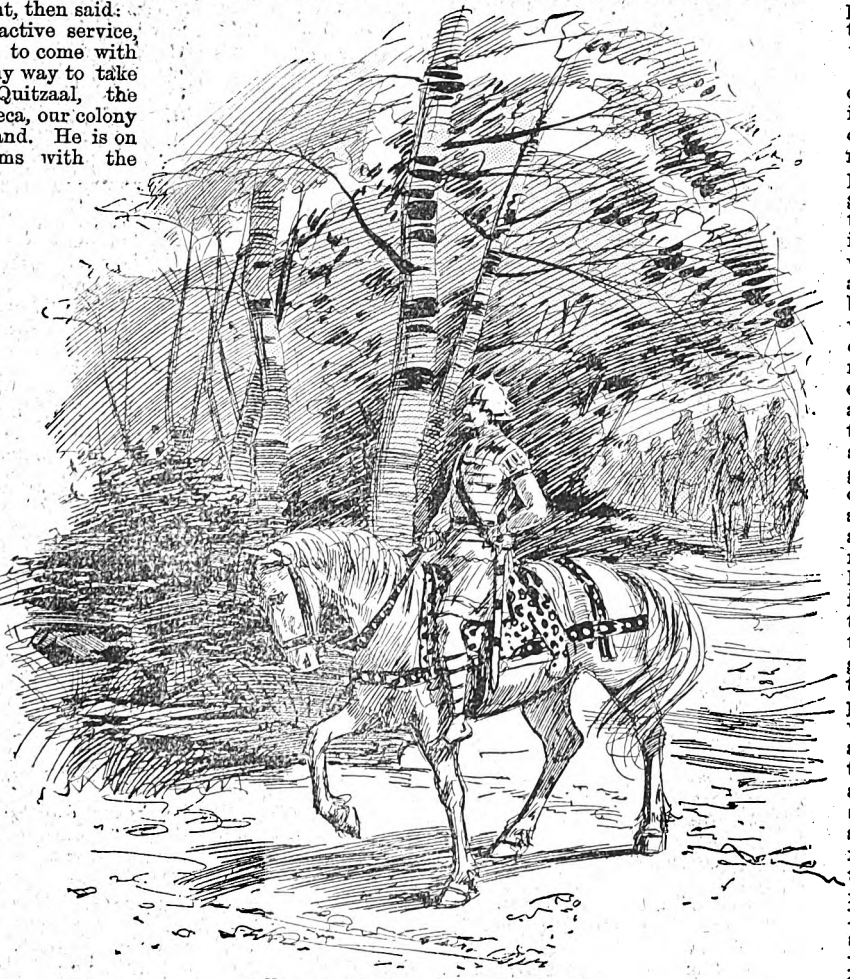
Awhile longer we talked, I skilfully eluding and baffling all his questions regarding my own vicissitudes, and drawing him out on all the great events that had taken place in my absence, and then, mightily refreshed, prepared to leave.

Throwing the innkeeper the gold coin I had shown him and a dozen more as well, which nearly took away the agitated little fellow's breath, and eyesight too, we left the house and journeyed a short distance together. At a place where the road forked my companion stopped.

"That is your way; this is mine," he said. "Farewell."

"Farewell!" I retorted, taken aback by his sudden curtness; "and if you value your remaining ear, take care you meet me not in battle, as is possible in these strange times."

"That is as it may be," he said shortly, and then we parted, going our separate ways. Little did I suspect, even then, the cool, calculating craftiness of his evil mind! You were tricked, duped, fooled; blind, witless Arnon, unsuspecting bungler that you always were!



Lulled me into deep engrossing thought.

Alone I wandered on, passing into the province of Aidè before nightfall, and putting up in great state at the first large inn I came to. I was rich now, and men bowed before me as I went, sparing no effort to make my quarters easy. I stopped at that inn across the border several days, gathering a band of followers, stout, well-armed, well-mounted, lusty knaves, ready to follow me through anything for the gold I offered them and the prowess I showed with the sword and sling. I then went on again, having secured a trusty steed, more confidently now, through that fair northern land, where the sun, more tempered than in the region I had left, shed ever a genial glow o'er hill and dale. Never before had I seen so fair a country.

It was, indeed, a lovely land that I now traversed, affording, as I went, gladsome glimpses and pleasing peeps of rural glades, mossy hollows, and ferny dingles, where the trees stood in lakes of a delicate blue, where the wild hyacinth tinged the ground.

Anon we journeyed by the banks of a swift-flowing river, now broadening out into a deep, pellucid pool, and now curling and foaming down a dainty rapid, white-sprayed, that seemed like an ivory circlet on the arm of a beautiful girl.

Then further on would be an old stone bridge over the gleaming current, with old huts and quaint gardens clustered near it, while around rose craggy heights, soaring

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to the sky, all symphonies in dark, dull grey, and darker green and dullish purple.

As we neared Thinæ, the chief town of the province of Aidè, the villages became more frequent, and the woodland recesses by contrast more delightful, more solitary, more soothing still.

Here I welcomed more earnestly than before the enchantment of the encompassing woods, the green, sunny slopes, the wilful little waterfalls, the hum and whirr of insect life, the songs of birds, the rich perfume of the many flowers, and the great masses of white, fragrant bloom that clothed the low trees. Still we followed the sparkling river, limpid and luminous as the eyes of a gazelle, mirroring on its pure surface frond of fern, branch of tree, and grass-like rush, and reflecting in its depths the subtle, silent changing of the clouds in the arch above.

Small wonder is it that my followers found me a dull leader, leaving them much to their own devices. I was in no mood to laugh and jest with them then, though I felt that after all it was good to live in that fair land.

The quiet grandeur of the sun's arising over those fertile hills, the aroma and solemnity of the wooded avenues through which we passed, the creeping on of the silent eve, the lengthening of the cool shadows, the unsurpassed restfulness of the day's departure, so much sweeter, purer, peace-giving, than the sudden fall of the tropic night—all lulled me into deep, engrossing thought and long, abstracted silences, at which my men marvelled.

Once I overheard the fragment of a conversation between the two whom I had appointed chiefs of the band under myself. It was when we were riding down a pleasant, winding path contiguous to the stream I have mentioned. Said the first:

"Our master seemeth wrapped in thought."

"And none too pleasant ones, methinks," said number two.

"What is't he's turning over in his mind? Canst guess, Valdo?" asked the first speaker.

"Wealth or women I'll warrant me," said the second, "and more likely the last than the first, for he pays with no niggard hand."

"An that be so," said the other, "I'll wager thee a hundred tecs that he is smitten with our flighty Princess, and little need for surprise at that, for she turns the heads of most men who come to her near presence."

"'Twere too risky a wager for me to take," laughed Valdo; "but if it be as thou say'st, I imagine she'll rouse him from his reverie when we get to her mimic Court. But whilst taking counsel, Atris, hast heard aught of Quitzaal's doings of late?"

"Not I," said Atris. "Though he is so still that one must needs expect some mischief to be hatching."

They fell back a few paces then, and I heard no more, though I had heard sufficient to set me thinking anew. I became curious to see this charming semi-sovereign, and test for myself whether her near presence was so captivating as report had it.

Since the two fair ones who had loved me truly were dead, since the only one I loved with a quenchless flame was false to me, since all whom I had known and trusted were lost or slain, and I stood alone in the world, why should I not seek what solace I could in the giddy whirl of a dissipated life, enjoying myself to the full, now that the wealth was ready to my hand?

The words that the Spirit of Isis had spoken came into my mind for a moment, only to be banished with a scornful laugh, for was it likely that I should ever mate with one who had put a price on my head?

And that being so, what temptation had power to harm me more? Away with such dream-fancies, sent only to mock and delude, and welcome a life of instant pleasure, where the wine flows round the board and bright eyes speak to bright eyes, telling of present love in every longing glance! Thus I thought, now that the weight of sorrow had broken down the barriers of rectitude, and thus I acted, and suffered in consequence, as you will see.

In due time we entered the city of Thinæ, and marching through its tree-lined streets with great pomp and intentive clangour, came to the palace of the Princess, a very dream-land of material splendour and obtrusive opulence.

Here I sent word by the seneschal of my coming, and that I offered myself as a soldier in the Princess's army. For a name I gave Macis, after the mate of the luckless *Seamew*, and by that name was known to my men. A bravely-decked functionary, with many bows and unnecessary speeches, informed me in answer that to-morrow the Princess herself would see the stranger who appeared so opportunely, and that meanwhile, myself and followers would be entertained in the palace as honoured guests.

The remainder of that day and the following morning I busied myself in learning all I could regarding my fair hostess, discovering, amongst other things, that her husband, the Prince of Aidè, was at that time on foreign service, being in the pay of Quitzaal, and had not seen his province for now ten years.

The Governor and his wife had quarrelled, it was reported, and were not likely to live together again; indeed, from the way men talked of the Princess over the confidential wine at night, there was small need for surprise thereat. But in my reckless mood I cared little for such circumstances.

I felt as though all stay and guide and hope in life were gone for me, and I drifted alone on the world's wide ocean, at the mercy of the first fierce passion-storm that should arise.

Towards nightfall, when the Princess had tired of the company of her last favourite, one Dison by name, a rich noble, proud alike of his descent and his martial prowess, she sent the seneschal to take me before her.

Already consumed with curiosity, I followed where the chattering old man led, through massive portals, down spacious corridors, up broad and easy stairways, in and out of gilded rooms thronged with gay assemblies, who regarded me with undisguised indifference, past dainty little alcoves and windows looking out on pillared balconies, till he stopped before a purple curtain drawn across a doorway.

"Here, my son," said he, "we shall find the Princess. Follow my footsteps as I enter, and if I may advise thee, I would say, do not ape humility in her presence. My mistress loves a self-assertive bearing above all things."

I thanked my guide for the timely hint, slipping a gold piece in his hand as a guerdon, and said: "Pass on!"

He pulled aside the heavy drapery and stepped in with wonderful agility for so old a man, I hard on his heels, agog with expectancy and surmise.

It was a sumptuous, ease-breathing, sense-lulling apartment where the Princess Listra received me; a room redolent of sweet perfume and merry with the warbling of scores of singing birds; a chamber that reflected the wealth, the voluptuousness, and the graceful tastiness of its fair mistress in every part.

Enchanting oriel windows gave glimpses of the spacious palace grounds, luxurious couches invited the weary guest to revel in their downy depths, choice and priceless trinkets, gathered from many lands, bedecked the walls and polished tables, and at the further end of the lofty chamber, behind the seat where the Princess sat, towered three marvellously-wrought marble figures, dwarfing to insignificance the dozen statuettes that ornamented the high carved niches in the wall.

The outer figures of the three were presentments of the spirits of Life and Truth, the middle one, larger than they, and presumably the spirit most worshipped there, was the image of the Spirit of Love, not over-chaste in its design, nor sparing of detail in the exquisite execution of its finely-chiselled lines.

But chief among the many beauteous things within that

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room, more lovely, more fascinating, more enthralling than them all, was the Princess Listra herself, as reclining indolently on a couch of ivory, inlaid with gold, she waved her dainty hand to her maids, bidding them leave her presence while she talked with the stranger. The old seneschal, also, having discharged his duty, withdrew, leaving me alone with his mistress.

"And thou wouldst be an officer in my army, stranger?" she said, when I explained my wishes.

"For that, as I have told thee, I came," said I, "but now I would sooner be thy slave than go away untaken."

"Brave words!" cried the Princess, though not displeased, "such as I have heard too oft to value greatly. What canst do if I make you my general?"

"I would sooner be thy slave than go away untaken."

"Anything thou mayst wish me to," I answered boldly, "for at sword-play, or slinging, or archery, or even bare-handed, I'll warrant I excel any soldier within thy province."

"Art not blind to thy own merits, Macis!" said the languishing beauty, with a bright eyeflash that betokened arising interest. "Thinkest that thou can overcome any whom I put against thee in the palace yard to-morrow noon?"

"Aye, or any two!" I replied, carried away by a consuming desire to exhibit my strength before this lovely being's gaze, "or any three for a kindly gleam from she under whom I shall soon serve!"

"An thy arms are brawny as thy speech is honeyed, I doubt it not!" said Listra, passing her fingers across her forehead as if to shade her eyes, but really to take a peep at me unnoticed, exposing, in the action, a white rounded arm, the picture of perfect health, beneath the purple robe that fell around her in its rich and ample folds, and which was gathered in upon her breast and fastened upon her creamy throat by a clasp of purest gold.

"Nor needst thou doubt it," responded I, bewildered by her sensuous beauty and bewitching grace. "I only long for to-morrow's sun to prove my words true before all thy guests and servants. If I succeed thou wilt accept my services; if I fail, thou canst send me away as a weakling—a craven. But I think Vichri would tell thee, were he here, that I am not the last, for 'twas he sent me to thee."

"Then this trial I proposed in jest need not be held," said the Princess, "for Vichri is a brave soldier and knows a strong arm when he sees one. Rest content, Macis, thou art appointed, and when thy men are ready root me out these lawless robbers that infest our northern hills."

"That I will, and glad to do the work set by so fair a taskmistress," I answered. This time she did not reject the flattery, but replied with mock severity:

"Do so, then, and mind thou seekest not my presence till the country roads are safe. Then I will think what reward will best suit so useful a soldier."

A while longer we talked, of the mysterious encroachment of the sea amongst other things, and then the Princess dismissed me, having by that time set my blood aflame with the witchery of her alluring loveliness.

(To be continued.)

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A NIGHT ADVENTURE IN BENARES.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

HAD I known what was going to befall me when I took steamer passage from Ceylon to India I should have probably continued my journey eastward round the world without stopping at the "Land of the Rajahs." In blissful ignorance, however, I landed at Calcutta. The time of year was that when the climate most favours up-country travelling, and so, after a brief visit to friends, I started north by rail. I was the richer by half-a-dozen introductory letters to men of more or less prominence in the chief cities of the empire.

I went first to Benares—the sacred city on the mighty Ganges—and sought the house of Sita Ram, to whom one of my letters was addressed. Sita Ram was a wealthy and cultured Hindoo banker, and my friends had pictured in glowing colours the hospitality that I would receive.

Before my ride through the city was over I felt that hospitality of any sort from anyone would be doubly welcome. To my surprise, most of the bazaars and business places were closed, though it was nearly afternoon. Groups of evil-faced natives stood about in the squares and the streets, while police and soldiers appeared to be unusually plentiful. I was made a target for sullen glances from all sides, and I could not help recalling the stirring times of the great Mutiny, more than thirty years back.

I found Sita Ram's house to be a palatial cream-coloured building, not far from the river. Its owner proved to be absent, but his private secretary received me and opened the letter of introduction.

Baboo Das was a sleek, mahogany-faced gentleman who spoke English perfectly, and wore garments of faultless cut.

"My honoured master is in Allahabad on a matter of business," he explained. "He will return in a day or two, and meanwhile the house and servants are at your disposal."

I thanked Baboo Das, and inquired the meaning of the strange sights I had witnessed in the city.

"There has been danger of a riot during the last twenty-four hours," he replied gravely; "but it is believed to be past now. The most ignorant of the Hindoo population are angry because the municipality have acquired the Ramjee temple for the purpose of erecting new water-works on its site. The Mohammedans have taken part in the disturbance because of the dearness of provisions, for which the municipality is also responsible. My honoured master belongs to the board of government and helped to purchase the temple."

I suspected that Sita Ram's departure might be more in the order of a flight than of a business trip.

"Are you sure that the danger is over?" I asked, for I had some notion of going to a hotel.

"Yes," replied Baboo Das; "the rioters are cowed and submissive. My master's house was under the protection of the police, but they withdrew this morning."

His manner was so calm and decided that I quite forgot my fears. I was shown a luxurious bed-chamber, and a little later I dined in solitude off dishes of gold and silver. The entire house was furnished in a costly and sumptuous style that showed its bachelor owner to possess a sense of European taste as well as of barbaric splendour.

During the evening I was left pretty much to myself, and as I did not care to venture into the street I passed the time with a cigar and a magazine, and when I signified my wish to retire Baboo Das preceded me upstairs.

Squatted on a rug in the hall, just outside my room, was a bright-faced Hindoo lad, about twelve years old. A cord dangled by his side, and, passing through the door, communicated with the fans that were attached to the ceiling of the apartment. The lad was evidently the "punky wallah," or fan puller. His name was Gunpat, Baboo Das informed me, and his duty was to keep me cool during the sultry hours of the night.

I chatted with the boy for a few moments, and found him to be intelligent and fairly conversant with English. Then I entered my room and lowered the square of rice matting that was furled above the doorway. There was also a door of heavy teak-wood, but I did not think it necessary to close it. The apartment had two windows overlooking a small court-yard that contained shrubs and a fountain. After riding most of the day in a stuffy and jolting railway carriage I was weary. It did not take me long to undress and fall asleep. The last thing I remember was the soft whirling of the fans and their refreshing current of air.

I was awakened by a hand tugging at the bed-clothes. "Rouse, Sahib, there is danger," was poured into my ears by a shrill, childish voice.

I sprang out of bed in a trice and struck a light. It revealed the half-naked figure of little Gunpat. His expression was one of indignation, rather than of terror.

"What is it?" I demanded.

"Those pigs of rioters, Sahib," he replied. "They have broken loose at last."

Then, for the first time, I became aware of the tumult in the streets surrounding the house. Brawling voices and the restless patter of feet rose hoarsely on the night air. I could distinguish the shrill "Din! Din!" of the Mohammedans—their rallying cry to battle. From afar I heard the faint pealing of bells and the rattle of musketry. A lively commotion was going on downstairs, banging of doors, and shoving of furniture, interlarded with husky voices.

Gunpat slipped away for a moment and I hurried on my shirt and trousers. I felt decidedly uncomfortable, to say the least. I could not forget the black looks that had greeted me on the previous afternoon. Europeans were in bad odour at Benares just then. I glanced at the clock. The hands pointed to an hour past midnight. I began to consider what I had better do. I was puzzled to account for the non-appearance of Baboo Das.

Meanwhile the tumult had swelled to a frightful din. The streets without seemed to be choked with rioters. "Kill Sita Ram!" they yelled. "Slay the heretic! Loot his house. Down with the destroyers of the faith!"

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I was fully alive to the situation now, and the thought of my peril sickened me. A moment later a succession of heavy thuds, followed by a tremendous crash and a burst of cheers, told that the main entrance of the house had been beaten in. Cries of rage and terror and the sounds of deadly conflict floated up the staircase.

I determined to escape, if such a thing were possible. There was no time to put on shoes or coat. I seized my money and papers, and jammed them into the pockets of my trousers.

I ran to the window and looked out. Alas! The court-yard swarmed with dusky figures. The only avenue of escape was cut off.

I turned back into the room, resolved to sell my life dearly. I had no weapons, but on the wall hung a Tibetan shield and spear, trimmed with yaks' tails. I dragged them down and rushed for the door. Before I could close it entirely, a figure slipped through the crack, and I very nearly impaled Gunpat on the spear.

"The Sahib must fight," he exclaimed. "Baboo Das has fled, and the rioters are downstairs and everywhere. They have killed some of the servants, and now they will search for my master, whom they hate. They believe he is in the house. They will kill you, too, Sahib, if they find you."

"What shall we do?" I demanded. "Is there a way to escape?"

"None, Sahib. We must push furniture against the door and fight. The police and the soldiers will be here presently."

"But surely the mob won't hurt a little chap like you?" I replied, filled with admiration at the lad's bravery. "Go while you can, Gunpat."

"No," he answered calmly; "my duty is with the Sahib. I will stay here."

There was no time to argue, for already the blood-thirsty miscreants were pattering up the staircase with shouts and yells. The door had only a frail bolt on the inside, but luckily the furniture was massive. Gunpat seemed to know just what was wanted. He helped me to the best of his strength, and hardly was the barricade in place when the mob surged through the hall.

"The heretic is trapped," they cried, at sight of the closed door. "Come out, Sita Ram, and meet your fate."

Crash! crash! crash! The door trembled under the rain of heavy blows. A table that was on the summit of the barricade toppled to the floor, and burst asunder. The mob heard the fall, and yelled exultantly.

Gunpat twirled his spear between his supple fingers. "The end will be soon, Sahib," he said quite calmly. The next instant he gave an eager cry and pointed overhead. There I saw for the first time a small circular trap-door.

"Where does it lead?" I demanded.

"To the roof," replied Gunpat. "My master sits there on hot evenings. But there is no ladder. We must take from the barricade, Sahib."

No sooner said than done. Hardly as they could be spared we removed a table, a chest of drawers, and two chairs. We piled them one upon another. I plainly saw the door quiver from top to bottom as I mounted the shaky structure. I was directly below the trap now, and a blow from my fist drove it upward. I grasped the edge of the opening and drew myself to the roof. Gunpat passed up the two spears and the shield. Then I caught the lad's hands and drew him to my side.

That instant the mob broke into the room below, where they expected to find Sita Ram. They howled with rage at the empty room. Then we saw their dark faces glaring at the pile in the middle of the room, and up at the opening in the ceiling above. We slammed down the trap door but there was no way to fasten it on the outside.

We knew the mob would follow us in a moment, so we ran across the flat roof, mounted the parapet, and sprang to the top of an adjoining house. Thus we hurried on from roof to roof till we were some distance from the house of Sita Ram.

"Faster, Sahib! they are coming!" panted Gunpat.

Then husky yells rang out behind us and I turned and saw half a score of turbaned figures at our very heels. The space of but a single roof intervened. A spear whizzed between us. A pistol ball shrieked overhead.

Faster and faster we sped, till suddenly a gap six feet wide yawned before us. "Jump, Sahib," yelled Gunpat. Without hesitation we sprang together, and landed safely on the next roof. One of our pursuers was close behind—a burly Mohammedan with a sword. Gunpat snatched the brazen shield from my hand; turned, and threw it with all his might. It struck the fellow as he was in the act of jumping. Without a cry, he plunged down between the houses. His companions paused only an instant. Then they leaped the gap, and came on with frightful yells.

This advantage, brief as it was, proved our salvation. We ran on as before, climbing headlong over the parapets from roof to roof, neither gaining or losing. The end house of the block abutted on the Ganges, and all at once, over the last parapet, we saw the water below us.

"You can swim, Sahib?" asked Gunpat.

"Yes, come on," I replied.

We dropped through twenty feet of air and shot far under water. When we came to the surface we dived again instantly. The next time we rose we were well out in the current. Side by side we swam out, while a shower of spears fell harmlessly in our wake.

Anchored in mid-stream, we spied the ark-shaped roof of a trader's boat, and a short swim brought us to it. The friendly natives gave us a shelter, and there we remained until morning, listening to the sounds of strife in the city.

When day broke the riot was quelled, but the mob had wrecked the telegraph office and railway station, plundered the treasury, and destroyed the engine and boiler of the new water-works.

Sita Ram returned that afternoon, and I found him a most polished and agreeable gentleman. He was apparently unconcerned over the looting of his house. His first act was to discharge Baboo Das. His next, after hearing my story, was to promote brave little Gunpat to an honoured position among the household servants. Nor did I forget to honour the lad in my own way.

HARRY ROGERS.

The November number of PEARSON'S MAGAZINE, as well as that of MELODY, is Now on Sale.

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AN ESCAPADE.

In days gone by it was the custom in France for those daughters of noble families who could not find a husband to enter a convent. That many took the veil very much against their will goes without saying, but obedience to parents was imperative.

In 1787 there was a large number of these poor birds caged in the great convent of Arles, the antique royal abbey of St. Cesaire; but the youngest and prettiest of them all was undoubtedly Sister Rose.

Rose de X—— belonged to a family that was a great deal richer in ancestors than hard cash. When her father had bled himself dry to purchase a commission for his eldest son in the Bussy Regiment, there remained to him not a sou wherewith to *dot* his daughter. He therefore decided that she should become a nun.

In the opinion of the parents it was far better for their daughters to pass their lives under the veil in some rich convent than to espouse a penniless noble. Rose probably failed to take this wise view of the matter, but the parental fiat had gone forth; it only remained for her to obey. Therefore, sad at heart, and with her pretty eyes brimming over with tears, she entered the convent. The Archbishop gave her the veil, and all the nobility of Provence assisted at her investiture.

Being young and of a cheerful disposition, she soon accommodated herself to her forced seclusion, and no doubt would ere long have become reconciled to the extremely easy existence enjoyed by the inmates of the convent, had not her unlucky star placed in her way a dashing chevalier, who turned her head. This chevalier was the brother of Rose's particular friend, a nun like herself, and they first saw each other one visiting day in the reception room with the result that the chevalier promptly fell head over ears in love.

The chevalier was a hot-headed youth of twenty, full of ardour and daring. He determined to make his passion known to the pretty nun. This was easily accomplished by means of a *billet doux*, a complaisant gardener, and a piece of gold. Had Rose done her duty she would have refused the missive with indignation, or have thrown it in the fire without reading it. But she was young, she was curious—and maybe she was in love. She was weak enough to take the fatal note, to read it, and, for ought I know, answer it.

However this may be, on the night of Shrove Tuesday, when all the convent had retired to rest, Rose issued barefooted and on tip-toe from her cell, and flew like a frightened bird to the end of the garden. She was probably not overcome by surprise to find there a gallant chevalier, who threw his mantle around her and in a trice whisked her up a ladder—and over the garden wall.

An hour later the chevalier appeared at the masked ball in progress at the Jeu de Paume, and clinging to his arm was the prettiest and timidest domino that ever was seen.

When Rose found herself amid the gay throng of maskers, she was so frightened she could not put one foot before the other. She thought she was in the infernal regions. But the chevalier held her so tenderly, and breathed nothings so softly into her little ears, that she soon became reassured, and thought she was in paradise.

They danced together, and everybody admired them. They were, in fact, too much admired, for a presumptuous officer—somewhat heated by wine, which maketh glad the heart of man, and likewise maketh him quarrelsome, according to his temperament and the quantity he imbibeth—also wanted to dance with the pretty domino. But the chevalier failed to see the fun of it. Facetious compliments were exchanged, and in two shakes of a lamb's tail two swords were flashing from their scabbards, and probing for the soft spots in the respective anatomies of the rivals, while the whole ball was in an uproar.

Rose, left by her chevalier, and wild with terror, flitted out of the ballroom into the dark labyrinth of streets like a will-o'-the-wisp, without anybody taking any notice of her.

When she began to recognise her surroundings, she found herself in the narrow Rue des Petres, opposite the porch of the cloister of Saint Trophime. Just then two o'clock struck in the town hall tower. Half dead with fright at finding herself alone in the streets at that hour, she sat down on the steps of the cloister, and wept until her heart was like to break.

What was to be come of her? Return home to her father? She trembled at the mere thought: he would probably kill her should she dare to show her face before him! Return to the convent? Absolutely out of the question!

While she was lamenting her terrible plight the bell of the Carmelites du Marche Neuf began to ring matins. Its clear sonorous clang summoning the nuns to the chapel recalled the convent to her mind. What excitement there would be at five o'clock, when the sisters rose and discovered her absence! How she envied them now, peacefully reposing in their white cells! What would she not have given to be in their place! What she had suffered for having listened to the temptation of the Evil One!

In her anguish her thoughts dwelt upon the great saints whose relics in the shrine near Arles perform so

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many miracles. She knelt upon the hard, cold stones and prayed to them with all her heart to save her. And the great saints, always full of compassion for us poor mortals, sent her a happy inspiration.

Mgr. du Lau, the Archbishop of Arles, was the kindest of men, and when he visited the convent, he always advised and encouraged her. Why not go to him? He alone had the power to save her.

A few minutes later she was pulling the bell at the door of the Archbishop's palace. She had to ring for a long time, for the porter was not accustomed to be called up at such an hour, and when at length he opened the door, he would not push his condescension to the point of admitting a lady who declined to give her name. But the pretty unknown pleaded so earnestly and persuasively that he at last relented and grumblingly went upstairs to wake his Lordship the Archbishop.

The good prelate did not make so much fuss about it. When he learned that a lady wished to see him on serious and urgent business, he had her shown up to the waiting-room without more ado.

Rose awaited him in fear and trembling, and when he made his appearance she pulled her hood over her face and fell at his feet. The holy man was considerably surprised to recognise in the mysterious supplicant a nun whom he believed to be safely confined in her convent, and even more so when the girl he had always regarded as a model of saintliness confessed her awful fault.

At first he had a good mind to shake her, but seeing her in tears he could not help pitying the poor lamb who had wandered from the fold and appealed to him, the good shepherd, to lead her back again; so, placing his hand on her head, he said:

"My daughter, your fault is great. However, swear to me that you will never again listen to the counsels of the devil, and that you will henceforward be the example of piety you ought to be, and I will see what can be done."

Rose promised fervently all that was required of her.

"'Tis well!" exclaimed his Lordship, raising her to her feet. "Courage! Cover up your face so that no one can recognise you. In one hour from this you will be back in your cell, and you can believe me when I say that no one in the convent will ever know you left it."

This said, his lordship summoned his valet and ordered that his carriage be got ready without delay. A few minutes later the last of the revellers from the masked ball at the Jeu de Paume were surprised to meet the Archbishop's carriage rumbling along towards the convent. What would they have said could they have seen, ensconced in a corner of the old coach, the pretty domino who had excited their curiosity?

The sister who acted as doorkeeper of the convent, awakened by the noise of the wheels as the carriage drew up at the gate, popped her head out of the window of her turret and thought she was dreaming when she beheld his Grace the Archbishop.

His Lordship ordered her to open the gate. She hastened to comply and to call the Abbess, whom he wished to see immediately. The Abbess jumped out of bed and hurriedly donned her robe, putting her veil on all awry in her precipitation, and forgetting her golden crucifix.

The Archbishop was waiting for her in the reception-room.

"Madame," he exclaimed sternly, as she entered, "it appears that scandalous things are taking place in your convent. I am told that some of your nuns gad about the street at night."

"Oh! Monsignor, it is impossible!" ejaculated the Abbess, clasping her hands and raising her eyes in horror.

"A truce to talking," continued the Archbishop. "I am here to see for myself, as is my duty, whether all is in order. Let every nun lock herself in her cell, and you, madame, set the example by withdrawing to your apartment. I will go the round of the cloisters and see whether everybody responds to the roll call."

As the Archbishop ordered, so was it done. Every nun, from the Abbess to the doorkeeper, locked herself in her cell. His Lordship then fetched Rose, who was huddling in the carriage, and led her through the deserted corridors to her cell, where she noiselessly locked herself in. Then the Archbishop went the round of the convent, knocking at every door.

"*Benedicamus domina!*"

And every nun responded:

"*Deo gratias!*"

Monsignor finished with the Abbess, whom he wished to assure that no one was missing. Then, filled with glee at the success of his pious manœuvre, he re-entered his carriage and returned to his palace.

From that day Rose was the model member of the community, and practised mortifications, vigils, and orisons to such an extent that she fell into a decline and died.

No one knew for certain what became of the chevalier. He had unfortunately killed his adversary, and had had to fly from the law.

Some declare that he became a monk. Others assert that he was taken at Quiberon, and that when the Republicans shot him he was found to be wearing as a sash across his breast the white veil of a nun. Anyhow, he was never seen at Arles again.

As to Mgr. du Lau, everybody knows that he was killed by a mob in 1792.

HONOR LUCELLE.

Jumbled Story Competition.—19.

ON page 604 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *November 9th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 19.] [SEE PAGE 603.

AH, FRIEND CADI, WE AWAIT.

Kitty was arranging her skirts.
It was the most delicious moment of my life.
As I came up the drive, I saw this sight: Kitty, yonder is standing up dressed all in white. A man bent down, and kissed her on the cheek.
"Don't," I said, "you will kill yourself," and you are not going to marry"—I took a step nearer—because of what old Martha said to you? It is," I Count, who's not worthy——"
"Harry—dear." Her cheeks were covered with Martha's cottage.
The words took terrible effect. Kitty rose to her conversation concerns no one.
I crept round behind Kitty and behind the Count, and said very sternly: "Downright wicked, I repeat. The Count, in irreproachable knickerbockers, was insignificant little whippersnapper of an Italian subject.
Then I was no longer silent.
But she was too quick for me, and head in air, standing behind. I have often thought, in after life, my coat-tails, and thoroughly considered the lap.
"Don't breathe," I hissed, "or I'll murder you."
The words, I own, were strong ones; they had, interrupted her:
"Henry, how dare you."
I then gave her the minutest instructions, sprang into the saddle, and we sped away.
Then I took my hat, and struck out across the the Count's mouth, and with the other gripped his his brothers yonder."
The road outside the gates runs for two miles back her head.
"Are you ready?" asked Kitty.
Then I sprang back and pedalled furiously.
Kitty threw her feet on the foot-rests, and tossed stealthily, until my face was level with hers; then I wanted, "I see a great church, and my lady expression changed—"fair, a soldier, ah! and see that what I now did was the most successful action down a steep hill. We started at a great pace.
"Kitty," I said presently, as we sped madly down among the villagers as a fortune-teller. As a witch unwieldly man-killer" (I am a soldier) "you are old witch has looked at your hand, and said that fortune told again.
"I will," cried Kitty furiously, "and we will soon giving him a final admonition to keep silence, I feet her eyes flashed, her hands clenched together.
"It is absolutely preposterous."
"It isn't," she replied lamely, hastily rearranging her position on the front seat of a tandem bicycle. I ever accomplished.
I stooped forward on my handles, far forward, pedalled harder than ever.
I slackened speed, and silently we rode round to where the old witch had taken up her residence.
"When you have learnt manners," she said, "I very carefully, very stealthily, so that neither of see whom I am destined to marry."
Kitty put her tea-cup down with a bang.
The witch was standing over a cauldron, and two Italians were grinding a barrel-organ.
This shrivelled-up little woman, Martha, as she was called, had built up a reputation for herself marched to the door.
I emptied out my pockets into the old hag's arm in an iron grip.
"I see," she said, when we had told her what we in the neatest of cycling costumes, was taking up her hand, "it will be a man you have known ever known since you were a baby in arms, for an absurd, but it is downright wicked."
"Yes," said I, imitating the Count's voice, while peering into the contents.
"Martha," I said, as I pushed open her door, "I will speak to you again. In the meanwhile," went on, without allowing her time to answer. told."
"And if you do it satisfactorily, there's gold for once, you horrid wretch! Stop! I shall jump the power of making a scathing answer.
"Oh!" screamed Kitty, "how dare you! Stop at turning at the door, "you may digest this: "Well, this is the condition on which I shall stop; You go and throw me up, *me* whom you have very much mistaken," and with that she left me.
It was a pretty trick!
"Henry, how dare you!" she began, but I am going to bring a lady to have her fortune off!"
I did not answer.
"Henry," she repeated.
I pedalled in silence.
"Henry," said Kitty presently, when we found that you come with me to the witch, and have your blushes. "Before, you know, I was only in fun. Of you—pots of it."
I spread myself out before the fire, turned up fields (we were staying in the country) to the house since you were a baby."
And I maintain that the remainder of our course, Harry, I never really cared for the Count."
I was quick to follow up my advantage.
I paused for a suitable comparison. Outside homewards.
"It is not only preposterous," said I, "and however, this good effect; they deprived Kitty of them heard me, and then I clapped one hand over and leaving her to digest them, proceeded ourselves riding away.
I rose to my feet, threw out my chest, frowned, the hill, "why won't you love me? Is it merely here," she cried, taking Kitty's little pink palm in the tea-cups.
"And for why? Merely because a shrivelled up "not going to marry, Kitty, the man you love."
"Who's not worthy so much as to act monkey to at me—"a tall man," went on Martha—Kitty's is holding her hand"—Kitty threw a defiant glance if you imagine I have any care for a great, she was held in respect by everyone; even Kitty, as has been seen, was under her spell.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XLI.

MURRAY SPEAKS TRUTH.

"BROMPTON."

She had not read the word, but she divined it, and with a pitiful moaning cry, as all that awful past came back. He was ill there then. Was she to go and humble herself once again?

"Oh—oh—oh—oh!" that one continued moan, so full of misery and despair, as she covered her pain-distorted face with her hands, and sank back in her chair.

"Olive! For God's sake don't—don't!" he cried wildly. "You know how I have fought all that down. I cannot bear to see you suffer like this. It is too much. In Heaven's name, send me away!"

But she did not seem to hear his words, and the low, piteous moan went on, as, in spite of self, Murray took a step nearer to her, drawn by a power he could not for the moment master.

He took her hands in his, and drew them from her face, and she lifted her eyes to his with such a look of appeal and despair that, drawing his breath with a sob, he bent down, and kissed her fingers tenderly. That look had disarmed him.

"For Heaven's sake, control yourself!" he cried huskily. "Be a woman. You must not go there again. I'll go to him at once and you shall hear everything."

"I beg your pardon! I did not know you were engaged. One of your headaches, Olive?"

Lady Braetoun started from her seat and Murray turned fiercely upon him, white as ashes.

Braetoun, who also looked very white, had come in silently. The cab-wheels had made no sound, and he had let himself in with his latch-key.

"Roderick!" cried Olive, rushing to him to throw herself in his arms.

"Don't be a fool!" he said hoarsely. "Go to your room."

"But the telegram! We thought you were dangerously ill."

"So I am," he said, "or I shouldn't have sent. Enough to make me. He didn't lose any time. There, go!"

"No," she said firmly. "You are ill, and I must stay."

"What for?" he cried with a ghastly smile. "Are you afraid?"

"Yes, horribly! Roderick, dear, let me stay."

"You need not be alarmed, Lady Braetoun," said Murray quietly. "Perhaps it would be as well if you went to your room for a while."

She gazed at him with her eyes dilating, and in his read nothing but pity and a something which seemed to enforce obedience, as he went to the door and opened it for her to pass out, shivering with a horrible dread.

Murray stood looking after her till she had passed out of sight, and then closed the door and turned to cross to where Braetoun had thrown himself upon a couch, groaning with pain.

"I'm sorry I interrupted you," he said, with a ghastly, cynical grin.

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? Oh, curse this pain! You didn't lose a chance of finding me out."

"Out? I came expecting to find you here. Brute! Cowardly, callous brute, to insult your wife like that."

"Insult her! Ha-ha-ha!"

"By sending a telegram from the house of your mistress.

"Who did?"

"You. There is the post-mark on it—Brompton."

"How was she to know?"

"I came on at once, expecting to see you prostrate here, and, not finding you, of course she read the telegram with me."

"Well, what of it? She knows."

"Knows!" said Murray bitterly. "Yes; she knows."

"Ah," cried Braetoun, as he ground his teeth and writhed in his agony, "and what if she does? What does it matter to me? Curse her white face and sickening ways. She knows how to comfort herself with her handsome doctor."

"You villain!" cried Murray, bending over him, and catching him by the throat. "Dare to insult her again like that and I'll crush out your miserable life."

"You dare not," sneered Braetoun. "Bah! do you think I am blind?" and, struggling against the bodily agony he felt, he went on. "I've known it from the first. Hasn't it driven me away from home to get what consolation I could yonder? Villain, am I? Allan Murray, dear companion of my boyhood, when did you find me a fool?"

"Always. Never greater than you are now. Coward, too, idiot!"

"What! When I came back here, half dying, to find you two like that!"

"To find her broken-hearted, half fainting in her anxiety for you."

"Bah! Be honest. I am. Villain yourself!"

"Silence, sir. You married an angel of truth. You have done everything man could do to kill her love, but her heart has never beaten with a throb that was not for you."

"It's a lie. Always for you—the doctor—the clever, thoughtful doctor. I'm not a fool, I tell you. Do you dare to tell me here, face to face, that you have not loved her from the first?"

"There is no dare," said Murray, gazing down at the miserable, writhing being on the couch. "I do tell you, her husband, that I have loved her from the first day we met—before you ever set eyes upon her, and came like a blight

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—miserable, despicable creature that you are—to blast her young life."

"And what about you?" said Braetoun, whose face was more ghastly now.

"I am a man, a weak, helpless man, Roderick Braetoun, who has gone through so cruel a fire that I pray God it may fall to the lot of few. These things are beyond me. I cannot grasp why they should be so—how it should have fallen to one who loved Olive Emsworth to pass hours of misery, toil, and despair, to fight for the life of the man who robbed me of my love, to give him the power to keep on cursing her with his presence here."

"Go on—go on!" groaned Braetoun; and then mockingly: "You have both consoled yourselves pretty well!"

"Don't tempt me," cried Murray fiercely. "There are limits to what I can bear. You shall not insult her by your vile charges."

"Go on! You'll never make me believe."

"Then," said Murray, "you had better die."

"No: you daren't kill me, Murray," sneered Braetoun. "You daren't do that."

"No. But I tell you this: if ever poor mortal wretch was tempted by the devil to end a brother's life, I have been that man."

"I know. A few drops more. But there would be the inquest, and the fashionable physician hounded down, and the scaffold. No; you dared not do that, Murray, and you took your revenge another way."

"Repeat that foul, lying charge, and I leave you to your fate," cried Murray, with so fierce a look that Braetoun quailed. "Are you in a position to die? Better you should, and let her suffer and mourn for you, her wretched husband, than have you live to curse her still. You fool! To cast away from you happiness such as might have been yours. Love me! Why, she would not tolerate my presence if it were not for your sake. She knows what you know, that your chances of life would be *nil* in another's hands. It is no empty boast—only from the experience I have had of you. What! poison you? The end would come more surely—would have come a dozen times if I had stayed away—would come now if I go, and you know it."

"Yes, I know it, curse you!" groaned Braetoun. "But you've got to save me again, and you will. I'm not afraid, only of this cursed pain!"

"Yes," said Murray, "I have to save you again for her sake, if my poor knowledge will help me."

"Yes, and——"

"Stop!" said Murray fiercely. "I can bear no more, either now or in the future. Let this be the last time you ever send to me for help. Some other doctor may grasp your case. You have now broken the last link. I can do no more."

CHAPTER XLII.

The Slaying of Love.

There were no complications caused by drink, no violent delirium to recur for days, and before many hours had elapsed Braetoun was about once more.

But to Olive's misery and despair there was some other great trouble or loss which kept her husband in a constant state of irritation, while his manner to her was agonising, and she lived in dread of some terrible scene, trembling the while as if she were guilty of some sin.

He was always receiving letters and telegrams, and various little things pointed to the fact that he was now approaching some crisis in his career. What it was more exactly she was soon to know.

It was one afternoon: Braetoun had come down very late after a sleepless night, looking irritable and strange, when the first letter he opened made him break out with a loud curse.

Olive sprang to her feet and hurried to his chair, to lay her hand upon his brow.

"Roderick, dear," she cried, "be calm."

"Calm!" he cried: "calm!"

"You are hot and feverish, and you frighten me. You will be ill again."

"Well," he said sneeringly, "isn't that what you want?"

"Roderick!"

"Another good fit of illness and insensibility, so that we may have the doctor again, and nice long nursing *tête-à-têtes*."

"Roderick!" she cried in agony; "how can you be so cruel? What is the matter?"

"Matter? What has always been the matter? You know well enough: money."

"Ah!" she sighed.

"Yes, money, beggarly money. Here am I, supposed to be a nobleman with a rich wife, and treated by everybody as if I were wealthy, and all the time worse off than a city clerk."

"Is it—another debt?" she faltered.

"Debt? It's a dozen; and money I must have from somewhere. I'm not going to be sold up, and so I tell them."

He leaped up, and went to a tall cabinet that stood between the windows, took out his keys, opened it, pulled out a drawer, and stood with his back to her, doing something which made a clicking sound, and then turned sharply round, holding a revolver in his hand, and thrusting some cartridges in his pocket.

"Roderick!" she cried, with a horrified look, and she sprang at him to try and take the weapon from his hand.

"Idiot! Don't be a fool, woman," he said harshly, as he wrested his hand away. "You'll have the thing go off. Oh, don't be alarmed. I'm not going to blow out your brains, nor my own either. This is for those cursed city hounds. Put in men in possession, will they? Law or no law, I'll shoot the first man who dares to show his face. A set of thieves! Two hundred pounds interest at least for every fifty I have had."

"Money—you have borrowed?" faltered Olive.

"That's it. Curse 'em, let 'em come; that's all."

"Oh, Roderick, you must not do anything rash."

"Oh, I won't, but I'm afraid they will if they come here," he cried, with a curious laugh. "The scum! It would be a benefit to humanity to polish off two or three of the scoundrels. Don't let them come in and interfere with me, that's all."

He thrust the revolver into his breast-pocket, and buttoned his coat over it. "But now, look here. I've been hard hit lately, after a pretty good run of luck, and I'm regularly in Queer Street. They are going to put in an execution——"

"What does that mean?" said Olive, trying to be firm.

"How sweet and innocent we are!" he cried mockingly. "Seizing and selling up the house and furniture, horses, carriages, and everything."

"Oh!" sighed Olive, as she thought of the household gods she had worshipped when she was a girl about to be married, so short a time back, but which seemed so long ago. Then, recovering herself: "Well, dear," she sighed, "let them take them and pay your debts. We shall be so much happier then."

"Oh, indeed! And you can go to your father, and use his carriage, and there will be nothing to mind. No, it isn't coming to that, my sweet wife," and he tapped his breast.

"Roderick, for pity's sake, don't talk to me in that cruel, mocking way."

"Very well, then, I'll put it straight I shall do someone a mischief if they use force, so you had better try and stop it."

"Yes, dear, I will," she cried. "There are all my jewels. I know they are worth a great deal. Let's take them and sell them."

"Pish! They'd sell for a song. No; you must go a different way to work. I'm not going to be disgraced like

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this. I haven't troubled the old man lately, and he hasn't troubled me. But he can't sit still and see you sold up. Go to him, and don't ask a favour of him; tell him he must help us, and then he will."

Olive's brow wrinkled, and she shook her head.

"I cannot," she said.

"But you must. This is no time for squeamishness. I let you off when you went to him at other times, and he refused—a miserable old miser!—but there must be no nonsense now. Tell him he must come down and save us from this disgrace."

"He will not, dear," cried Olive wildly. "It will only make him violently angry against you."

"What does that matter? He hates me as it is. He must and shall help us. Now then, go at once."

"I cannot, I cannot, dear."

"But you shall."

"I would if I could, Roderick; but it will only make matters worse. He said last time——"

Olive stopped short, and turned scarlet, then pale, and the tears rose to her eyes.

"Well, what did he say?"

She was silent, and shook her head.

"Tell me what he said," cried Braetoun savagely, and he caught her wrist.

"Don't, dear. You hurt me," she cried.

"And I'll hurt you more if you trifle with me. Now, then, what did he say?"

"Don't, pray, don't make me tell you, dear."

"Say it at once," cried Braetoun fiercely. "What was it?"

He was pressing her arm so cruelly that the pain awoke resentment, and she said quickly:

"That if you wanted money so badly you might sell ——"

"The Brompton house," cried Braetoun, for she stopped with her face scarlet. "Yes, of course. Never mind; I'm not going to sell that, nor this either, so go and tell him he must."

"I cannot, Roderick."

"You go."

"No, I cannot," she said sadly.

"What? Out with it, then," he cried. "Say you will not at once."

"I will not——" She stopped short.

"What?"

"I will not insult my father by going and asking him again," said Olive firmly. "It is too painful and degrading. You cannot be so cruel as to force me to do such a thing as this."

Braetoun turned pale with rage and passion.

"Degrading, is it? Well, what if it is? Who are you to talk of degradation, after what has passed? Now, look here, I've put up with too much, and I won't suffer for nothing. Will you go to your father for help?"

"No, Roderick, I cannot," she said coldly. "You must go and ask him yourself."

"I would if I could get it," said Braetoun with a laugh. "Then you will not go?"

She made no answer, and there was a look in her eyes that he had not seen there before, one which reminded him of her father; but he was half mad with disappointment and rage at finding the timid, quiet girl no longer patient and plastic in his hands.

"Very well, then," he said, "it is no time to be nice; I must have the money from somebody. It's rather degrading for me," he laughed mockingly, "but the debts must be paid. Ring and order the carriage."

She rose, and crossed the room slowly to touch the bell, after which they both waited till it had been answered, and the door was once more closed.

"Now put on your things," he said, taking her by the wrist, and speaking through his teeth, with his eyes half closed; "drive to Wimpole Street, and tell Murray he must let me have five thousand pounds at once, or sign his name to bills for that amount."

Olive sprang to her feet, wrested her wrist away, and stood gazing at her husband with flashing eyes.

"Ah! that bites, does it?" he said, in a low husky voice. "I understand: don't reproach me again for being a little weak. He has plenty of money, makes no end, and saves it. Tell him it must be done directly, as I want it. Do you understand?"

"How dare you ask me to do such a thing as this?" she cried, with her cheeks flaming.

"Because he is the man who can refuse you nothing."

"Refuse me—nothing! Roderick, are you mad?"

"Pretty nearly, and I shall be quite if you don't go soon. Now, no nonsense—five thousand in cash or bills at once."

"But you cannot ask him."

"No, but you can."

"Why?" cried Olive excitedly.

"Because in this miserable extremity I am compelled to stoop and ask it of my wife's lover."

"*Roderick!*"

"Well, do you think I'm blind, that I haven't known what has been going on all this time?"

"This from my husband!" she moaned.

"This from your husband. Haven't I borne with it long enough—been obliged to bear with it—curse him! Do you think I did not know? Such a good, patient wife as you have been, nursing me through all my long illness. Such a faithful friend and clever doctor!" he went on in a low, fierce tone, completely beside himself with passion, but never once raising his voice. "Good wife! So admired by everyone for her devotion to her husband—and the doctor."

"Roderick, what are you saying?" she cried passionately.

"The truth," he cried savagely. "I've borne it all too long; now I'm forced by my misfortunes to speak. I am the culprit, of course—the fast man about town, and everyone has a kick at me, while you go on in your smug respectability, playing the model wife, and everyone is full of praise."

"Roderick, you do not know what you are saying? It is not true."

"Not true! When even the paid nurse has protested to me about my lady's goings on with the doctor, and I, poor helpless invalid, have seen her sneer as she spoke in a pitying way to me."

"Oh! That woman! Nurse Jennett?"

"Yes, that woman—Nurse Jennett."

"Roderick, my husband, don't, don't believe it," she cried.

"Even my mother warned me about what she felt sure was going on."

"Your mother! Oh, impossible!"

"Indeed! I was blind and foolish. I said you were too good and true a girl to deceive, and she said she hoped you were, but that it was my duty to keep my eyes open, for she believed that with all his smoothness Allan Murray was a dangerous man."

"I cannot believe it."

"Ask her, then. She said she had seen several little passages between you, which showed a gross familiarity."

"Roderick, I swear it is not true."

"Why, he owned to it—to me."

"Dr. Murray!"

"Yes; our dear Allan, the grave, quiet, thoughtful, clever physician, curse him! Told me he loved you, and always had loved you—told me to my face."

"Oh!" groaned Olive, and she sank back and covered her ghastly face.

"There," he cried, raising his voice; "deny it now. Tell me it is false, and then I won't believe you. But are you beginning to see why you are to go to him and tell him I must have this money? Are you too shamefaced to ask it of him now?"

"Oh, Roderick! That you could believe this!"

"You made me when I vowed that it was not possible. That nurse opened my eyes."

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Olive's hands dropped from her pallid features, and she looked Braetoun in the eyes unflinchingly, while his wavered and fell.

"Look at me, Roderick," she said in a low, pained voice—and her breath seemed to come short. "I am your wife—the woman you swore to love and protect."

"And I the man to whom you swore faith."

"Yes, and I have kept my oath, dear. Look me in the eyes and tell me you do not believe this cruel slander."

"I do believe it," he cried.

"Then all is over," she said, with a low, sobbing cry, "and I must go."

"Yes, and tell him there must be no shilly-shallying. I must have the money at once."

"I am going home, dear," she said wearily, "to one who will not believe this infamy of his child."

"What, run away?" cried Braetoun savagely. "Not you. You shall go and get this money off Murray."

"No," said Olive firmly, as she saw his hand go to his breast and half draw the pistol, "not if you kill me."

"It is of no use for you to fight against it. You have ceased to care for me long enough, but I'm not going to complain, and you are to blame for anything I have done. Just understand this: we must keep up appearances, I suppose, so get me the money, and I will take no further notice. I can't afford to have my health wrecked for the sake of a woman; and besides," he added, with a sneer, "the doctor is useful to me."

Olive stood before him with her hands clasped, gazing in horror.

"Oh," she cried at last, in a voice he did not know. "Is this my husband speaking?"

"Yes, your fooled and deluded husband. Don't trouble yourself to lie any more, but be content that I do not take some savage revenge on you both. We must have no more scenes, my money troubles are enough. I'm not going to be jealous, I tell you—you are not worth it. I ought to have known better, for it is what I might have expected from a woman of your birth and breeding."

"And this is my husband!" she cried at last, with a passionate outburst of grief—"the man who swore to love and protect me. Heaven help me, then—I must protect myself."

Her indignant womanhood thoroughly roused, she faced him, and for the moment he was cowed by the beautiful woman whom he seemed to know thoroughly now for the first time.

"Yes," she said, "it is true, then—that which my heart has whispered a hundred times. Lord Braetoun, the nobleman, my husband, is really a man utterly devoid of honour—oh, that I should have lived to say it—utterly cruel and base. Yes, I will go—not to Allan Murray, but to my father—not as your miserable mendicant, to beg for money, that you may waste it, but to seek refuge from your cruelty—and from this shame."

"What!" he roared, as he started up and advanced threateningly; "you dare to leave here or to do other than what I have said, and I'll kill you."

"Kill me?" she said with a bitter laugh: "my poor body. Why, you have already killed my love and girlish trust, made me a despairing, reckless woman, crushed out every hope. Well, kill me. Finish your cruel work I am ready. What have I to live for now?"

"Allan Murray!" he cried, but his eyes fell before her indignant gaze as he said the words. "Pish! Heroics! Stage. Once more, will you go?"

"I would sooner die."

"If you do not get it there is nothing left for me to do but blow out my brains."

She retorted with a contemptuous laugh:

"'Heroics! Stage!'"

He gazed at her now in wonder.

"You don't believe me?"

"No: you have proved to me by your words that you are too great a coward. Fresh from what was almost a school, what did I know of the world and its ways? I had no mother to whom I could fly for help and counsel, and, longing as I did for a woman's help in such a strait, I gladly clung to Lady Braetoun, and believed her praises of her noble son."

"Have you nearly done?" he sneered.

"Yes," she said coldly, but her words cut him as if they had been some weapon forcing a way to his heart. "I believed in her gross flattery, her blessings, and miserable adulation. She told me that her one hope, her one desire, was to see her noble boy happily married to some true, innocent girl who would give her heart's love—and—a hundred thousand pounds. True, noble, society mother, counsellor of the innocent girl. Oh, great Heaven! How easy it was! How soon I was snared! I listened—I drank it all in as the truth—her words—your words—and I believed. I did not love you, but I was attracted by all this, and I said it is the beginning of the love a woman should bear a man, the rest—the long clinging attachment of which I had read—would come. I became your wife in a dream, and ever since I would not awaken from it. 'The love will come,' I said. I prayed for it nightly on my knees, and I went on in my wretched dream, knowing all, seeing all, but refusing to believe till now that with cruel hands you have awakened me, and I cannot dream again."

"Have you quite done now?" he said sneeringly. "Then it is my turn. I am not too great a coward to use the pistol on myself—to make my exit, and leave him the charming young widow as soon as decency allows, and the fresh married settlements can be drawn out to satisfy your father."

She stood with her eyes withering him in their contempt, and he blazed out more fiercely now.

"Curse you! Confess it before I go. He was your lover before we were married?"

"I have degraded myself enough by my defence already," she said coldly.

"Once more—I give you another chance to save me—to save him. Will you go?"

"Yes. Home. Never to return."

"Then, by G—d! I'll go myself, and make him disgorge."

"Roderick!" she cried wildly, as he dashed towards the door; and she caught him by the arm, mad now with terror, but the struggle was short. He swung her here and there for a few moments, and then as he tore himself free, and rushed out, she tottered toward the door, which was flung back heavily in her face.

(To be continued.)

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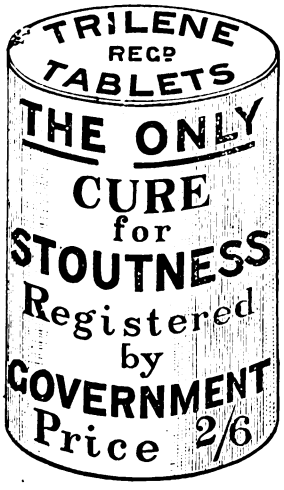

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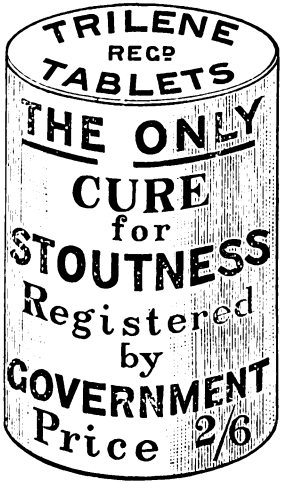

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"DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND": The Story of a Clever Amateur Detective. (See page 609.)

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 411. FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 14TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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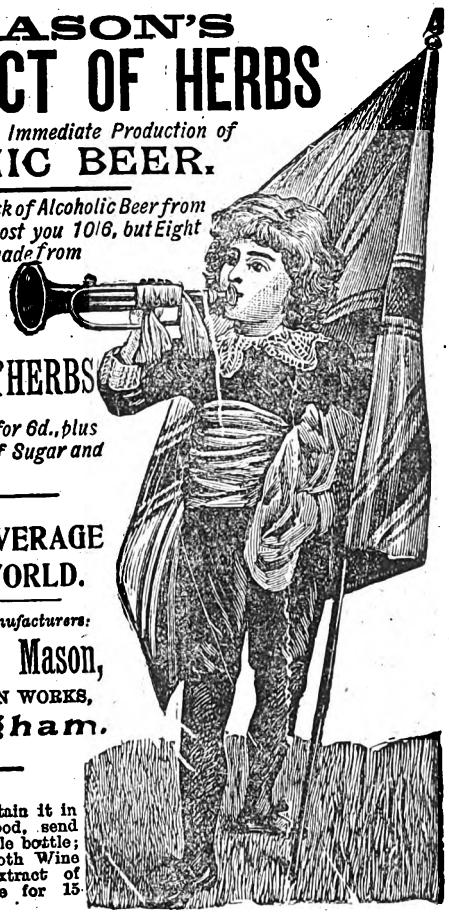

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For the Week ending November 14th, 1896.

DIAMOND ✣ CUT ✣ DIAMOND.

SIR EUSTACE MARSTON was the soul of hospitality but he was not always discreet in his choice of guests. There were none who would refuse an invitation to Marston Manor; there were plenty who came away with their noses in the air, wondering "where Sir Eustace manages to pick up the people he asks to meet one, don't you know." The fact was, that Sir Eustace, a genial, florid old giant of sixty, had one weak point—hunting. Let a casual acquaintance introduce a total stranger to the baronet with the remark added, "First-rate across country, Sir Eustace," and it was odds that the Squire would invite the two to Marston Manor to try their luck in his own famous country. This fact was so notorious that many who wanted a few days' hunting, or who wished to see the glories of Marston Manor, got themselves introduced to Sir Eustace and fished for an invitation on the strength of a reputation that was not always justified. The Squire, good easy man, scarcely troubled himself about the social consideration of his guests—though, of course, he knew where and when to draw the line—and so it came about that not a few whom nobody knew, and whom it would not have harmed anybody to know, were admitted to the Manor. As were, occasionally, certain others.

November was gone, December was half over, and all the time guests had been coming and going; but to-day the house was empty, and Miss Marston and her friend, Lucy Fulton, were spending a quiet afternoon together, discussing friends who had departed and those whose arrival was still expected.

"So Everard Hood is coming to-night," said Lucy, with a sidelong look at Miss Marston. "How many times will this make, Gertrude?"

Gertrude rose quickly and lifted a heap of Liberty silks from the sofa to the table. "I don't think I understand." she said in some confusion.

"Don't you, dear?" mocked Lucy. "Then I'll explain. He is coming down to propose to you for the third time. Have you made up your mind what answer you will give him?"

"Mr. Hood has just returned from Siberia," said Gertrude, frowning slightly and ignoring the question.

"I know, and I suppose he will be off to the South Pole if you refuse him again. That seems to me to be

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the only place on the globe he has not visited. Well, you need not answer unless you choose. Of course, you will refuse him? What attraction can he possibly have for a girl like you?"

"There is a very great deal more in him than in the men you delight to honour with your preference, my dear Luce," answered Gertrude rather tartly.

Lucy burst out laughing. "You have risen to the bait," she cried, clapping her hands. "Now I shall watch the issue of this visit with all the more interest."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Gertrude, sweeping the silks together in a heap. "I hope I am able to do justice to a man's good points without necessarily being in love with him." She flushed again as she spoke.

"Oh, certainly," acquiesced Lucy with a little *moue*. "But I am quite sure Everard Hood is not your ideal. He is not mine, at all events. What is your ideal, Gertrude?"

A smile twitched at the corners of Gertrude's mouth. "How fast you go, Luce," she said. "My ideal! Well, now, really, it is so nebulous—I——"

"Then I'll materialise it, or, rather, him, into definite shape," cried the irrepressible Lucy joyously. "Listen, now. He has the face of a Viking and the manners of a—of a—Chesterfield."

Gertrude burst out laughing. "Oh, spare me, Luce," she cried. "What a combination!"

"Wait until I have finished," went on Lucy. "He is tall and broad-shouldered, with well-chiselled features and keen blue eyes—rather a soldierly type, you know—fair hair and a moustache, of course. Handsome all over and—why, good gracious!" she broke off, looking out of the window, "if here isn't the very identical ideal driving up to the house at the precise moment when I am describing him."

"What do you mean?" asked Gertrude, peeping over her friend's shoulder. "Ah!" she exclaimed, drawing back quickly. "It is Mr. Hood; and he must have seen us looking at him. How very annoying!"

"What does it matter?" said Lucy, gaily waving her hand to Hood. "Being a man, he will flatter himself that you were watching for his arrival; being a lover, he will not dare to believe it. But never mind him. Did you notice the other man? What a face! What a figure! What a voice! How he rolled out his directions to the groom about the portmanteau that had been left behind! There is your Chesterfieldian Viking, all ready to your hand. You have only to show yourself, my dear, and he is yours. Who *can* he be?"

"Love laughs at locksmiths."

"You'll exhaust your notes of admiration if you don't stop," said Gertrude impatiently. "I'm sure I wish you would—stop, I mean. We've done nothing but talk man for the last half hour. Do come and look at these silks."

"There was one note of interrogation, if you remember," persisted Lucy. "Who is he?"

"Colonel Dubois, I presume. He is the only other guest expected to-day."

"A soldier! Then that makes up the tale. Is he French? He can't be with a face like that. Have you known him long? I never heard you speak of him. Come now, tell me all about him."

"I never heard of him myself until yesterday," replied Gertrude. "I understand from my father that he speaks both French and English perfectly, that he holds a commission in the French army, and that he is very fond of hunting." They both laughed a little. "Sir Eustace met him in town, liked him, and asked him down here. *Voilà tout!* There's the dressing bell."

"Gertrude," whispered Lucy mischievously, as they went upstairs, "I materialised this beautiful ideal for you, and, of course, he's yours if you want him; but if you don't—oh, my dear, would you mind letting me try my powers of fascination?"

"I think you are an absolutely horrid girl, Luce," laughed Gertrude. "I have a great mind to write to your mother, and ask her to lock you up."

"Do, by all means," retorted Lucy saucily, as she ran off to her room. "Love laughs at locksmiths."

When, later on, Gertrude descended to the drawing-room, a tall man, who had been staring out of the window, turned to greet her with a low bow.

"Colonel Dubois?" said the girl, smiling a welcome.

"The same," he replied, bowing still lower over her outstretched hand. "And you, no doubt, are the renowned Miss Marston, whose praises are in everyone's mouth."

The strongly marked roll of the "r," and an occasional transposition of his words from the English to the French order, suggested a prolonged residence abroad, rather than a foreign origin, and with his wavy, yellow hair, and steel-blue eyes, there was nothing French about him. He might have sat for the portrait of Lucy's Viking.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding his handsome presence, Gertrude recoiled from him instinctively. His very first words, and the glance which accompanied them, roused an antagonistic spirit within her, though, if pressed for reasons for such an attitude she would probably have taken refuge in the declaration of her conviction that Colonel Dubois was not, in feminine parlance, "nice."

Withdrawing her hand from his somewhat too fervent clasp, she answered rather distantly:

"I am Miss Marston, though I do not know that I possess any title to renown."

"Are you so deaf then to the noise of fame?" said the Colonel gallantly. "It is not usually so with beautiful women."

"What an embarrassing person," thought Gertrude, and in her relief at the entrance of the others, she greeted Hood much more warmly than she had intended to do.

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"You must go in alone to-night, Hood," said Sir Eustace. "Never mind, we shall find a companion for you before you leave us, I hope."

The words were spoken without intention; but Hood

Hood stooped and kissed her.

could not help raising his eyes to Gertrude's face. He was still smiling from the warmth of her welcome, and she, seeing his joy, found herself equally unable to resist smiling back at him as she took the Colonel's arm.

"We shall have a full house to-morrow," said Sir Eustace, as they entered the dining-room; "but to-night we must just make the most of one another."

"I could contemplate with equanimity a reduction of the present company by three," murmured the Colonel under cover of the rustling they made in taking their places.

Gertrude flushed hotly. She resented the impertinence of the implication, but in her own house she felt powerless. The glance she gave the Colonel, however, boded ill for that gallant warrior's chances of sitting at her end of the table on the following night.

Hood saw the blush and immediately became possessed of an insane desire to kick the Colonel. The impulse overcame him so far that he actually raised his foot beneath the table and brought it rather violently down again.

"Oh!" screamed Lucy, dropping her soup-spoon. "Whatever is the matter with you, Mr. Hood? Do you know that is my foot? If you are subject to fits I shall move to the other side of the table."

The picture of confusion, Hood stretched out his hand to his glass, but the slender stem, unable to withstand the pressure of his nervous fingers, snapped in two, and a lake of sherry flowed over the spotless damask.

Lucy shot a mischievous glance at Gertrude and broke into a merry laugh, while Sir Eustace cried in his loud, jovial voice: "Don't look so glum, man; there's no harm done."

"You have been in some strange places since last we saw you, Mr. Hood," said Gertrude; and her smile steadied him at once.

"Yes," he answered, "and among stranger peoples. The manners and customs of the Tibetans are a trifle more singular than our own, curious though the latter sometimes be."

"Tibet," exclaimed Lucy. "That is the country where the inhabitants fire off electric sparks from their sheepskin coats on the slightest provocation, is it not?"

Hood smiled and was proceeding to explain, when the Colonel interrupted, "I've been there. What did you think of them? A lot of rascally savages and thieves. Eh?"

"Savages and thieves are to be found everywhere," said Hood quietly. "One need not go as far as Tibet to look for them."

"Your powers of observation are profound, sir," remarked the Colonel drily.

"But as to Tibet?" Gertrude hastened to ask, feeling vaguely that there was tension somewhere.

"Personally I found the Tibetans pleasant fellows enough; and as for thieves—why, I have seen bigger rascals in, let us say, Europe, than I ever encountered in the land of the Lamas."

The words were addressed to Gertrude, but as he finished speaking, Hood shifted his eyes to the Colonel's face and held them there for a second. And again Gertrude thrilled with an unpleasant sense of coming trouble.

"Your experience of the Tibetans was fortunate," said Colonel Dubois. "Myself, I was once left with nothing but the clothes I lay down in, for the beggars stole my baggage while I was asleep."

"Were they caught?" inquired Lucy.

"They were," answered the Colonel grimly. "Mounting a swift horse, I set off instantly in pursuit. I came up with them at length, six stalwart desperadoes, each armed to the teeth." He paused.

"Well?" cried Lucy breathlessly. "Don't keep us in such suspense."

"I cut them down to a man," finished the Colonel with a ferocious twist of his moustache, and, it seemed to Gertrude, a significant glance at Hood.

"Can these two have met before?" she wondered within herself. "I understood not. They don't love one another, it is evident. Surely Everard is not silly enough to be jealous of a creature like this." If Hood had but heard that thought expressed in words!

"A swift retribution," Hood was saying as Gertrude's wandering mind strayed back to the conversation; "yet no doubt preferred by them to the life of bondage that falls to the lot of the European criminal."

"Oh, I don't agree with you," said Gertrude. "Life is sweet, and one may come out of prison some day, you know."

"Certainly," assented Everard. "Prisons are rather comfortable places than otherwise, I should imagine—in this country, at all events. But picture what

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existence must be in a chain gang at Portland or Cayenne. I expect you could draw us a lively picture of that, Colonel!"

"I, sir!" exclaimed the Colonel, glaring at him. "What do you mean by that?"

"I naturally thought you would be acquainted with

"Please tell me, there's a dear."

the French convict system," said Hood apologetically, as Gertrude, with something like terror in her face, signalled swiftly to Lucy and rose to withdraw.

But if the Colonel suspected Hood of any covert impertinence, the latter certainly did his best to remove the impression, for he laid himself out to be agreeable with such success that when the two men joined the ladies in the drawing-room they were chatting together in the most amicable fashion. The Colonel had Everard by the arm and was laughing boisterously at something the other had said, his large bulk seeming to dwarf his companion's small, though wiry frame. Gertrude glanced anxiously at them, but something in Hood's eyes reassured her, and taking up a piece of music she sat down at the piano.

"You seem to be getting on capitally with Colonel Dubois," she remarked when a few minutes later she found herself alone with Hood.

"Ah, yes," he answered. "A lively person, very."

"You have never met before?"

"Well, perhaps, once. But I can't be sure. One meets so many people here and there about the world."

"It was not, I presume, in Tibet."

"No; it certainly was not there," said Hood with a quiet smile. "He would be a terrible person to encounter in the wilds."

They both laughed as their eyes met, and in that moment Hood took comfort from something he read in his companion's face. He was about to speak, when Gertrude said, somewhat hurriedly: "I hope your horses are none the worse for their journey down."

"No," answered Hood, taking his cue from her; "I paid them a visit before dinner, and they were looking very fit."

"What are the Colonel's mounts like?" pursued the girl, who had a passion for horses.

"I can't tell you, for he has brought no horses with him. I think he expects Sir Eustace to mount him."

"Really!" exclaimed Gertrude, much surprised. "I understood my father to say that Colonel Dubois was bringing three hunters with him. I must have been mistaken. You will have a good day to-morrow, I think," she continued. "There is no appearance of a frost."

"I hope so," said Hood, "for I expect it will be the last run I shall have for some time."

"Why?" inquired Gertrude.

"I think of sailing for Australia early in the year. I have heard that an exploring party is to start from Melbourne, and I should like to join it."

A shade of trouble came into Gertrude's eyes, and though she strove to speak lightly, there was a note of anxiety in her voice as she answered: "How insatiable you are, Mr. Hood. One would think you must have grown tired of wandering over the face of the earth. Do you never intend to settle down in your own beautiful home?"

"Yes," answered Hood quickly; "the very moment I can persuade someone to share it with me. Gertrude!" He took her hand and looked into her eyes.

"Gertrude!" he said again.

Gertrude blushed hotly. Whether she had lowered her guard by accident or design she alone knew; but she met his glance bravely and left her hand in his.

Everard held it as one in a dream. The swiftness of his own assault and the sudden capitulation of the citadel he had so long besieged in vain, bewildered him. He could not believe in his good fortune. He had nothing to say.

Gertrude understood and felt sorry for him. "Well," she whispered, "are you going to Australia—Everard?"

Hood stooped and kissed her. "No," he said with a poetry very unusual in him; "to Elysium."

Lucy looked keenly at them when she entered the drawing-room a few minutes afterwards. She learnt nothing from their faces, but her keen eyes noted that a rose which Gertrude had been wearing had found its way to the buttonhole of Hood's coat, and she drew her own conclusions. "I'll have it out with her by-and-bye," she thought, while aloud she said: "Come here, Gertrude. You are wanted to settle a point."

"What is it?" asked Gertrude, moving across the room to where Lucy and Colonel Dubois were seated

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upon a couch. Hood followed her and took up his position behind the couch, so that he could feast his eyes upon Gertrude unobserved. In a chair by the fire Sir Eustace slumbered serenely.

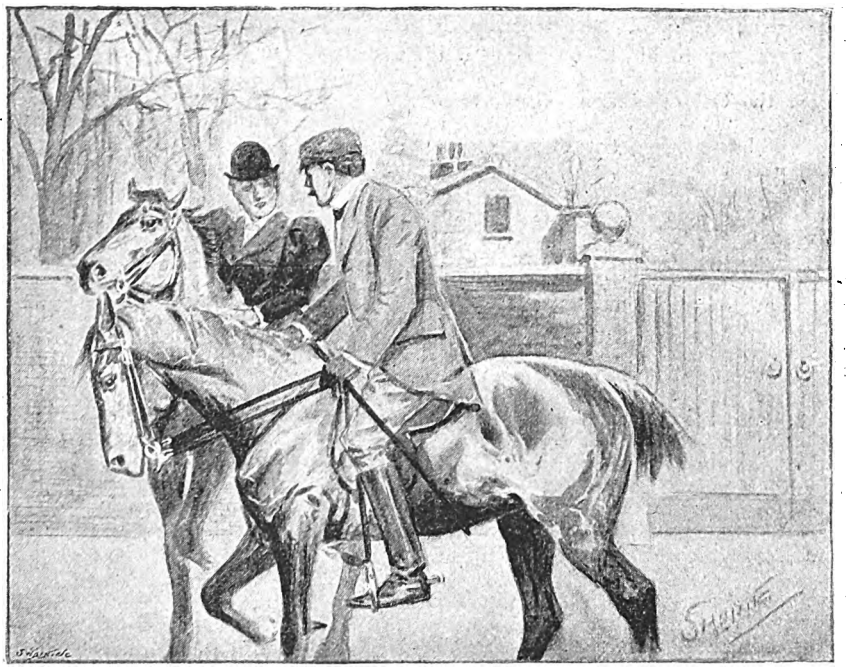
"Colonel Dubois has been entertaining me with some of his adventures," said Lucy. "And very amusing they are, some of them." She laughed—a little derisively, Gertrude thought.

"And I suppose you have been arguing with your usual freedom," her hostess smiled at her.

"No," said Lucy demurely. "I have listened meekly, as a woman should do to the words of a hero. It was only just now that I ventured for the first time to differ with Colonel Dubois."

"And am I to support you?" asked Gertrude.

"We were speaking of jewels just before you came in," went on Lucy, "and Colonel Dubois asserted that the finest rubies he had ever seen were set in the hilt of the scimitar of some Eastern potentate with a name I won't venture to try and pronounce. I suggested that the famous Marston rubies were probably finer. The Colonel doubts the possibility of this, and as I feel sure he will agree with me when once he has seen your rubies, I want you to show them to him and convince him."



"Where do you keep the key of your jewel-safe?"

Gertrude had never yet worn these wonderful gems, and as Lucy spoke the thought crossed her mind that before many months were over she would deck herself in them for somebody's benefit, and she smiled up at Everard. The expression with which he was regarding the Colonel almost startled her, but his face cleared as their eyes met, and he smiled back at her.

"Perhaps it is out of Miss Marston's power to show us the jewels," said the Colonel. "I have no doubt that gems of such value are bestowed elsewhere for safe custody."

"No," answered Gertrude; "they are here. It is a whim of my father's to have them in the house. He argues that if they are not secure here, they cannot be so anywhere else. So they are deposited in a wall safe in my boudoir and I keep the key. I do not like the responsibility, I can assure you."

"Well, no harm has come of it so far," observed Lucy, "and, if the pretty things belonged to me, I confess I should dearly love to have them where I could take an occasional peep at them I am passionately fond of all sorts of gems—particularly rubies."

"They must be a great temptation to the servants, I should think," said the Colonel.

"We have every confidence in them, most of them being old retainers," replied Gertrude coldly.

"You probably owe your immunity from attempts at robbery to the fact that it must be generally supposed that the jewels are not kept here," said Everard. "If the truth were known generally, matters might be different."

"True," agreed the Colonel. "There are some precious clever fellows among the house-breaking fraternity nowadays. I must say I should be inclined to put them in a safer place."

"We are getting no nearer to the point," cried Lucy impatiently. "I want to have it settled that your rubies are finer than any the Colonel has seen."

"They must be very fine indeed to eclipse my friend the Rajah's," said the Colonel. "Perhaps," with one of his killing glances, "you will not object to letting me see and compare them, Miss Marston. I set up to be rather a connoisseur in these things. But if it is too much trouble——"

"Not at all," answered Gertrude, turning away. "I will go and get them."

"Eh! What's that?" said Sir Eustace, who had been awake for a few minutes and, as his habit was, listened to the conversation to gather an idea of what was going on, in the fond belief that it would appear that he had not been to sleep at all. "No, no; it is too late. You shall see the jewels to-morrow. Come, Hood, let us go to the tower. Colonel, you will smoke a cigar before turning in? Be off to bed, girls. The meet is an early one."

"Gertrude," announced Lucy, as she reached her bed-room door, "I'm coming in presently for a good long chat."

"Not to-night," pleaded Gertrude. "I'm so tired, and we have to be up early, you know."

"You can't deceive me, my dear," nodded Lucy. "What did Everard say to you when we were out of the room?"

Gertrude's face was in the shadow, but she laughed as she answered: "Do you want to know very much?"

"I do, indeed. Please tell me, there's a dear."

"He declared most emphatically," said Gertrude

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slowly, "that—he was going to Australia immediately. Good-night. I'm going to lock my door."

What would Sir Eustace Marston have thought if he had seen, some two hours later, a man steal through the dark galleries, revolver in hand, make for the door of Gertrude's boudoir, open it and glide softly in? What would Gertrude have thought had she known that the man who thus entered and who, after localising the safe that held the precious treasure, drew softly behind the window curtains, was Everard Hood?

* * * * *

"Couldn't have a better hunting morning," said Sir Eustace, when they met again at the breakfast table. "Look at the sky. Where's the Colonel? If he doesn't look sharp we must start without him. I thought he was so keen about hunting. Ah, here he comes."

The door opened, and Colonel Dubois appeared, limping laboriously and with an expression of pain upon his handsome face.

"Good gracious! What is the matter, Colonel?" cried Sir Eustace, springing to his feet. "Have you met with an accident?"

"No, no," answered the Colonel, sinking slowly into a chair beside Gertrude. "It is merely an old wound I got in the knee when fighting the Arabs. It troubles me much at times, and I fear the cold journey of yesterday has affected it badly."

"But you can't sit a horse in that condition," said Sir Eustace plaintively.

"I fear not," replied the Colonel deprecatingly. "However, never mind about me. I will try and make myself happy by the smoking-room fire while you are away."

"So very annoying," grumbled Sir Eustace. "Really I think you two girls ought to stay at home and keep the poor fellow company."

"Not for the world," said the Colonel earnestly. "It would give me far more pain than I now suffer were I to be the means of spoiling your sport. Pray do not think of such a thing for a moment."

"After all, you will not be left so very long alone," said Sir Eustace. "Half-a-dozen people will arrive after luncheon, and I expect we shall be back between four and five."

"That will do famously," agreed the Colonel, glancing at Everard, who just then rose and left the room.

"Send my man to me in the library, please, Jenkins," Hood asked the butler, whom he met in the hall.

"Yes, sir."

"I have something to say to you, Williams," began Hood when his man joined him. "Attend carefully and carry out all I say to the letter. A great deal depends upon your doing so."

Williams was an old campaigner upon whom Hood could thoroughly rely, for they had been together in many an out-of-the-way place, and though the nature of the instructions he now received was sufficiently surprising, he made no comment, asked no questions, but simply promised obedience. Whereupon Hood left him and hastened to the front door, where the party, minus the disabled warrior, were preparing to mount their hacks.

Hood assisted Gertrude into her saddle, and swung into his own. Then, after waiting until Lucy and Sir Eustace had ridden some little distance ahead, he said: "I shall ride as far as the meet with you, Gertrude, and then I must leave you, as I have some very important business to attend to. You will not mind, I hope."

"I shall mind very much indeed, sir," answered Gertrude, with a little pout. "Can you not lay aside your business on this particular morning?"

"No," said Hood, with a smile; "not even on this particular morning. My business refuses to wait. Do not draw attention to my absence, though. In fact, Gertrude, I may as well tell you I am preparing a little surprise for you."

"A surprise for me!" echoed Gertrude. "Is it a pleasant one?"

"In a way, yes," answered Hood. "It has its disagreeable side; but that may be discounted if the—the surprise comes off as I expect it to. Don't ask me any more."

"Oh, you are too tantalising, Everard. I would rather you had told me nothing, dear, than so little."

"Where do you keep the key of your jewel-safe?" asked Hood suddenly, with apparent irrelevance.

"Upon this." She touched a fine gold chain that wound like bangles round her wrist. "It is very small, you see, and it never leaves me, though I do not always wear it here."

"Will you lend it to me for a few hours?"

"Everard!"

"I admit the request is an extraordinary one. But will you humour my whim?"

Something in his face checked Gertrude as she was about to speak, and, without another word, she unwound the chain from her wrist and handed it to him. In another moment they came in sight of the meet.

As the groom led up his hunter, Hood changed mounts to avoid exciting observation and comment and mingled for a few moments with the crowd. But as soon as the cheery "Gone away!" pealed through the crisp air, he pulled his horse back and, leaving the field to find their way after the cracks who were already sailing over the first fence, wheeled round and rode towards the groom, whom he mightily astonished by dismounting.

"I shall not follow to-day, Tom," he explained; "so lead Brown Man home again. I am going down into the village to do a little business and then I shall return. Look out for me at the stables, not at the front. And, Tom"—he slipped a sovereign into the groom's hand—"if you should see anybody—Colonel Dubois, for instance—don't mention my return."

"Very good, sir," answered Tom, and Hood, remounting his cob, trotted rapidly off to the village, which lay, with its tiny railway station, some two miles from Marston Manor.

He alighted at the post office, where he wrote out a lengthy telegram, which he handed to the post-mistress, who started with surprise and looked inquisitively at him as she read it over.

Hood noted the start. "It would be a great pity," he said gravely, "a very great pity, indeed, if it were to leak out that anything exceptional in the way of a telegram had been sent from here this morning."

The post-mistress, a fat, florid person of middle age, notorious for her love of gossip, flushed deeply, but received the hint in silence, and Hood, pocketing his change, left, and rode back to the Manor House, where he found Tom awaiting him at the stables.

Assured that all was quiet, Hood entered the house by the back door, ascended the servants' stairs and reached his own room unobserved by anyone but a solitary chambermaid, who stared at him in some astonishment. Williams, who was sitting in a chair by the door, started up as his master entered.

"Well, have you anything to report?" asked Hood.

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"Not much, sir," answered Williams. "The maids were busy about the bed-rooms until some twenty minutes since; but he must have been on the watch, for shortly after they had gone away he came downstairs very quietly and made for the young

Seated .... by the fire, reading the TIMES.

lady's room. He was almost at the door when I came out of this room into the corridor with your coat in one hand, and a clothes-brush in the other. At sight of me he pulls up short. 'Oh!' says he, sharp and sudden, as if he couldn't help himself. With that, he claps his hand to his leg and limps downstairs to the hall. But he hadn't much of a limp when first I caught sight of him, sir."

"You are sure he has not come up again and gone to his room?"

"Quite, sir. His room is just above your own. Besides, I must have seen him if he had come up. I took a peep over the well of the staircase after he had gone down, and he was steering for the tower. I expect he's in the smoking-room now."

"Well, we must not lose time," said Hood. "Have you got what I told you to get?"

"Yes, sir," replied Williams with a subdued grin. He opened a wardrobe and brought out something which he handed to Hood. "Hold it carefully, sir," he warned. "There's no mistake about it."

Hood took the thing gingerly enough, and walked out of the room. "Go to the well of the staircase and look over, Williams," he ordered. "He will not come up if he sees you there."

Williams took up his position, while Hood made his way to Gertrude's boudoir, the door of which he softly closed and locked behind him.

He soon had the safe open, and, rummaging among its contents, lifted out a square, brass-bound box, which he set upon a chair beside him. Then with a good deal of care, he placed the thing he carried in his hand on the floor of the safe and covered it lightly with papers. He then closed the safe, leaving the key, with the chain attached to it, in the lock, took up the box, and returned to his own room, where he placed his precious burden under lock and key once more.

"All right, Williams," he said to his man. "Go back to your post of observation and keep carefully out of sight. As soon as he comes upstairs, no matter when, lock the door leading to the servants' stairs and bring me the key."

He went downstairs and entered the smoking-room, where he found Colonel Dubois seated in a chair by the fire, reading the *Times*.

At sight of him the Colonel dropped his paper with an exclamation of surprise. "Back again already, Mr. Hood," he said. "The run must have been very short."

"I am alone," explained Hood. "I did not start, as my horse cast a shoe. How is your leg?"

"Rather better, thanks; but very painful still." He rose as Hood filled his pipe and took up an illustrated paper. "Excuse me, I must go upstairs and get a handkerchief."

"Let me ring," said Hood, springing towards the bell. "The less you move about the better, I should say."

The Colonel sat down again. "You are very kind," he said. "Don't trouble, please; I find I have one here. Do you know by what train Sir Eustace's guests are expected?"

"They will be here shortly after three, I believe." They chatted in a desultory fashion for half-an-hour or so, when the butler appeared and announced luncheon.

Hood rose at once. "Are you coming?" he asked. "Or would you like something sent in here?"

"I'll come with you," said the Colonel, rising, after a moment's hesitation, and hobbling to the door.

The meal was not a very lively one, though Hood ate with a good appetite. But the Colonel seemed abstracted and merely trifled with his food.

"Your leg appears to pain you a good deal," remarked Hood as they finished. "Come back into the smoking-room and forget your troubles in tobacco. I can offer you a very excellent weed."

The Colonel hesitated again, but finally accepted the offer and they returned to the tower.

"Confoundedly sleepy sort of day," observed Hood, blowing rings of smoke into the air. He looked at his watch. "Half-past two. They will be here in an hour or so."

"If you will excuse me, I will go to my room and lie down," said the Colonel. "This pain is becoming intolerable."

"A good idea," acquiesced Hood, "I shall curl up here and take forty winks myself. *Au revoir*." He threw himself back in his chair with a yawn. But the moment the door closed behind the Colonel his languor vanished and he sat up with an expectant look upon his face.

Ten minutes later Williams entered. "Here's the key of the back stairs, sir," he said, handing it over. "He's in the young lady's room now, sir."

"Off you go then," returned Hood, pocketing the key. "Let me know when he comes out again."

Williams was back again almost immediately. "He's out now, sir," he grinned, "and gone up to his own room.

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He's got it hot, sir, for his hand was under his coat and he was swearing hard to himself."

Hood raced upstairs to his own room, fetched the jewel-box, and replaced it in the safe, which he re-locked, and, descending once more, sat down very contentedly in front of the great fire that blazed in the hall.

Presently Williams reappeared. "He came down, sir," he explained to Hood, "and tried the backstairs. Finding the door locked he went back to his room."

"Leave him there, then," said Hood. "It is unlikely that he will try this way before it grows dark. But keep within touch, for we must detain him by force, if necessary."

Four o'clock struck, and the short December day had already grown dark enough to justify the butler's query whether Mr. Hood would like the lamps lit.

"Not yet," answered Hood. "Wait till the people come."

He waited with some impatience until the clock chimed the half-hour. Then, as the noise of wheels and clatter of hoofs on the gravel announced that the house party and the sportsmen had arrived together, he sprang to his feet and hurried to the front door, where in the bustle of dismounting and greeting he managed to whisper to Gertrude: "Here is the key. Get the rubies when I ask for them."

He went airily out.

He had left her side before she could express her surprise at these singular instructions, and made his way to the dog-cart, from which two stalwart, well set-up men were descending. They were quietly dressed and there was nothing about them to indicate that they were not a couple of guests whom Sir Eustace had invited to the house.

He led the way into the library, where, after a short conversation, he left the two men and rejoined the party in the hall, which was now a blaze of light.

"What did you desert us for, Hood?" queried Sir Eustace, interrupting. "We had a splendid run. Where is Colonel Dubois?"

"In his room, I believe. He complained a good deal of the pain his leg gave him."

"Who is Colonel Dubois?" asked Lady Oliver. "I don't remember to have met him."

"Oh, a very good fellow indeed," said Sir Eustace. "I forget who introduced him to me. It was at—I forget where just now. But a good fellow—a capital fellow. Has travelled all over the world—fought his way through most of it, I believe. Very good company—tells a story better than anyone I ever heard, and——"

"Hush!" interposed Gertrude. "He is coming downstairs."

The Colonel seemed rather surprised to see so many people in the hall and half turned upon the first landing as though to re-ascend. He altered his mind, however, and continued his limping descent as Sir Eustace came forward to meet him with a cheery, "Well, Colonel, how is the leg?"

"So bad, I am sorry to say," was the answer, "that I was just coming in search of you to ask you to be good enough to let me have a carriage over to Great Marston. There is a train from there at a quarter to six, which I can catch and return to town."

"Don't go because you are afraid of giving trouble," urged Sir Eustace kindly. "We will make you as comfortable as we possibly can."

"You are most kind," murmured the Colonel. "But I know the symptoms too well. I am in for a regular bout of it and shall probably be laid up for a week or ten days. I should prefer to go. I should, indeed."

"Well, if you insist upon it," agreed his host, turning away, rather disappointed, to give the necessary order.

While the Colonel and Sir Eustace were conversing, Hood had slipped quietly upstairs. He now rejoined the group and addressed Dubois.

"Come and sit down, Colonel, till the carriage is ready," he urged. "You must not tire your leg." He drew the Colonel towards a chair, the back of which was immediately opposite to the library door.

The Colonel took the cup of tea with his left hand and set it upon his knees. His right hand was thrust deeply into the pocket of his coat.

"What is the matter with your hand, Colonel?" asked Hood. "I can see the end of a bandage. Have you an old wound there as well?"

The Colonel forced a laugh. "No," he answered; "a new one. I—the fact is—my wretched leg. I had a tumbler in my hand. I slipped to the floor. It broke and cut my fingers rather badly."

"What an unfortunate fellow you are, Dubois," said Sir Eustace. "Upon my word I'm sorry for you."

Somehow the Colonel looked very sorry for himself, nor did his face grow less sombre when Gertrude, who had slipped away for a moment in response to a whisper from Hood, returned with the jewel-box.

"You must see these before you go away, Colonel," she said, opening the box. "Confess, now, that you have never seen anything finer in the way of rubies."

"No," admitted Dubois, with something like a sigh, as the chorus of admiration arose. "Nothing, nothing—Ah! I am sure I hear the carriage."

"You are in a terrible hurry," said Sir Eustace. "You will have a long time to wait at the station if you start so soon. What did you say, Hood?"

"If the Colonel has time to listen to it," began Hood, "I can tell him a story about these particular gems which will interest him, since he has a partiality for gems in general. It so happened," he went on quickly, "that I had an uneasy feeling regarding the safety of the Marston rubies, so took it into my head to keep watch all last night in Miss Marston's boudoir. Nothing came of that watch, and this morning I asked Miss Marston for the key of the safe in which the gems were kept. I was still uneasy about them and I had a notion that there were rats in the house. Now, as everyone knows, rats have a terrible partiality for precious stones—sit down, Colonel, I shall soon have finished—therefore, I opened the safe, took out the casket, and substituted this." He drew one hand from behind his back, and held up before the eyes of the astonished company a steel rat trap, along the toothed grasp of which ran an ugly, dark stain.

There was an ominous pause. Gertrude, pale with

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terror, fastened her gaze upon Dubois, who had risen to his feet, and with his body bent slightly forward, glared ferociously at Hood, while his left hand crept slowly up to the breast of his coat.

"I caught something, as you see," continued Hood, keeping a wary eye upon the creeping hand. "And it must have been a large rat, too, for it walked off with the trap, and laid it in Colonel Dubois' room. *I hope you are not badly hurt, Colonel!*"

At the cue, for cue it was, there was a sudden rush from the library, the Colonel's dangerous left hand was struck swiftly down to his side, his wounded right wrenched with little ceremony from his pocket. Something gleamed in the firelight, there was a sharp click, and Lucy's Viking stood a handcuffed prisoner between Hood's two mysterious friends.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Hood. "That was well and neatly done. Now, Anatole Baptiste, alias Colonel Dubois, alias I don't know how many more high-sounding names and titles, I think you will admit that your very pretty plot to carry off the Marston rubies has been foiled."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Sir Eustace. "Hood, what are you thinking of? Colonel, what does this mean? Dear me, a gentleman whom I met at—Where was it I met you, Colonel? and who was introduced by no less a person than—Who was it? I can't for the life of me remember. But—but—there must be a mistake somewhere. Colonel Dubois, why don't you speak? Can't you explain?"

Dubois had recovered his *sangfroid*. "I am as much at a loss as you can be, Sir Eustace," he said. "I see that I am indebted to Mr. Hood for my present uncomfortable position; but what is his charge? Am I supposed to have stolen gems, which at present lie upon the table? Mr. Hood must be out of his senses to suggest such a thing. Be kind enough to remove these handcuffs," he added to the detectives at his side. But they only smiled knowingly.

"You had better catch the train," said Everard, "or you will have to spend the night here; but first——" He made a sign, and while one of the men rapidly "went through" the Colonel, the other ransacked his portmanteau, which stood upon a chair hard by.

"Nothing but this, sir," said the man who had searched the Colonel, and handed a small ring case to Hood, who passed it on to Gertrude.

"My mother's ring!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Everard, and but for you I should have lost everything!"

"Bless me!" gasped Sir Eustace again as the second detective produced from the portmanteau several jewel-cases and a choice selection of the family plate. "You rascal!" he cried, turning upon the Colonel. "You rascally thief! I—I—oh! if only I could remember the name of the other rascal who foisted you upon me, I'd —I'd——"

Dubois laughed. "You've had no reason to regret the introduction, Sir Eustace," he said coolly. "You have got the best of me so far, Mr. Hood. That was a scurvy trick to play though, and I own I did not give you credit for so much ingenuity. I attributed this little accident to Miss Marston's cleverness." He held up his hands with a bow and a smile towards Gertrude. "Well, no matter, I shall not be in for ever on account of a trifle like this, and when I come out again, look to yourself, Mr. Hood." He laughed in a rather ugly fashion.

"You will have plenty of time for deliberation, Monsieur Baptiste," answered Hood; "for when we have done with you on this side, I expect the French police will present you with a little account for settlement. Indeed, I should not be surprised if they urged a prior claim." Then to the detectives: "You had better be off. You will only just do it."

"Good-bye!" cried the Colonel as he moved off between the two men. "A merry Christmas to you all when it comes. Drink my health at dinner to-night, Sir Eustace, will you? Miss Lucy, I am sure we should have become good friends but for this untoward accident. Miss Marston, I feel almost repaid for my ill luck by the knowledge that I was not the means of inflicting pain upon so charming a lady as yourself. Good-night! Good-night!" And he went airily out.

"The smooth-tongued rascal!" said Sir Eustace, as the door closed behind Dubois and his guards. "How could I have been such a fool! Hood, I don't know what I owe you. How did you discover the fellow's game?"

"Mr. Hood will demand payment in full before long, or I am much mistaken," whispered Lucy to Lady Oliver, with a roguish glance at Gertrude.

"Well," replied Hood, "I happened to be in Paris three years ago when Anatole Baptiste, or Colonel Dubois as he called himself here, was sentenced to deportation for a cleverly executed jewel robbery. I was present at the trial when the sentence was passed and was much struck with the appearance and cultured style of the prisoner. I learnt later that he was a man of good education and respectable parentage, though, evidently, his talents had been perverted. The man's personality was so marked that it impressed itself on my memory, and though I never heard of his escape, and though he had dyed his hair and moustache"—"Oh, my Viking," sighed Lucy in Gertrude's ear—"I knew him at once when we met at the railway station yesterday. You may have noticed his irritation at my reference to Cayenne last night. That, and the way in which he brought the conversation round to the rubies after dinner, made me doubly sure, and I determined to watch him. I gave him no opportunity to play any tricks during my absence from the house this morning, and I kept him in play till it was almost time for the detectives to arrive, having made matters easy for him by leaving the key in the safe."

"What amazes me is that, knowing you were in the house, he ventured to make the attempt at all," said Lady Oliver.

"I imagine he merely intended to spy out the land and lay his plans," answered Hood; "but the temptation of an open safe was too much for him, as I thought."

The company dispersed, some upstairs, some to the smoking-room, and Gertrude, with a backward glance at Everard, entered the library. Before he could follow her, Lucy sped after her friend.

"Gertrude," she whispered, "are you not an arrant humbug? Confess, now, it is all settled."

"Well, I suppose I may as well admit that it is," said Gertrude with a blush.

Lucy shook a merry finger at her. "Oh, my poor Viking!" she cried. "I can't help feeling sorry for him; he looked so splendid. And you told me, Gertrude, that Mr. Hood was not your ideal."

"I don't believe I did," returned Gertrude, smiling at Everard, who just then entered the room; "but at all events, you will admit that I have found an excellent substitute for yours."

REGINALD HORSLEY.

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Impedimenta.

In the chaos of trunks upon the steamship dock, the portmanteau and the Saratoga trunk found themselves side by side. Under the circumstances it was awkward; but the portmanteau belonged to a man of the world, and difficult positions were his *forte*.

The ice must be broken; and the portmanteau made the first plunge.

"I believe we have met before, mademoiselle?" he remarked to the trunk.

"I should not have thought," rather coldly replied the Saratoga, "that you would care to recall the circumstances. They were, at the least, distinctly painful."

"You allude, mademoiselle, to the episode of our two proprietors? That was undoubtedly painful: but I cannot see why it should affect our relations."

The Saratoga trunk was silent for a moment, and then answered in mollified tones: "You are right, monsieur. Our owners' love quarrel need not extend to us. We are not in love."

"Mademoiselle must speak for herself," said the portmanteau gallantly. "By-the-way, the first scene of that unhappy drama occurred——"

"At Waterloo Station. You remember, he intended crossing with her to New York, and settling their difficulties *en route*. But she cut him dead at the station."

"I remember," cried the portmanteau. "She was superintending your transfer to the luggage-van at the time. I lay on the platform ready and labelled: but after her cruel behaviour he had me sent back to the hotel. Two days after we left London for the East."

"Ah, the dear East! It was there we met first, was it not?"

"Yes; at Shepheard's Hotel. My master was coming back from India, and of course he had to see Cairo."

"And we belonged to a party of globe-trotting Americans on a Nile voyage. I remember being placed next you on the verandah at Shepheard's. My mistress stole a look at your labels; and I heard her say to her married sister: 'This valise belongs to a Captain Richard Assheton. I wonder what he is like, and why he spells his name with a double "s."'"

"The idea of calling me a valise! So American?" interjected the portmanteau. "Still your mistress was a very charming young woman, and deliciously sprightly."

"She is charming still, though scarcely so sprightly. Do you knew, *mon cher*, I actually believe that she felt that episode sadly."

The portmanteau sniffed impatiently. "Then why did she act so?" he exclaimed. "It was all her fault."

"Nothing of the kind," the Saratoga retorted. "It was the fault of your Captain Assheton"

There was another silence, broken by the portmanteau. "Well," he said, "we need not quarrel about it. I remember when my master saw your mistress first. He asked a servant her name; and I heard him repeating several times: 'By Jove! This Miss Carrie Dunham is a deucedly pretty girl!'"

"It certainly showed his good taste. She noticed him, too; because I heard her talking about him to her sister. Then they met on the excursion to the Grand Pyramid."

"So I heard. And the acquaintance ripened into his joining the party."

The Saratoga tittered. "I can recall the tender fashion in which he looked after me at Port Said," she murmured. "You were quite neglected, *mon ami*."

"Oh, but Miss Dunham kept me in mind. I can still hear her begging the Captain not to 'forget his dear old portmanteau.'"

"The first proposal occurred at Malta. She came down to the state room and told the whole story to her sister. She was sitting on me at the time."

"She had put him on probation. I heard him tell his friend McClean. He was to meet her in London and receive her final answer. Ah, that answer! How can you females act so cruelly?"

"Cruelly, monsieur? Nonsense! My dear mistress had no alternative but to act so after the conduct of Captain Assheton."

The portmanteau was astounded, and said so. "I cannot penetrate your meaning," he cried.

"Your nation, monsieur, is proverbially slow of comprehension. But it is surely hypocritical on your part to pretend a lack of knowledge of your master's frailties. You must be well aware that in Paris he so far forgot his alleged love for my mistress as to pay court to Mdlle. Fanny Patte-en-haut at the Folies Bergères. Nay, did he not present that notorious creature with a gorgeous diamond tiara in full view of the audience. My mistress's brother-in-law was in the audience, and saw him do it."

The portmanteau uttered a sharp exclamation. "And such," he said, "was the reason why Miss Dunham rejected my master when he came to London, refusing all explanation; and why she subsequently cut him dead at Waterloo Station?"

"Such was the reason," tartly answered the Saratoga; "and a very sound reason, too, so far as I can see."

The portmanteau burst into a fit of laughter, much to his companion's disgust. Long and vigorously he laughed, ceasing at last only from sheer exhaustion.

"And now," said the trunk, "perhaps, monsieur, you will be good enough to explain the cause of your—your cachinnatory hysteria."

"What a clever trunk you must be, mademoiselle, to use such long words! Anyone can see that you came from Boston. The cause of my merriment, eh? Well, I was laughing over the very ridiculous mistake made by your mistress and her donkey of a brother-in-law."

"Mistake, monsieur?"

"Certainly. The superb tiara which my master gave to poor little Fanny Patte-en-haut did not belong to him at all. He was merely an instrument in the presentation. The tiara was a gift from the Rajah of Bundleapore, who had seen Fanny the previous summer in Paris. He sent the diamonds to her from India in the care of his friend, Captain Assheton; I ought to know

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because they were stowed away inside me all the way from Madras. The whole story was in the Parisian papers at the time; and if your mistress's brother-in-law had taken the trouble to read them——"

"He does not speak or read French, poor fellow."

"Ah, that explains it. And so, because of his ignorance, two young hearts are to be severed and two happy lives blighted in their prime!"

"It is very sad!" sighed the Saratoga sympathetically.

"Sad? By Jove! mademoiselle. It is criminal. But let us consider. Is there no way by which things may be set right? Here we are about to enter the United States together. I am labelled for Newport."

"And so am I. Dear me, Monsieur Portmanteau, I never wished that I had the power of human speech so fervently as I do now! I should lose no time in apprising my dear mistress of that hideous mistake about Fanny Patte-en-haut."

"Human speech is out of the question," said the portmanteau. "We must hit upon some other scheme. Ah, I have it!"

"Monsieur, you are a genius."

"You flatter me, mademoiselle. And yet the plan is not a bad one. This morning, as Banks was packing me, he wrapped some novels in an old newspaper and placed them right under my lid, on top of everything else. I can feel them there now. What, think you, was the newspaper used?"

"Indeed, I cannot guess," said the Saratoga.

"It was a copy of the *Gaulois*, containing a full account of the presentation of Fanny Patte-en-haut on behalf of the Rajah of Bundleapore. I am sure, because Banks read it over with a reminiscent chuckle before he wrapped it round the novels."

"But how about your plan?"

"Is it possible that you have not surmised my plan? In a few minutes the Customs House people will come along. I shall simply slip when they open me, and cause those novels and the *Gaulois* in which they are wrapped to fall in your direction. You can roll over slightly and possess yourself of the newspaper. When your mistress, or that perky French maid of hers, comes along, take care that she notices the *Gaulois*; and leave the rest to fortune."

"A good plan, monsieur; but too much is left to fortune, I fear. And here come the Customs House officials, with Mr. Banks to open you. Now for it!"

The portmanteau strained himself with excitement, until his straps creaked again.

II.

THE Customs House inspection was in progress. Miss Dunham and Capt. Richard Assheton stood near their respective heaps of luggage, while the latter's valet and the former's maid attended more directly to the matters in hand.

As Clarisse, the maid in question, was about to unlock the Saratoga trunk, her quick eyes caught sight of a newspaper lying on the dock floor.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "*Le Gaulois!* It is a good omen, this message from *la patrie*."

She raised the paper and, glancing at the year-old headings, was about to throw it away again, when an article in the centre column arrested her attention. She read it carefully to the end with an astonished little "*Mon Dieu!*" and "*Ma foi!*" at every sentence. Finally, forgetting all about the Customs officials she tripped towards her mistress, newspaper in hand.

"Oh, mademoiselle! What an occurrence! What a providence!" she exclaimed, pointing to the article in the *Gaulois*. It was a long article, and it described in truly Gallic fashion the presentation to Mdlle. Patte-en-haut from H.S.H. the Rajah of Bundleapore, through the medium of the Rajah's obliging friend, Capt. Richard Assheton.

Miss Dunham gasped when she read this revelation. Then her fine eyes filled with tears and she turned sadly to her maid.

"Oh, Clarisse!" she whispered. "And I refused him for that, and cut him so cruelly at Waterloo last year, and—and travelled all the way over in the same ship without speaking to him once. And all the time I have loved him. What shall I do, Clarisse?"

Here Miss Dunham sank back upon the dock railing.

Clarisse's eyes brightened. "*Mon Dieu!*" she cried, "I have a scheme. If mademoiselle will only consent to a little innocent deception—a little private theatricals, as it were—all will be well."

"I will do anything in reason," sobbed Miss Dunham.

"*Eh bien!* Does mademoiselle observe her Saratoga trunk yonder. Good; mademoiselle must pretend to faint, and fall back upon the trunk. It will not hurt, as I can catch mademoiselle as she falls. Naturally M. le Capitaine will see, and, being a gallant gentleman, he will come to the rescue. Leave the rest to me."

Miss Dunham bit her lip. She did not like the scheme.

"It is the only way," whispered Clarisse, the tempter. "Otherwise the last chance is gone."

Miss Dunham yielded; and a few minutes later the bustle of that section of the dock was interrupted by the fainting of a young and beautiful lady.

As fast as his legs could carry him, Captain Assheton reached the Saratoga trunk and its precious burden. Clarisse gazed at him tearfully.

"Ah, M. le Capitaine!" she murmured. "It is all about you."

"About me!" said Assheton gruffly. "Can't see why my presence should make her faint, considering we came over together without exchanging a word."

Clarisse held out the newspaper, "*Voila!*" she exclaimed. "It is only this minute that mademoiselle learnt the true story of that affair at the Folies Bergères."

Then, while eagerly chafing her mistress's face and hands, she poured into Assheton's ears the whole story of the mistaken brother-in-law and the natural error of Miss Dunham.

Just as the narrative ended, Miss Dunham opened her eyes. They met those of Capt. Assheton.

"Carrie!" said the Captain. "Is this true? This about the mistake?"

"Oh, Dick!" cried Miss Dunham, "it is quite true. How can you ever forgive me?"

It was at this point that Capt. Richard Assheton relieved Mdlle. Clarisse, and assisted Miss Dunham to a cab.

* * * * *

"Well?" said the portmanteau to the Saratoga trunk, as they were being hoisted into the same waggon. "How did my little plan come off?"

"Ah, *mon cher!*" cried the trunk ecstatically. "It was admirable. There will be a wedding before Advent."

"And then we shall always travel together, you and I?"

But the Saratoga trunk was coy, and answered not.

GERALD BRENAN.

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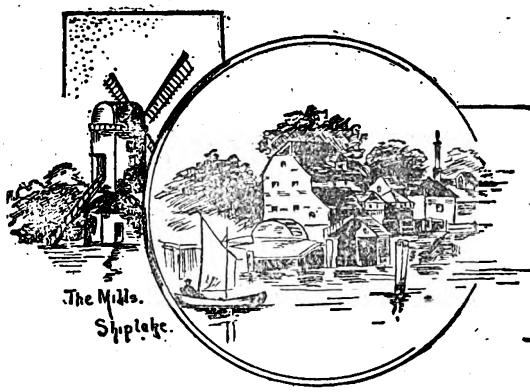

NONA LE MAQUET.

SOME years ago I passed several weeks at a fishing village on the coast of Brittany. What a hole it was! But how picturesque! A miserable anchorage, for ten boats at the most; a single stony street, which I can compare to nothing better than a mountain torrent. On top of the hill, a church, a veritable gothic toy, which stood in the middle of a cemetery from which a magnificent view of the ocean was obtained. Finding myself in the vein for work, I lingered in this out-of-the-way corner until the end of the month of September, which by a rare chance in rainy Finisterre was, that year, exceptionally mild and clear.

But one cannot always compose verses and write, and a walk was my hygiene and my distraction. My most frequent promenade was along the beach, having on my right the bleak and rocky cliffs, and on my left the uncovered stretches of sand—an immense desert of sand, left bare by the out-going tide.

Two or three times I had exchanged civilities with some Custom House officer going his rounds, his gun slung over his shoulder. I was so regular and peaceful a promenader that the sea swallows were no longer afraid of me, and hopped in front of me, leaving the print of their star-shaped feet in the wet sand. I walked six or eight kilometres a day, and returned home with my pockets filled with those dainty shells which are found by burying the hand deep down in the damp pebbles.

This was my favourite excursion. However, on the days when a strong breeze was blowing, and the tide was very high, I abandoned the sea-shore, and, climbing the village street, I strolled along the sandy moor, or else I settled myself with a book on a bench in a corner of the cemetery, which was sheltered by the church tower from the west end.

It was a lovely spot, conducive to sadness and reverie. The church tower stood out against the autumn sky, over which dark clouds were scurrying. Crows, whose nests were in the steeple, flew out with their hoarse cawing, and the shadow of their large wings glided over the scattered tombstones, almost hidden in the grass.

In the evening more than at any other time, the last rays of the setting sun, bathing the sea as though with blood, the ragged branches of the skeleton of an old apple tree, silhouetted against the crimson sky, and the deep, intense stillness of the wild home of the dead flooded my soul with melancholy.

It was on such an evening as I have just described, that wandering among the tombs, many of which bore under the sailor's name this mournful legend, "Died at Sea," that I read on a new cross the following words, which astonished and puzzled me:

HERE REPOSES
NONA LE MAQUET.
Died at sea, October 26th, 1873, at the age of nineteen.

Died at sea. A young girl! Women hardly ever go out in the fishing boats. How did this happen?

"Well, monsieur," said a gruff voice behind me suddenly. "You are looking at poor Nona's tomb?"

I turned round and recognised an old sailor, with a wooden leg, whose good graces I had acquired by the aid of a few glasses of brandy, which I had given him in the tap-room at the inn.

"Yes," I replied. "But I thought that you fishermen never permitted women to go out with you? I have even been told that they bring you misfortune."

"And that is the truth," responded the good man. "Besides, Nona never went into a boat. Would you like to know how the poor little one died? Well, I will relate the story to you.

"First of all, I must tell you that Pierre, her father, was a top-man, like myself, and an old comrade. At Bourget, when Admiral La Ronciere raised his golden helmet on the point of his sword, and we flung ourselves, hatchet in hand, on the embattled houses, we marched elbow to elbow, Pierre and I, and it was he who received me in his arms when those cursed Prussians put a ball in my thigh.

"That same evening, in the ambulance at the fort, Pierre held my hand to give me courage while the surgeon amputated my limb; and he was there at my bed-side when the Admiral brought me my medal. But those rascally Prussians got the best of us, and we were sent home. I, with my wooden leg, was practically helpless. But Pierre, who was uninjured, went on board a fishing smack. Very soon afterwards his wife died from an intermittent fever, leaving him the care of little Nona, who was getting on for ten years of age.

"Naturally, while the widower was at sea, it was I, his comrade, I, the old bachelor, who cared for the little one. She was a good and pretty child, monsieur; courageous and sweet-tempered. We very often went to the rocks at low tide to gather mussels, shrimps, prawns, and sometimes we were fortunate enough to find a lobster. Ah! but we were good friends.

"This went on for about two years. Nona had made her first communion, grown and shot up like a thistle in the sand. But one day, the *Amelia*, le Maquet's boat, was overtaken in a storm and wrecked. The skipper did not haul in his sail soon enough, and the boat struck on

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that reef you can see over there; just a little more to the starboard. There were four men in the crew—the skipper, two sailors, and my poor Pierre. But the sea only gave up three of the drowned men, and retained my comrade. Nona became an orphan. It goes without saying that I did my best to replace her father.

"But the child, even after the first sorrow passed away, did not seem to console herself. And, do you know why, monsieur? Because of an idea all the women around here have. They believe that a soul must remain in pain unto the Judgment Day unless it reposes in consecrated ground. We men do not believe in all this nonsense when we know what happens when there is a death on board ship. But Nona could not be forced to believe other than the women had taught her, and continued to burn candles at all the Bardons in the neighbouring towns for the repose of her father's soul.

"However, in spite of everything, Time is a famous merchant of forgetfulness, and Nona, after a few years, appeared to me to become somewhat reconciled. Besides, her grief had not prevented her from growing handsomer and taking a pride in herself, and it is not because I loved her like a father, but, upon my honour, she was the freshest and prettiest young girl in the parish. We lived so happily together. We were not rich, to be sure, but we lived and we enjoyed ourselves all the same. I had my pension and my medal, and then we used to go together to hunt for lobsters in the rocks. The trade is a paying one, and there is only one danger, that of being overtaken by the tide. Ah, unfortunately that was how she met her death, poor little one!

"One day, when my rheumatism confined me to the house, she went fishing alone. It was just such a day as to-day, the sky clear, the wind high. When the rock searchers gathered together with full baskets, they perceived that Nona failed to respond to their calls. There was no possible doubt. Great God! she had been delayed and surrounded by the rising tide. She had been drowned! Ah! what a night I passed, monsieur! At my age, yes, a hard-hearted man like me, I sobbed like a woman. And the remembrance came to me of the poor child's belief that to go to heaven she must be interred in consecrated ground. Therefore, as soon as the tide went down, I went to the shore, and with others searched for the body.

"And we found my poor Nona," continued the old sailor, in a trembling voice. "We found her on a rock covered with seaweed, where knowing that she was going to die the poor little one had prepared herself for death. Yes, monsieur, she had tied her skirts below her knees with her fichu, through modesty, and, with her old idea uppermost, had attached herself to the seaweed by her hair, her beautiful black hair, certain that she would be found and interred in consecrated ground. And I can say, I, who know what bravery is, that there is, perhaps, not a man brave enough to do likewise."

FRANÇOIS COPPÉE.

THE TAIL OF A KITE.

OLD Pierre Bernard was hammering away on the sole of a shoe. He was a cobbler and occupied a small shop on the outskirts of a city. His family consisted of himself and grandson, little Pierre, who was ten years of age. Behind the shop was a room which served as a parlour, bed-room, and kitchen. The cooking was done by Bernard himself, who possessed some knowledge of the culinary art.

Old Pierre's reputation was not of the best; though he had never been detected in a really dishonest act, he was known to be tricky. But he had a genial manner, was always ready to talk, and his shop became a rendezvous for male gossips who liked to chat about the affairs of the day. On this particular morning two of the fraternity sauntered in.

"Good-morning, Pierre," said Caleb Gibson. "How's business?"

"Bad," answered Bernard, shaking his head. "I can't compete with store prices, and it is a hard matter to keep body and soul together."

"Body and soul, eh?" said Caleb, chuckling at his attempt at wit. "You must see that the soul keeps the body while it lasts."

Pierre laughed as he gave the shoe a resounding blow with his hammer. He always laughed at other men's jokes, however poor they might be; this was one of the secrets of his popularity. Presently Silas Parker remarked:

"Odd about the robbery, isn't it?"

"What robbery?"

"Haven't you read of it in the papers?" Silas asked in surprise.

"I have no time to read papers."

"Well, it happened last night up at the Hall. Madame Benton's pearl necklace was stolen. They say it was very valuable, and so long that it could be wound several times about her neck. The detectives are working up the case."

"Have they any clue to the thief?" Pierre asked carelessly.

"Well a slight one. They found a bit of cloth—what is the matter?" he broke off in alarm, as a cry escaped Bernard.

"Oh, I pounded my finger a little, that's all."

"You must have hurt it badly, you are quite pale."

"No, no!" Pierre answered quickly. "It is nothing. Go on with your story. You were saying that they found a bit of cloth."

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"Yes—a small zigzag piece, evidently torn from a coat. It was hanging on a nail."

"Well," said Pierre deliberately, "I hope the robber will escape."

"Why?" exclaimed Silas, in amazement. "For my part I hope he will be brought to justice."

"Justice!" said Bernard testily. "Is there such a thing?"

"There is law, anyway, and if we commit a crime we must suffer for it."

"If we are poor—yes. But the rich contrive to escape the punishment, whatever they may do."

"I don't know," murmured Silas dubiously, while Caleb shook his head.

"Well, I do," said Pierre vehemently. "A rich man obtains money dishonestly; the transaction is called by a polite name People shrug their shoulders and pass on; but let a beggar steal a loaf of bread to keep him from starving, and he is thrust into prison without much ado. Bah! It is a strange world."

He tossed his hammer down, and it fell with a crash.

"Oh, I've heard about the beggar and his loaf before," said Silas. "But I never believed in him. We have hands to work with, and can always earn our bread by honest toil. You're out of humour to-day, Bernard. Come, Caleb, we must be off. Good-day, Pierre."

"Good-day," answered Bernard, without looking at them.

That night he took a bundle from his cupboard and went stealthily into his small garden. Digging a hole in the yielding ground he deposited the bundle in it then filled it up, packing the earth so tightly down that it was impossible to discover it had been recently disturbed. Little Pierre lay sleeping in the inner room, but some noise awakening him he crept from his bed and peeped into the shop just as his grandfather returned.

"Go to bed!" Bernard commanded sharply, as he closed the outer door. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought I heard a noise," answered the child.

"So did I, and I went to see what caused it. It was nothing. Go to bed again, and I will make you a kite, a marvellous kite, which you may fly to-morrow."

"Oh, will you, grandfather? Jolly! Now I'll go at once," cried the delighted boy.

A smile curved Bernard's lips as he gathered together the materials for the kite. It took several hours to complete it, but when finished it was indeed a thing of beauty. It was full four feet in height, and there were many coloured papers used in its construction; a fringe adorned the outer edge. But the tail was the most wonderful of all. A long string formed the foundation, and upon it were fastened pieces of cloth of graduating lengths, the longest being at the top, and tapering down to a mere shred at the end. Each was twisted in the centre, the ends being allowed to fly, but so closely were they put on the string that scarcely any part of it was visible.

Little Pierre rose early the next morning. His impatience was so great that he could scarcely contain himself until his grandfather should give him the kite; but he dare not express his wish as Bernard seemed excited and nervous, an unusual thing with him. The boy wondered why he stood at the door so long, gazing anxiously about, returning to his work only to repeat the performance a few minutes later. At last he turned to the expectant child:

"Come," he said, "you shall fly the kite."

"Oh, is it not beautiful?" Pierre cried, clasping his hands in admiration when the wonderful thing was held up for his inspection.

This Pretty Girl is a Reader of ☞ "HOME NOTES."

He was wild to touch it, but Bernard would not permit him to do so, and bade him hold the cord while he held the kite aloft himself. Soon it floated upward, the tail resembling a flock of birds as it straightened in the breeze.

"You are Pierre Bernard, I believe," said someone.

As Bernard moved quickly, he came face to face with two men.

"That is my name," he answered. "What is your business with me?"

One of the detectives, for such they were, eyed him sharply, as he said:

"We have orders to search your house, Bernard."

"For what?"

"We are looking for a necklace which was stolen from Madame Benton."

"And do you suppose I have it?" demanded Pierre, with a great show of anger. "How dare you accuse me of stealing? But go—search the house—and if you find it——"

He finished with a harsh laugh.

"The old fellow takes it coolly," said one of the men. "But come—let us get the business over." And they went to work, searching every nook and corner of the house for some signs of the missing property.

Meanwhile, Bernard was apparently absorbed in the kite, and laughed loudly as it rose higher and higher, the long tail curving and twitching like a snake. Presently it began to descend, and a shade of excitement was visible on his face, while little Pierre cried out in dismay:

"Oh, grandfather, it is coming down and will get caught in those trees."

"We will prevent that," said Bernard, with a furtive glance at the house; and he loosened the cord to its fullest extent. But the kite steadily descended. It hovered over a tree for a few seconds, then fell, the tail becoming entangled in the branches. Bernard gave the cord a sharp pull, and the kite dropped at his feet.

Little Pierre ran and picked it up, dragging the kite back to where the old man stood.

"The tail is broken, grandfather," he exclaimed. "Oh, why did you hide these pretty beads? See——"

He spoke no further, for Bernard with an oath sprang forward and snatched the kite from his hand. At the same instant one of the detectives, who had approached unnoticed, tore it from him.

"Ah! we are not mistaken after all," he said, holding up the tail for his companion's inspection.

Beneath each of the twisted rags was a small cluster of pearls.

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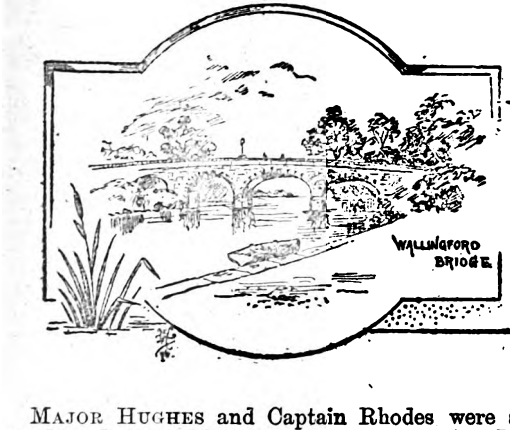

ALMOST A MONOLOGUE.

MAJOR HUGHES and Captain Rhodes were sitting smoking before a blazing open fire in Major Hughes' cosy library. Between them was a small table that held a few books and a box of choice cigars. Major Hughes was dark, tall and lean, slightly bald, with a stoop in his shoulders and an expression as of lately conquered querulousness on his face. Captain Rhodes was rather short, decidedly rotund, very bald, very erect, and looked as if he had been in the best of good humours all his life.

"Well," said Major Hughes, with a satisfied air, "I believe that I have already said that I was glad to see you."

"Yes," said Captain Rhodes, beaming on Major Hughes. "Once or twice; but it's one of those things that you can't hear too often. You're looking well—better than I ever saw you—and so is your house. I didn't know you had much taste in that line. You certainly kept it under a bushel when we kept bachelor's hall at Fort Reno. You must have a good housekeeper."

"I have," said Major Hughes, with a suppressed smile. "So good that I have got almost rid of dyspepsia. That was the curse of my life."

"That's good," said Captain Rhodes heartily. "Now tell me all about yourself. I haven't heard a word from you since I left the army."

"No," said Major Hughes, "I'm not much of a correspondent; but a man who falls heir to a fortune and resigns, and goes to Egypt for five years, doesn't deserve to hear from his friends. Aren't you afraid you will scorch, sitting so close to the fire? Do you think it's cold?"

"Not in here," said Captain Rhodes, pushing his chair back a little, "but it's only twelve degrees above zero out of doors."

"Speaking of cold," said Major Hughes musingly, "reminds me of an experience I had at Fort Keogh when I was on duty in Canada. You know I went there the year after you resigned, when I got my promotion."

"No, I didn't know it," said Captain Rhodes, "but go on."

"Well, you probably remember that I didn't like women?"

"Yes," said Captain Rhodes, smiling, "and that, with the inconsistency of all eccentrics, you read novels all the time—novels wherein heroes were of no importance, but that abounded in a varied assortment of the most remarkable heroines."

"Yes, I got enough of women that way. The real thing always bored me, or embarrassed me, I don't know which; and you can imagine what a brilliant prospect there was for me when I got to my new station and found that there wasn't a single unmarried officer there, with the exception of five or six youngsters, and they didn't want a rusty, fusty old major poking round with them. To make bad enough worse, there were dozens of little children about. The place fairly resounded with baby talk—the one thing that I abominated above all others.

"If I had had a controlling voice in army regulations, I wouldn't have allowed officers to marry. I hung about by myself for a month or so, getting more and more morose all the time. Of course I returned visits, but I selected times when I knew the wives were out. One night, though, I got caught. I had heard that there was to be a ladies' card party, so I trotted round to see Wilhelm—we were room-mates once, and I had always liked him. He opened the door himself, and I shouted out at the top of my voice: 'Hello, old man, I've come to spend the evening with you,' and then I stepped into the hall and saw Mrs. Wilhelm sitting in the parlour.

"I was utterly taken aback, but it was too late to beat a retreat, so I shuffled in and shook hands with her. She received me cordially, not appearing to notice my embarrassment, and, to my surprise, I soon found myself at ease, and having a very pleasant time. After that I got into the habit of going there. Mrs. Wilhelm was clever and bright, but she wasn't always doing the fire-work act, the way most clever women do, trying to dazzle people. She talked sensibly, and when she saw that Wilhelm and I were interested in some topic that she didn't care to discuss with us, she wouldn't try to make us switch off—she would just sit down at the piano and play something soft that didn't thrust itself on our notice, but that, somehow, always had the effect of making us feel in charity with all men.

"But it was all changed when their daughter came home from school. Great Scott! what a whirlwild that girl was!—and spoiled!—She was spoiled to the verge of disintegration. She was only about so high"—holding his hand five feet from the floor—"and her hair and eyes were as black as coal, and she was fairly insolently healthy and full of life. She ruined the Wilhelm's house for me. In the first place, all the youngsters in the garrison swarmed about her—the house was always full of them—and if she happened to be by herself, and came in and found Wilhelm and me absorbed in some discussion, she would say: 'Oh, you're talking some stupid *man* talk!' and she would rush to the piano—she rushed at everything she did—and bang some horrible brass band piece, or sing a college song at the top of her voice, with the loud pedals on.

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"It was awful. And the Wilhelms thought she was perfect.

"One day, early in November, I had one of my attacks of the blues. I ordered my horse in hopes of riding it down. It was lovely when I started—warm enough to make my overcoat entirely superfluous, but my striker, who had served in that country for years, begged me to let him put it on behind the saddle. He said that he knew that a change was coming on, and that I would need it if I stayed out long. I let him do it just to humour him. I rode along over the lowlands, with those dreary buttes all around me, and away off to the right the narrow belt of cotton-wood trees that edged the river.

"I had gone about twelve miles, getting bluer and bluer each step, when suddenly an icy wind slapped me in the face. It felt just as if a frozen sheet had struck me and wrapped around me. I looked up, and the sky was like ink, but on the horizon was a white wall that reached from earth to heaven, and that was moving towards me at the rate of a mile a minute. I turned round and started for home at a gallop, but before I had gone half a mile the blinding snow had caught up with me, and it was so thick that I couldn't see three feet ahead. The wind seemed to be coming from every direction at once. It almost swept me from the saddle.

"I saw that I was in for it, so I dismounted and put on my overcoat. My horse was frightened and jumped about, tugging at the reins, and when I was ready to mount, I couldn't tell to save my life which way to turn. It seemed suicidal to stand still in that piercing wind, that was growing colder every instant, yet it was folly to go on, for I realised that I was probably increasing the distance between myself and the garrison at every step. However, I pushed on, hoping that I was going in the right direction, and trying to make myself believe that the storm would soon be over, and that I could find my way home before dark. After half-an-hour or so of this struggle against the storm, I became aware of a dark object that loomed up suddenly through the snow. I stood still and waited. As it came nearer I saw that it was someone on a big horse. You can imagine my sensations when I discovered that it was Wilhelm's daughter.

"'What on earth are you doing here?' I said, going up to her. She started violently when I spoke, for she had had her head bent almost to the horse's neck, and had not seen me, then she said: 'Oh, Major Hughes, is it you? I never thought I *could* be so glad to see—anyone.' She had evidently meant to say 'you,' and changed it for politeness' sake at the last minute. 'But what are you doing so far from the post alone?' I said. 'Does your father know about it?'

"She said: 'No, I didn't tell him where I was going.'

"'I have often heard him tell you not to go more than a mile away from home,' I said severely; 'this is twelve, if it's an inch.'

"'Well, and does it concern you?' she said snappishly.

"I did not answer her, and we rode on in silence a short distance. Then she said in a conciliatory tone, 'I'm awfully glad that I met you. I was lost. I hadn't an idea of which way to go.'

"'Neither have I,' I said.

"'Oh!' she said, looking at me with big, scared eyes; and she pressed her horse close to mine.

"'We might as well dismount,' I said, after a while 'we will wear our horses out to no purpose ranging about in this way.' I got down and reached up my hands to help her out of the saddle.

"'Oh. I'm so stiff,' she said, 'really I can't jump.'

"I had to lift her down. I could feel her shaking and shivering. She was very small, but my arms were absolutely brittle from cold, and I felt that her weight would break them. I unsaddled the horses and then told her to hold them—for there was nothing to tie them to—while I built her a snow house.

"She took the reins mechanically, her eyes fastened on my face.

"'Won't we be able to find the way home?' she said in a moment, her voice trembling.

"'I'm afraid not,' I said.

"Just then a blast even fiercer than the rest struck us. The horses plunged, broke away from her, and in an instant were out of sight. She leaped after them—then, realising the hopelessness of such a chase, she stopped and turned towards me.

"'We—will—freeze—to—death,' she said slowly, utter despair in her voice. Then she began to cry out loud.

"I didn't know what to do. In those confounded novels the women always held their heads high in times of danger, and said: 'I fear naught,' or some such lofty thing.

"'Oh, stop!' I said crossly. I hadn't an idea of how to deal with her.

"'I won't!' she said, and went on worse than ever. I felt that I would go crazy if she kept it up. Then I remembered a ruse that always worked successfully with my little nieces and nephews, and I said grimly; 'You'd better stop—the wolves will hear you.'

"She uttered the most awful shriek that I ever heard in my life, and before I knew what had happened, her arms were around me, so tight that I was almost cut in two, and she was crying: 'Oh, save me! save me! Don't let them eat me up!'

"I wished that I had let her cry in peace. I wriggled and twisted, but I couldn't get loose.

"'Let go!' I shouted at last. 'How can I keep you from being killed if you hold me in this way?'

"I finally persuaded her to sit down on my saddle blanket, while I heaped snow round her to break the wind. She looked so little, and so blue with cold, that it occurred to me at last that she had no wrap on. I reluctantly took off my overcoat—yes—I was a brute, but I didn't like her, and I begrudged it to her—and wrapped her up in it. She thanked me, with her teeth chattering, and shivered down into it, and I went on piling snow. I thought every minute that I would freeze solid and fall down dead. I never suffered so in my life. After a while she raised her face and said: 'Major Hughes, aren't you cold without your coat?'

"It exasperated me beyond endurance.

"'Oh, no, I feel as though I were in a bake-house,' I said, with a brutal laugh.

"She jumped up like a flash, tore off the coat, and threw it at my feet.

"'*Take* your old coat!' she cried. 'You horrible—you horrible—oh, you *coward!*' and then she flung herself down on the snow, and writhed and screamed and sobbed.

"I was furious, but humiliated to the ground.

"I felt like a cross between a wild boar and an angle worm. I wanted to tear her to pieces, and I wanted to grovel on the ground before her, and beg her to put on the coat again.

"After about a minute, I picked the coat up, and said humbly: 'I beg your pardon, Miss Gertrude, won't you please take it back? I didn't mean to be rude.' My voice sounded so meek that I didn't know myself, but she

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did not deign to notice me in the least. She just kept on sobbing.

"'Well,' I said, after waiting a minute, 'if you won't take it, I'll have to put it on you.'

"'Don't touch me!' she cried.

"But I seized her. She fought like a little tigress! Strong!—I never saw anything like it! —but of course she couldn't hold out against me.

"I wrapped her up by main force, and told her that I would tie her with saddle girths if she tried to take the coat off again. She glared unutterable rage and hatred at me with her great black eyes. Then she turned her head away, and wouldn't move or speak.

"The cold was growing more and more intense. It nipped, slapped, pinched, all at once. I had to keep charging up and down to keep from freezing.

"Without saying anything, she moved off the saddle blanket and tossed it towards me. I wrapped it round me, but it didn't seem to make me any warmer.

"'If I could find some wood I could make a fire,' I said, fingering the matches in my pocket.

"'The saddle trees are wood,' she said, without looking at me.

"I lost no time in putting her suggestion in operation. I piled up the saddles and put some old letters that I happened to have with me under them, and soon we had a sickly, smoky little blaze. She crept up to it. Her face was swollen from crying, her eyes were red—all the rest of her was blue with cold. No, she didn't look pretty—an angel couldn't have under those circumstances —but I pitied her (for the first time), poor, pampered child, doomed to die out there in that wicked night—for it was almost six o'clock, and there was no sign of the storm abating.

"The saddles smouldered along. They could not last much longer.

"At half-past six there was a sudden, almost alarming lull. The wind gave one wild shriek, and died down. The snow stopped falling, the clouds parted, and there, within twenty feet of us, I saw the belt of cotton-wood trees that bounded the creek.

"'We are saved!' I exclaimed.

"She turned her face towards the woods, started up and fell back again.

"'I can't walk!' she said in a frightened whisper. I carried her bodily into the woods, and propped her up by a tree. Then I broke off branches, and in a little while had a big fire blazing right in front of her. That fire was the most beautiful thing I ever saw in my life.

"'Major Hughes,' she said in a few minutes, her voice trembling, 'I think my feet have fallen off—will you look and see?—I can't bear to—and if they have, let me die!—I beg of you to let me die!' She was too much exhausted to cry any more. I laid her down and drew her feet from under her, and took off her boots; she had on regular, long-topped boots, something like a man's, only softer. Her stockings were black silk. Her feet felt like little sticks. They were as cold as ice, but they were not really frozen.

"'They are all right,' I said; 'I'll rub them for you.' So I did. I was horribly afraid they would break. In about fifteen minutes she said that they felt better, and I was just about to propose that we start towards the garrison, walking a mile or so at a time, and stopping and building a fire, when I heard afar off a faint baying. It came nearer and nearer. I jumped up, and in furious haste added great branches to our fire. She watched me a moment, a startled look in her eyes, her head bent, listening—she heard the baying, too—then she *knew*.

"'The wolves!' she said, in a ghastly, blood-curdling whisper.

"My threat had come true.

"She crouched down beside the fire, holding her ears and gasping from terror. That fire was our only hope. The lean, furious beasts pressed about us, howling, their wicked eyes glaring in the light, their cruel teeth gleaming. Fortunately there was plenty of wood at hand. I extended the fire until it almost surrounded us, just leaving a passage for myself to go through, and I kept the murderous, hungry fiends off with burning branches.

"At three o'clock in the morning we faintly heard a bugle-call, then far-off shouts and whistles. Searching parties had been sent out for us, and one of them, seeing our fire, was heading towards it. The wolves did not give up all hope of their supper until the soldiers fired into them. As for Miss Gertrude, I hadn't time to look at her from the moment my fight with the wolves began until, surrounded by our rescuers, I saw her fall fainting into her father's arms. Her hat was pushed back, my coat, that had completely covered her face and head, slipped from round her, and, by the full light of the fire, I saw, just above her left temple, a broad streak of white in her black hair."

Just as Major Hughes finished his story, there was a clicking, as of high heels, in the hall, and a patter, as of little, soft-shod feet—a voice said dotingly: "Oh, oo is oo mover's darling!"

"What!—baby talk *here?*" said Captain Rhodes, looking at Major Hughes in astonishment.

The *portière* was drawn back, and a handsome little boy, about three years old, ran in, followed by a charmingly pretty young woman. She was very small, her eyes were as black as coal, and just above the left temple there was a broad streak of white in her black hair.

Captain Rhodes stared at her wonderingly.

"Why—it's——" he said—then stopped abruptly.

"Yes, *it's*," said Major Hughes, laughing, "and isn't it a good thing for me that five years ago I hadn't a controlling voice in army regulations?"

ELIZABETH HERMAN.

Keep your eye open for the Christmas Number of "Pearson's Weekly," which will be published Next Tuesday, Nov. 18th. It is good.

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By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

PASSION'S PLAYTHING.

FOR all my eagerness and energetic urging, some months elapsed before the raw levy of men that Listra's gold had gathered was ready to take the field against such sturdy foes as I knew those bandit hordes, ensconced in their rocky retreats, would prove, and during this time there was not a wealthy young blood, or a dissolute, tottering old noble, within that gay city, more wildly dissipated, more uproariously fond of wine, more careless of his coin, more sleepless through the balmy nights, than Macis the officer. Yet with prurient prudence, I took pains not to go too far, lest I should find ill-favour in the eyes of the Princess. In all else I outstripped every rival in my reckless revelry, and none were so welcome, none were greeted with such admiring homage as myself at deepest carouse, at wildest carnival, at most daring mischief plot, at most abandoned drunken brawl. To my shame I write this.

So free was I, indeed, with money that before long I had to make a secret journey to my treasure cave, to re-enrich myself with gold and jewels. All was as I had left it, unmolested, save that the sea, at highest tide, washed another step of the rough and rocky stairway outside.

On my return I stayed again at the little inn, astonishing that greasy, timid, tardy host still more than before by the liberal largess I bestowed upon him.

Soon afterwards I set out from Thinæ at the head of nearly a thousand men-at-arms, and, proceeding northward by swift marches, had the good fortune to surprise and utterly defeat a band of the robbers on one of their marauding sallies—a band at least 300 strong. This sent up the spirits of my followers at a bound, and, flushed with success, and imbued with confidence in themselves and in my leadership, they pressed forward with ungrudging speed, unflagging zeal.

From haunt to haunt, from lowland to upland, from stockades upon the plain to fortified ledges upon the hills, from battlemented ridges to almost inaccessible caves, we forced those brigands, step by step, cubit by cubit, league by league, until at last, surprised out of their usual caution, and dumfounded at our persistent following up of every slight advantage, they met and gave us battle in a narrow pass, fought their hardest, strove like very fiends in their furious despair, and in the end were forced to seek temporary safety in flight. But the victory was dearly bought, leaving me only five hundred sound warriors to complete my task.

Still I kept on, ably seconded in my efforts by that indefatigable couple of worthies, Valdo and Atris, and at length pinned the vagrants in their last retreat—a rocky defile near the top of a mountain-range, whose northern side sloped into the sea beyond. Their vantago point was the only place where a large body of men could cross the range, and as it was useless to attempt to starve them out, as they were supplied by the pirates, I determined to bring matters to an issue then and there, having now four hundred men to oppose to their grim, gaunt band of seventy, entrenched in their formidable stronghold.

So formidable it was, truly, that any leader less reckless would have hesitated before it. The narrow path wound up the hill between tall, precipitous cliffs, unscaleable by human cunning, wound round the edge of a towering column of rock that rose sheer in the middle of the gorge, and, a few paces further on, crossed a deep ravine that ran transverse to it, by means of a rude, wooden bridge.

On the column of rock, and on both sides of the bridge, the brigands took their final stand. They could easily have stayed our progress by destroying the frail structure that spanned the abyss, but only at the cost of making themselves prisoners, unable to pursue their forays, since a few men left by me would have served to prevent them recrossing the critical point.

Up the narrow pass, dim already with the darkening shades of eve, in strange contrast to the glowing light on the peaks above, I led my sturdy band, higher and higher, till we reached the column of rock I have mentioned. Here we met the first fragment of the enemy's small force, perched high on the stony cliff, and lost many men in circumventing and clearing them out, and that done, pressed on with fresh zeal, and streaming along the curving ledge, re-entered the gorge and came to where our fifty remaining foes took stand to guard the bridge on which their lives depended. From this high point, looking northward, I caught a glimpse of the cold, grey sea, unbroken by a sail, washing restlessly upon a rugged shore.

"If we leave here victorious," I said to Valdo in the momentary hesitation before the conflict, "our work will be done, and there will only be yonder implacable, invincible foe to deal with," and I pointed to the distant waters.

"That is true, Macis," said he, "therefore, let us rid ourselves of all the enemies that we can."

He was ever sternly practical, was Valdo, and even the shadow of the great calamity that threatened the low-lying districts, and perhaps the whole of Atlantis, failed to turn his mind from its present purpose. A worthy soldier, truly.

So I turned and gave the order to advance and seize the bridge—an order more easily given than carried out, for here the ravine narrowed so that scarcely four men could pass abreast, and men fighting as the bandits fought, in their last hold and for their very lives, would be able to dispute the passage while strength remained to them to draw bow or swing sword. At them, pell-mell, in one great dashing charge we went, crowding through the narrow neck regardless of the death-dealing shower of arrows and bullets that the archers and slingers poured into our compact mass with terrible effect.

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Twice, thrice, we charged thus, each time surging back with diminished numbers, not a few stumbling forward in their mad impetuosity into the gulf below. I soon saw that this would only decimate my force to no purpose, and that it were wiser to let my marksmen pick our foes off one by one, and having withdrawn ourselves behind the shelter of a jutting rock, we set to work thinning that desperate little band from our place of safety, and with such ease, that in rage and disgust they separated, hiding themselves by twos and threes, to let the storm of missiles pass them by.

Now I saw my chance, and taking my two officers and calling on the rest to follow, I dashed down the gorge and bounded on to the bridge before the astonished foe could intercept me. Then we turned back to back, and fought as I have seldom fought before or since. Sword clashed on sword with fiercest stroke, dagger on shield, and arrow on helm, and high above all, the ringing blows of the robber chief's great axe resounded mightily on every skull that came within his reach. Soon the foemen between us and our main body were all cut down, and pouring over the bridge, we pressed the last score of stubborn dogs down to the very water's edge. Then they turned their backs to the sea as we formed in a semicircle before them, and drawing ever in, we slew them one by one and two by two, though slowly and with great loss to ourselves. Nearer and nearer to the flowing waves we forced the few who still strove on, till only the giant chief remained, swinging his great axe in hissing curves before him, as he stood there defiant, his feet already washed by the curling water.

Bounded on to the bridge.

"How many dogs does it need to pull down the solitary bear?" he shouted tauntingly. "How many cowards to slay a brave man?"

"I know not," I cried in answer, stung to fury by the insult, "but this I know, that one brave man alone is needed to despatch a braggart!" and signing to my men to draw back and hold their hands, I sprang forward and met the boaster in single combat.

With a roar of delight at what he thought an easy prey, the giant whirled his axe in a swinging circle round his head, and brought it down—but only upon the unresponsive sand. Again he whirled it, having parried my stroke, and again, thanks to my nimbleness of foot, missed his aim. Again the great axe whirled, and as it came, measuring my distance and watching my time, I leapt upwards and forwards, striking at the hardwood shaft with all my strength, and so well that Sunderer's blade passed slantwise through it, and, smiting downward with unabated force, was buried in the bandit's head.

My men gave a mighty shout when they saw the deed, making the rocks re-echo with their cries of jubilation, for now the work was done, and a handsome reward awaited all who were left alive to receive it, the greater, too, because out of the thousand men who had started out with me on this perilous mission, only 150 remained to share the spoil. So desperate had been that last, stern struggle.

As it was then near sunset we stayed by the shore till morning, then re-ascended the mountain to the ravine, breaking down the bridge when we had passed over, and retraced our steps with light hearts to the city of Thinæ, to receive and endure the plaudits, and feastings, and irrepressible attentions of the populace. I made report of our triumph with all due formality before the Princess, and, to Dison's unmistakable chagrin, was nominated her chief soldier, and commanded to take up my abode in the palace. As I bent low to acknowledge the favour, I seized her dainty hand and pressed it to my lips with feverish impulse, holding it, perhaps, longer than was needful, but unresistingly, nevertheless; and as I turned away our eyes met for a moment in a swift glance—a fiery, passionate message of love on my part, a half-responsive look on hers that seemed to say, "Wait and hope."

Elated by such promise of success, I was stalking from the room, scarce heeding how I went or against whom I jostled, when someone roughly seized my shoulder and hurled me a dozen paces from my path, and a voice rang angrily in my ear as I reeled:

"Take heed, interloping wretch, how you tread on the toes of better men than yourself!"

In an instant "Sunderer" was out of its sheath, and flashing in the air. Nor had I far to seek the cause of the sudden interruption. 'Twas the Lord Dison himself, with drawn sword, coolly regarding me with quiet jealousy, who had spoken.

"An you account not for such villainous language," I said to him, "and that speedily, be on your guard."

"I render no account to such adventurers as you," he made reply lunging at me with his blade.

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"Then take your deserts!" I cried, forthwith engaging him, slashing, thrusting, crossing, and recrossing with feint and counter-feint, parry, and ward. Immediately the great chamber was in an uproar, the ladies screamed, and clung to their husbands or lovers, men crowded round us to watch the strife, and Atris and Valdo reached my side but just in time to strike down a couple of Dison's paid varlets, who were about to plunge their daggers in my back, thinking to escape unnoticed in the general confusion.

I was too busy to see this at the time, being fully occupied with the irate noble, who proved a good match for me at first, but lost his ground when he grew frantic at his inability to break through my defence; and I grew calmer as the duel went on, till at last, with "Sunderer's" razor edge, I shivered his blade in twain and bore him to the floor, holding the blue steel against his throat in case he strove to rise.

Then I spoke him, asking with a mocking smile if he would that I forgave the insult or no, telling him that, if no, the blade should sever his ill-natured neck as swiftly as the lightning splits a stricken tree.

"If the Princess wills it, I crave pardon," muttered my fallen enemy; "not otherwise." I turned to Listra, who now stood near, not in the least disconcerted at the struggle, and asked if it was her will that the disgraced noble should humble himself before me.

"Nay," she answered, "I would see no man humbled to save his life, but you have done enough without. As my servant, Macis, I command you to sheath that wondrous blade of yours, and let the Lord Dison go about his business. To which I will add that I dismiss him, as a beaten warrior, from my town and province," and with that the dictatorial beauty turned on her heel in supercilious disdain of her former favourite.

"When my mistress orders, I must obey—at least, at present," I said to Dison, taking care that none of the sting in my remarks should be unfelt, "and, therefore, you are free to leave with a sound skin. But cross not my path again, or a dozen fair ones' pitying words shall not save you. Begone!"

His face almost hideous with the concentrated malice and suppressed mortification showing in it, the swordless soldier strode hastily away amid the jeers of the company, nor did I see him again till after many years.

Now my lot fell in pleasant lines, and I became the most noted man in all the province; nay, the repute of my skill and good fortune and the fame of my matchless sword spread far beyond its borders, and Macis the officer, the gayest of the gay, the favourite of Listra, the iron-handed champion of her little army, was a household word in many of the wonder-loving districts round about. Yet not all at once, nor of my own open seeking, did I become the acknowledged lover of the Princess. It happened in this wise:

For some time after the discomfiture of Dison I held aloof from her ladyship. At this the Princess was piqued, and flouted me whenever we met in the banquet or the guest rooms, so that I held aloof still more. This game of sullen distancy we kept up, till, as I expected, my lady, who was so used to flattery and homage, grew tired of it, and strove in many ways, and with the many arts she knew so well, to lure me from my seeming apathy.

Once, in a brilliant assembly, where she moved resplendent in her beauty, like the Spirit of Love incarnate, she turned her lustrous eyes full on me as I chanced to approach where she sat, surrounded by a bevy of her ardent admirers, and greeted me thus:

"Am I not fair, Macis, that you deem not my company worthy of your lordly presence?"

The men gazed curiously at me, so pointedly favoured, and the women whispered to each other quietly. For the benefit of the latter I answered:

"Fair you are, indeed, Princess—as a bright gem 'mid sparkling jewels, *rare and beautiful as any.*"

Pouting, the spoiled and petted creature turned away, while I bit my lip in vexation, wishing now to recall the words so lightly spoken, wishing that it were possible to throw myself upon my knees before her then and there, for I could not hold out against her charms and wayward grace much longer. Reviling myself for my contrariness, I retired to my quarters and paced the room fretting and fuming in impotent chagrin.

By now my Princess had had enough of it, and sent a messenger to command the officer Macis to attend upon her in her audience chamber without delay. Thither, heavy-hearted, I proceeded forthwith, expecting nothing less than a contemptuous dismissal, and perchance a passionate outburst of invective from her ruby lips.

I found her alone, reclining on the self-same ivory couch where I first feasted my eyes on her bold, dark beauty, her raven hair this time flowing in loose rich tresses upon her cream-white shoulders; her rounded arms bare from the elbow, save for the circlets of solid gold that nestled on her wrists; her purple robe exchanged for one of a dark, shimmering silk, that fitted her lithe form to a marvellous perfection, showing every graceful curve with clearness, and contrasting well with the fair skin and white embroidered edgings of the neck and sleeves; and her dainty feet tapped the polished floor impatiently when I entered, revealing most coquettishly a pair of neatest ankles beneath the falling folds of silk. Upon her head gleamed a clustering coronal of purest diamonds, which sparkled dazzlingly in the lamp-light when she raised her eyes to mine on hearing the sound of my footfall.

"Then you deign to come at my command, my proud soldier?" said she, with a tinge of irony.

"Your word is law to me, Princess," I said, chilled by her reception, "as it is to all your servants."

"Now you speak as a servant should. Know you, then, that I am minded to send you away, as I sent the noble Dison, whom you so cruelly ill-used?"

"I feared as much," said I in answer, "and if so I have no choice but to suffer and obey, though as to ill-treating Dison, I will do the same again an he crosses my path."

"Still haughty and self-willed, I see," returned the Princess, "though you are more amenable to reason than you were an hour ago. Before I send you away I must have an explanation of your curtness, and wherefore you slighted me in presence of my guests and vassals. But pray sit down—you look so gainless standing there like a prisoner on trial!—here, at my side—there is room enough and to spare on this couch, an it be not too hard to suit your Majesty."

Wondering, I complied, nothing loath, though the ivory seat was scarcely large enough for the two of us, and our forms must needs touch. Her hand fell on mine, it seemed by chance, and burned upon my flesh as a thing of fire.

"Now tell me, Macis," said Listra, looking full into my face with her melting orbs, that took all the stubbornness and anger out of me, "now tell me, I pray, wherefore you spoke lightly of my beauty before all men?"

"'Tis hard to tell," I answered, returning her gaze with an ardent look that no daughter of Atlantis could misread, "but methinks it was because I thought you looked on me in no other light than as a servant, paid for his duty," and while I spoke the vision of Briseis came into my mind, and I remembered how I had once so talked with her.

"And in what light would you that I looked on you?" asked my lady.

"As an equal," I responded boldly, "equal both in rank and riches."

"Then why came you here to join my soldiers?"

"Because," said I, "I love an active life, and Vichri commended your province as one where I should have such a life as I desired."

"Is that all?" she asked, in a low voice.

"All," I answered, my tongue still refusing to say the words that were burning for utterance. For a little time the Princess sat regarding me with a curious expression,

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"Oh, Macis!" she cried.

part angry, part sad, part hungry—as only a woman in love can look—and then, without a word of warning, she slipped off the couch, and was clinging to my knees in passionate entreaty.

"Oh, Macis!" she cried beseechingly, seizing my hands convulsively in hers, while the crystal tears stood in her eyes, "Oh, Macis! if thou art human, and can read a woman's heart, and are moved by a woman's suffering, breathe one word of love to me! Nay!" (as I strove to raise her from the floor) "Nay! *I will not rise* until thou sayest thou dost think me the dearest of women! Deep down in thy heart thou must do, Macis, my beloved, for e'en an iceberg melts when floating into warmer waters, and I have loved thee, thou proud, strong soldier, since the day thou first wast brought to me, and spoke a flattering speech into my willing ear. Now, own that thou hast felt the same, and dared not say it—for so 'tis, my Macis, is it not?" and the soft, pleading voice rang almost stern in its last questioning.

Before that wild appeal from one so fair and young and so encharmed with my unworthy self, all sense of right and wrong, the image of Briseis, the warning of Isis, and all things I had once minded, were forgotten and went down into viewless chaos, and, marvelling how 'twas that I had held back so long, I bent down and seized my sweet, pleading Princess in my rough, scarred arms, lifting her from the floor to the couch beside me, myself now all aglow with passionate longing, and took unstinted measure of bliss from her responsive lips before I answered:

"It is as thou thought, my Listra, for I also have loved thee since our eyes first met."

"Then I am content, for of all men thou art the noblest and the best," she whispered, nestling to my arms, and giving back kiss for kiss and caress for caress.

Now it seemed to me as though the Gate of the Garden of Pleasure—that lies beyond the Shadowland—was opened before us, and we walked therein, alone with our sweet restrainless passion; that through the waking vision I saw the Spirit of Love smile softly on us, as a mother smiles upon a favoured child; and in that first fierce fever-flush of delirious delight, with those soft, warm arms about me, that velvety cheek pressed close to mine, the nectar of those willing lips upon my own, I ceased to care for aught on land or sea besides the radiant creature who thus caused my eyes to darken to all else besides her own supreme, enchanting loveliness.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Waking of the Sleeper.

Now all things went well with me for a space, intoxicated as I was with the love of Listra, and for nearly a year I lorded it over the province of Aidè, and strutted proudly about the streets of Thinæ, idolised of the soldiers, envied of the nobles—and hated of some, who sought my position—caring little for the news which reached us from time to time of the ceaseless rising of the sea and the inward flight of the frightened dwellers on the shore, heeding little the many rumours of disaster to our forces in Western Ulmeca, in conflict with the Red Barbarians, and still less heeding the stories of the Queen's indomitable zeal in organising her armies and fleets, and storing munitions of war.

All this passed indifferently to me, who was bound up in my Princess, and had no eyes or ears for other things for long together. Fresh bands of robbers appeared on the hills once or twice, but I sent my two trusty followers against these, not caring to leave my mistress for so long a time as would be needful to expel them; and Valdo and Atris, I make no doubt, were quite as willing to earn the glory and share the spoil unaided. Also I fought once with a blustering lord who made some jesting insult regarding myself and my Princess when in his cups, and though he was a notable swordsman, it availed him nothing against the sharpness of my magic blade; and to Listra's inexpressible delight I wounded him so grievously that he died before a week had passed.

All this I am telling to my shame, even though it savours of self-abasement in the telling to you who read; but in setting down the doings of my life it were ill to keep back the evil days, recording only the good, and portraying myself as that which I was not—and thus must I account for the fulness of my story. It has ever been a heavy task with me to dissemble, saving in the matter of my name, in which deceit I think I have excelled.

At last came word by mounted messengers that Quitzaal, the governor of Ulmeca, had risen in revolt with the aid of the Red Barbarians, and had put to the sword all who were faithful to the Queen, as Ethiop had done in Nubia years agone; that many of the soldiers under his command had acknowledged him as King of Ulmeca, and had seized a goodly number of warships in the harbours; that Vichri, who was with him, had proclaimed himself King of Atlantis, and with the help of Quitzaal was making preparation to invade his coveted country; and that the pirates, far and wide, had made common cause with the rebels, and were mustering their vessels from oversea.

Following hard on the heels of the bearers of these tidings came one with the Royal Seal, commanding the Princess, as governor of the province, to send an armed force as strong as she could spare, under a trusty captain, to the plain outside the city of Kronos, there to join the army that was gathering to repel the imminent invasion of the two rebel leaders. To this last message and command, the Princess paid no attention further than to bid the courier return and tell his sovereign that the province of Aidè was able to defend itself, and expected others to do the same, but that no soldier should cross her borders except in direst need.

This answer angered me somewhat, for I began to get ambitious, and to long for further glories on the field of war, but when I made attempt to reason with my wayward

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mistress, she at first said that she was not so sure, as her lord the Prince was in Ulmeca, that she ought not to lead her men against the Queen; and then she urged that if I went to battle I might never return, and what would she do then? And when I persisted, she gave way to a flood of petulant tears with which all my arguments were swept away, and I had to make pretence to come to her mind before she was appeased.

But others were not so blinded by her sophistries as I, and many, deeply offended, deserted in secret, and found their way to Court, bearing tales of their Princess's humour and spirit, and of her amour with myself. Valdo and Atris, in particular, were enraged at her decision, and but that I entreated them to remain in my service, would also have gone, and to console them somewhat I took to going hunting and fishing raids with them, bringing myself at last to leave my love on occasions.

I grew tired of for ever dangling in her wake, and, moreover, her temper was intensely passionate and jealous, so that I was in contant fear lest a stray smile from any lady should rouse her slumbering fire, and perhaps lead her to do the unoffending victim a mortal injury. Yet, when after a temporary quarrel we were reconciled again, it was like sunshine after storm, so bewitchingly lovable was she, so prettily attentive to my wants, so joyously merry all day long.

Another thing that came to my knowledge, and disquieted my mind considerably, was the fact that Queen Briseis had never issued a decree of special sternness against pirates, as Vichri had made me believe at that roadside inn; had never put a price upon my head, or so much as made mention of me since her accession to the throne. If so much was false, how knew I that what he said regarding his own share in my seizure and sentence fifteen years ago was true?

"Vichri shall tell the truth next time we meet!" I said to myself ominously.

One day, whilst fishing with baited lines from the shore where I had slain the bandit chief, my two followers alone being with me, I descried a white sail on the horizon line, at first no larger than a seamew's wing, but coming in swiftly towards the land under a strong north-west wind. Nearer and nearer it came, till I saw that it was a full-sized warship, well manned and worked, flying a strange flag—a red cross, outlined with white, upon a field of blue—and evidently steering for the creek just below the rock from whence we cast our lines. Seeing this, we drew them in and hastened down to the sand to await the stranger's coming, for I had seen enough by this time to know that it was no pirate we had here.

When within some hundred paces of the shore the strange sail hove to, and a boat shot out from her side, breasting the creaming surges of the inlet, and running her keel high up on the sand. A tall, soldierly man, still young, but well-set as one who had seen rough service, sprang out upon the beach, followed by a score of armed men, and, marching up to us, demanded authoritatively who we were and what was our business there?

My answer to this short, sharp summons was equally as sharp and short, for I was not used to being addressed so roughly by strangers.

"Who I am," I said curtly, "you had better inquire of someone else, and my business *is* my business."

"Think yourself of importance, doubtless," the tall man answered, with a queer smile, "but perhaps you may not be above knowing *my* name?"

"By no means," said I, "and, that forthcoming, may enlighten you as respects myself and these my followers."

"Good!" the stranger replied. "Know, then, that I am the Prince of this province of Aidè, and am come to take up my residence and duties here after a long absence; so that if you live within my jurisdiction I can demand your name, and your object in being on this deserted coast."

Momentarily I was taken aback at the sudden knowledge that I stood in the presence of my love's rightful lord, and Valdo and Atris stared open-mouthed and wide-eyed as the tall man uttered so startling a piece of news. Recovering my complacency, however, and reflecting that here was stern necessity for the exercise of that dissemblance which I so detested, I returned:

"As to our object, Prince, 'tis simple enough; one must have sport, and fishing, I believe, is called by that name amongst its votaries. As to myself, I am known at Thinæ as an officer of the palace guard, by name Valdo. Aught more I can tell thee?"

"Much," he answered shortly. "You can say whether my soldiers have gone to the war on behalf of the Queen, or no."

"I had not been here, in idleness," I replied, "if a chance had offered of active service, but the Princess forbade us to take part in the war, much to the chagrin of many. Some have deserted of their own will, but a good force remains."

"Then my Princess had that sound sense," mused my questioner thoughtfully. "And whilst talking canst tell me any news of my lady? Nay, out with it! no matter what it may be; I can partly guess its purport!"

"I can best tell you," I began, with every appearance of reluctancy, "by advising you to march on Thinæ fully armed and prepared to do battle with the holder of the keenest blade in the world. There is much talk in the city concerning the Princess and one Macis, her chief officer, and rumour has it that he is the Prince of Aidè in all but name."

To this the tall soldier made no response save a most expressive firm-setting of the lips, but went on to say:

"Would you care to do me a service? You shall not be unrewarded when I come into my own again."

"Ay, and glad of the chance," I cried, feigning enthusiasm at the prospect, "for 'tis tiring work to be at a woman's beck and call, and to sit fishing while others revel in the shock of arms."

"Then seemeth to me, Calasis," said the Prince, addressing one of his troop, "that here we have the very man we seek?" The other nodded. "Then," he went on, turning to me, "what I desire is a trusty man to hasten to Thinæ with the news that a large force of the enemy are landing near the southern confines of Aidè. That will draw off the fighting men from the city, so that I and my band can make entry and seize the palace and its false mistress before the alarm can spread. Then I will answer for my success. Canst do this?"

"Readily, and enjoy the trick," I answered. "I will start without delay."

"Go then and prosper," said the Prince. "Stay!" he added, "Calasis and a score of my men shall go with you as far as the wooden bridge, and remain to guard it till I have got my men over. Now hasten."

I smothered my anger at being thus baulked as well as I could—for I had meant to throw down the new bridge that I had erected—and together we rode up the hill side, crossed the wooden span, and there leaving the score of soldiers, struck spurs into our horses and clattered down the rocky ravine with re-echoing tread. As soon as we debouched upon the plain, I drew up, and consulted with my two followers.

"You heard what passed between me and the Prince?" I asked.

"All," said Atris solemnly.

"And see that 'tis folly for me to return to Thinæ?"

"Utter folly," said Atris, again solemnly.

"Then," I said, "this is what I will do. You two are free to go with me, or back to Thinæ to make the best of your chances, but I shall seek refuge in the southern districts of the country. Make your choice now, and let us say farewell."

"Not so fast, captain!" said Valdo, smiling, "let us make our choice before you say farewell! For my part, I go with you anywhere on land or overseas. I have had enough of courtier life."

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"And so say I," assented Atris, "for our captain will need us to guard his back as we have done before an he goes far alone in this disturbed country."

"Your faithfulness shall not be unremembered," I said, deeply moved, "for I think I can show you a hoard of treasure that will make your mouths water, and we will be sharers of it. Now will you go or not?"

"We go," they reiterated.

"Then away!" I cried; and the three of us let out at full gallop along the silent road, directing our course to the westward of Thinæ, and towards the village where I had first entered the province. Our horses were still fresh, the night was warm, and the stars shone brightly, so we raced on till the rosy dawn illumined the hill-tops, and the world of life awoke to another day of activeness. Then we rested at a wayside house, then on again, and thus, avoiding the larger towns and ever keeping forward, we reached the outskirts of the hamlet where I had engaged my two attendants, and, passing round it, crossed the border-line into the next province.

Well do I remember my last glimpse of Aidè. We were riding gently down a winding valley, hemmed in by a chain of undulating eminences, letting our steeds have their bridles, and proceeding silently, each engrossed with his own thoughts. To our right the wooded ridge, rich with its age-old trees and rife with timorous game, rose grandly above us, the great red blossoms of the autcylus flaming across its darkest places, intersprinkled with the whitish hemlock; to the left a hidden brook made sweet melody adown the lovely slope as it hurried to the river; behind, rose green hills melting away into the cloudy sky; in front, the vale curved sharply, so that we appeared to be riding at a great dead wall. The day was drowsily hot, every leaf and pebble gleaming with that surface sheen that pleases so well the man in strong and healthy vigour and so dejects the sorrowing, solitary traveller, out of tune with man and nature too.

Taking a last look at the lovely prospect we rounded the jutting rock at the foot of the valley, and were then riding in the province of Yand.

We kept on, staying a night to rest at the inn of mine host with the fat form and greasy face, being none too sparing in our remarks anent his tardiness, and then struck out for the wind-swept plateau where the entrance to my cave was hidden.

Dismounting at the edge of this thick-grown plain, hearing even then the splash of the waves on its seaward face, we made our way to the tunnel mouth, and one by one struggled into the cavern. Here an exclamation of surprise and delight burst from both my comrades. The vast wealth dazzled their eyes, and roused the avarice that is in every human soul—even though it be dormant.

"Now," said Atris, speaking a longer sentence than was his wont, "we shall be rich as princes, and well paid for leaving her ladyship."

"Now," said Valdo, ever practical, "we shall be able to pay a troop of men large enough to take to the war under a separate flag."

"Which is my intention," I remarked; "but first we must get this gold into convenient shape for carriage. 'Twere idle to try to take away these great bars as they are, and I have spent most of the coins and jewels already."

Having made provision for a short stay, we set to work breaking up the heavy ingots of the costly yellow metal into sizes suitable for transport, and then, taking as many as we could carry, loaded our horses and ourselves with it and with the few remaining gems and money pieces, still leaving behind some dozen unbroken bars of gold and several great reels of rich, thick-woven cloth, worth a king's ransom. One thing I noticed was that the sea, at highest flow, was just awash with the cave floor.

Thus, loaded down with wealth, off we went again, shaping our way for Kronos, and for all the pelf I had about me, and for all the lively songs and well-meant quips and jokes of my two companions, I was for the most time sunk in moody reverie. It is true that the pangs of parting from Listra were not so very keen—were rather a relief from irksome dalliance, indeed; but the thought of seeing Briseis again and the danger of being recognised—if it was a danger any more—was material in plenty for worrying uneasiness. The future loomed up black even as the past did, saving only that short and blessed time, like the far-off gleam of a brilliant star, when I lived in the house of Briseis as her favoured guest, and dark treachery had not thrown its withering blight upon my chequered path.

At length, having travelled many weeks, and being tolerably ignorant of passing events, we found ourselves within an hour's ride of the town of Miropis, which I had such good cause to recollect, the pointed cone of the Sacred Grotto jutting up out of the plain directly before us. At sight of it a thought flashed into my mind.

"An you would like to see the Sacred Sleeper," I said to my comrades, "now is our time. We can tether our horses in the cactus groves in perfect safety."

"Lead on, then, Captain," cried Atris, his curiosity aroused, and Valdo agreed.

So we went forward towards the conical, hollow hill, penetrating the belt of forest that surround it, and threading reverently through the dildo maze, in which we secured our animals, until we reached the entrance.

"Now follow me," I said, "and do not speak until I give the word." Therewith, bending low, I scrambled through the orifice in the black rock, closely succeeded by the two soldiers, and we stood upright within the vasty hall, gazing, awestricken, at the immensity of void that lay around us. Valdo and his comrade were too overcome by the sight to say much; but their faces, dim as was the light, showed me that they felt much as I had done on my former visit. The thin, bright ray that pierced the murky middle of the two-coned vault still glowed on its straight down-pouring course into the gulf below. As we gazed, the rope rattled loosely at my side, and the door which closed the entrance fell, leaving us in darkness save for the solitary ray of light, and I had but time to whisper to my friends "stir not for your lives!" when a voice rang out, though modulated as by coming from a distance, the words that I recalled so well.

"Enter, and fear not, O, Arnon, for the place where the Sleeper sleeps is holy ground!"

I answered that I would enter when I saw a safe way. The voice replied, as of old:

"Take three paces to the right, you and your comrades, and all shall be plain before your feet."

We followed this instruction, and then, as I expected, the thousand lights around the rocky vault flashed forth into a flood of brilliancy, showing us the steps that led from our little stone platform in a curving path to the earthward apex of the inverted pyramid. Down this winding stair we crept, I leading, the others still dumfoundered, until we reached the lowest point and stood beside the couch of gold on which the Sleeper lay, the brazen shield still resting on him and reflecting the great sun-ray from its polished surface. As before, the two watchers, who seemed as little changed by the hand of Time as the sleeping body they guarded, spoke, one saying softly, "Wait!" and the other, pointing upwards, "Look!"

Then, amid the silence, the hundred doors on the stairway opened, and the hundred Priests of Truth came marching down the steps, formed in a double ring round us and round the Sacred Sleeper, singing the self-same chant whose notes had haunted me ever since I first heard it. Into a mighty volume of soaring sound it rose, majestically echoing round the lamp-lit vault, then falling in wild weird melody from the sloping slides and meeting in a focus overhead; nor this time, any more than of old, did the sleeping figure make slightest sign of life!

Now I waited to see the white-robed company reascend to their hundred cells as before, but they moved not,

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standing as they stood to sing, mute, still, and dreadfully unnerving with their stolid stare. Then Unim, the elder of the watchers, turning, spoke:

"It is both well and ill for thee, my son, that thou hast sought this holy spot. But first tell me, thou who went from here with curses on thy lips and hast doubted my word full oft since then, have not my prophesyings proved true?"

"Even so," I answered, "though I doubted long."

"Then thou hast learned, and see thou forgettest not the lesson, that what the Spirit of Truth utters by the mouth of Unim can never fail. This, then, I further say to thee, though it is forbidden for me to lift the veil too far, lest mortal eyes should shrivel up at the awful prospect. Thou hast come for counsel, as I foretold, and my counsel is to seek the presence of the Queen as soon as may be, and so be restored to thy former favour, for the treachery thou chargest her with was not of her doing, but another's. Then thou shalt become great in Atlantis, greater than all men, though not without strife and coming near to death full often in the service of thy country. Nay, even these with thee have no common lot, and each shall find a warrior's grave, their names being known as long as Atlantis lasts. As to thyself, O, Arnon, son of Didron, whom men know now as Macis, it is told of thee that, after many dangers, thou shalt die in the arms of the sea that thou lovest so well, though many shall have gone that way before thee.

"And more than this it is not good for thee to know, save that the land is doomed and its glory fast departing. So hath the Spirit of Truth moved me to speak."

"Something I would tell thee, Unim," I said, "and ask thy answer to it. When I dwelt in that foreign land as a priest I had a vision from one of their gods, the Spirit of Isis, and I would know whether it was a true one or not."

"First tell me the vision," said the priest.

So I repeated the substance of it and the prophesy of the shadowy shape regarding my re-union with Briseis and the great temptation I was warned against, my hundred and three listeners hearing me in perfect silence to the end.

"It was a true foretelling," said Unim, when I had finished my story, "and showeth that the Spirit of Truth is worshipped in other lands than here, though it be under another name and with other rites. It shall come to pass as the Shape said, but I fear me, Arnon, my son, that thou hast already fallen before the temptation there foreshadowed. Art not now travelling from the province where a lawful bride of a distant lord bewails thy absence?

"But what is done, is done, my son, and as only the spirits know the heaviness of our trial, so they only can condemn, and in condemning, temper the punishment to the doer's guilt; so they only can be truly merciful. Let that pass, and meet what the future may hold for thee with an undaunted heart, for till thou hast been here a third time, *fear not death.*"

He ceased, and the younger of the watchers turned to me, saying in a softer voice than Unim's:

"Look upon the Sleeper, Arnon, and call him from his slumber; for haply he may hear thee, who art so favoured of the gods in other ways."

I stooped and looked intently at the features of the sleeping warrior, for such I took it that he had been, by his shield and spear and martial dress, though the weapons were strange-shaped, sadly ancient then, and all of bronze instead of iron. His face, I saw, now that I observed it closely, was that of a man of middle-age, his form was well-knit but rather large-boned, he was no taller than myself, and seemed to all appearance as a healthy man who had fallen quietly asleep and was sleeping undisturbed.

"O, Sleeper!" I cried, obeying the priest's injunction, "awake, arise, and live! I, Arnon, the son of Didron, call upon you."

"Methought I heard a voice calling."

The recumbent figure moved not so much as a finger. I called again, and still no visible response.

"You must take his right hand in yours, and command him in the name of the Spirit of Life," said the priest. I did so, taking the right hand in mine, and saying:

"Sleeper of the Grotto, awake, arise, and live! I, Arnon, the son of Didron, call upon you in the name of the Eternal Spirit of Life, for the hour has come for your eyes to be unsealed!"

A quiver ran down the sinewy frame that had been so long without a stir, a deep-drawn breath escaped the parting lips, the eyes unclosed, lighting with the light of reason, and he who had last seen the sun a thousand years agone sat up, gazing wonderingly, confusedly, first at the ray that poured down the awesome place, and then at us who stood around in silent surprise, in bewilderment no smaller than his own.

"Methought I heard a voice calling," said the wakened man; "a strange voice, speaking of the hour that has come. Where is Mattoni, and where Olasin, and where am I?"

"In the Grotto sacred to the Spirit of Truth," Unim answered composedly, as though he conversed with a well-known friend, "in which thou hast slept a thousand years, because the gods so willed it."

"Merciful Spirits!" exclaimed the risen one, evidently but half believing the monstrous tale; "tell me, then, who reigns in Atlantis now?"

"The Queen Briseis," replied Unim.

"And who before her?" asked the Sleeper.

"King Dulo the Tenth," said I.

"Then I am near accepting this awful story," said the questioner, with the air of one who yet has doubts; "but take me into the daylight that I may be sure the land is Atlantis, and that things are not as they were."

"Willingly, if thou canst walk," said Unim.

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"Walk! ay, and run too," cried the other, "as though I but woke from a night's slumber, and was waiting for Mattoni and Olasin to go with me down to the sea to set sail in our argosy for the Isle of Olives."

"Then follow me," said Unim, as, preceded by the hundred white-robed priests, he led the way up the spiral stair, the clatter of our feet vibrating strangely in the hollow space. One by one the priests stepped back into their cells as we wound higher and higher, till only Unim and the Sleeper, with myself and two comrades, stood upon the platform before the entrance, which, being opened by the watcher who remained below, by means of the trailing rope, gave us passage into the open air. And how fresh and free it seemed to us after the gruesome spell of that cavernous grotto!

In coming out the Sleeper turned and recognised the conical hill. "It, at least," he said, "is unchanged outwardly."

Nearly to its summit we now climbed, by a stair so cunningly contrived that it was invisible to the casual eye, and stood near the apex, looking out upon the picture of land and sea and sky spread before us in the full glow of the even's sun. There was the plain over which we had ridden, there were the vast cane brakes, intersected by their narrow irrigation canals, there was the hated town of Miropis, and beyond was the dark blue sea, its tide now ebbing from the shore. Marenso (as the Sleeper was named) gazed silently upon the scene for a while, his face wearing an inscrutable expression; then sighed, and spoke:

"It is enough," he said; "you tell me true indeed. It must indeed be a thousand years since I stood upon this pyramid, and, gazing out to where is now the ocean, saw waving fields of corn, with hamlets here and there, stretching right to the sky. This town was not so large as 'tis now, nor was the sea nearer than a day's journey. Also this grotto was but half cut out when I remember it, and the people that I knew wore different dress to yours. It is enough. Now leave me, I pray, to silence and solitude, that I may grow used to the awful knowledge. Leave me, I say, in silence and solitude, here or otherwhere."

"In the Grotto alone thou wilt find peace," said Unim, and led him therein, returning to us shortly.

"Priest of Truth," I asked him, pointing to the town, "canst tell me why yon fleet of warships is gathered in the bay, why the town is all astir with soldiery and fenced about with barricades, and why these fields around are filled with a beleaguering force?"

"That can I easily," answered Unim. "Miropis has been seized by a sudden raid of the invaders, the Governor of the garrison, Sothi, having treacherously surrendered and gone over to the enemy, and now holding the place for them. The vessels yonder, four score in number, are their ships, and the besieging force is a detachment of the Queen's army under one Nayrahn, a brave soldier, but over slow in his doings. It would be well if you were to go down and hasten his movements; fearing not to be known by your rightful name."

I needed no further news, already smelling the battle from afar, longing to mingle in it, and so to drown the sadness that was fast benumbing my intelligence.

"To horse!" I cried to my dazed followers, suiting the action to the word, leaping down the cone, and springing into my saddle in hot haste. "We will burn this hated town above the heads of its inhabitants, and hang its traitor-governor on the deck of his allies' flag-ship. When last I looked on this wine-sodden hole I swore by the Eternal Spirits to re-enter it only as a conqueror, and that I will."

"Remember the words of Unim!" said the grave old man whom we left standing near the black pyramid's apex, "and enter not the Grotto again until you bring the body of the Sleeper here, dead. In life you shall next see him at the Court of the Queen."

Impatient of delay, scarce heeding his words, and even ceasing to wonder at the waking of Marenso from his age-long slumber, in my revengeful fury I dashed down the groves at sacrilegious pace, Valdo and Atris coming hard behind, and on we tore from the forest belt, across the waving fields, recklessly trampling down the grain and the bright, brittle stalks of cane, leaping waterways, flying over thick bushy hedges, charging unceremoniously through the lines of sentries round the Queen's men, riding uninvited past the camping troops of soldiers and the serried ranks of the mounted guard, and slacking not our pace for all the cries of the surprised sentinels till we reached the General's tent, where, bidding my comrades remain on guard, I dismounted, lifted the door-flap, and stalked in with unblushing effrontery.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY. No. 17.

First prize of £5: Mrs. Harris, 4, South Road, West Kirby, Cheshire; £1 each to Mr. Thos. Woolner, 63, Beaufort Road, St. Ann's Road, Green Lanes, N.; Mrs. Peirse, Northover Cottage, Charlton, Shepton Mallet; Mrs. Jane Hudson, 8, Bettridge Road, Hurlingham, S.W.; Miss Jessie F. Dulley, Lindens, Wellingborough; Mr. M. F. Musson, 21, Sutherland Avenue, W.

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A MUTUAL SURPRISE.

"AND is that really all?"

"All?"—and Mrs. Jardyne's big brown eyes glanced up at her visitor with an expression of pathetic reproach.

"Yes, all," continued Captain Mathurin, drawing a chair near his hostess. "Your note led me to expect all sorts of awkward complications. Why, the thing is as simple as can be."

Mrs. Jardyne shook her head dolefully.

"I cannot see that. Oh, if you knew what a dreadful night I have passed!"

"Poor little girl! But where does the difficulty come in?"

"Why, I have told you. I dare not advertise for them, because I should have to say how and when I lost them, and Gerald gave them to me when we were married, and I nearly always wear them."

"Well, but there are other pearls in the world, I suppose?"

Mrs. Jardyne looked up quickly.

"The only thing to do," continued the Captain smoothly, "is to match them as nearly as possible; and, unless Jardyne knows a good deal more about such things than I do, he'll be none the wiser."

"But he would know eventually."

"Why?"

Mrs. Jardyne grew pink, and as her complexion was of the delicate, transparent sort, the pause before she answered was very agreeable to Captain Mathurin's sense of the beautiful.

"Why?" he repeated, after a second.

"Because"—and Mrs. Jardyne's small, jewelled hands twisted nervously—"because Gerald pays all my bills."

The confession was a humiliating one, and Captain Mathurin would have hated himself for forcing it, if his companion had not looked so absolutely bewitching upon the moral rack.

"But this matter of the pearls does not concern you at all, Mrs. Jardyne. You were in my charge. It was through some carelessness of mine that the necklace was lost; therefore, in common fairness, it is my business to replace it—don't you see?"

"Oh!" But the first exclamation of relief was quickly followed by a very mournful shake of the head. "Oh, no! I could not possibly allow you, Captain Mathurin."

"Nonsense! Why not?"

"Oh, because—because I could not; it would be so dreadful."

"More dreadful than to tell your husband how you lost the pearls?"

"Oh, I shall never dare do that. I know Gerald would never forgive me. Oh, how wrong—how mad it was to go!"

"Come, Mrs. Jardyne, don't be so terrified about it. When all is said and done, there is nothing so very dreadful in going to the Empire with one of your husband's friends."

Gladys Jardyne was a very fragile-looking creature, with soft, fluffy, yellow hair, and an innocent childlike expression, which irritated her own and charmed the other sex; but for all her irresponsible expression and infantile ways, she was a passibly shrewd little person, and had a very distinct idea that to go to the Empire with Captain Mathurin while Gerald was away was distinctly one of those things she ought not to have done, and that to accept this suggested present of a pearl necklet was by no means the simple, irreproachable transaction her companion wished to imply—but—but——

"Don't look so wretched! I shall never forgive myself for having made you sad. Let me run straight off to Ryder, and see what I can do."

Captain Mathurin saw that the golden curls shook with less decision than before.

"But——"

"You will see that I have excellent taste. I may go, may I not?"

"I know it is very wrong," faltered Mrs Jardyne; "but it would be so dreadful to explain: and you—you are very kind!"

Captain Mathurin would have liked to express his feelings in somewhat warmer fashion than by pressing the little fingers; but he had served his apprenticeship in Cupid's Court, and knew that a precipitate move is often ruinous to the brightest prospects.

"When do you expect Jardyne back?" asked the Captain as he rose to go.

"He is coming by the Club train. I suppose he will be here almost directly."

"You will not be expected to wear the pearls to-night?"

"No, but I shall on the 20th at Lady Vipere's."

"And to-day is only the 18th. You need not be anxious. You shall have them to-morrow."

"Oh, how can I ever thank you, dear Captain Mathurin!"

"Nonsense! If you will sometimes remember our evening at the Empire—and me—I shan't want any more thanks."

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"I shall never forget either," said the little woman fervently. "The 17th of June will always be a red letter day to me!"

"And to me!" echoed Captain Mathurin, with such significance that, even after the hall-door had closed upon him, Mrs. Jardyne felt herself blushing from crown to chin.

"He is very nice," she murmured, as she turned away from the window, "and there is really no harm in it; and—oh! I do hope he'll get a pretty clasp; the other was such a perfect thing!"

* * * * *

Mr. Jardyne was in great spirits on his return from Paris! The "legal business connected with the estate of a maternal uncle," as he explained to his not too-curious better half, had been arranged in a most satisfactory manner. It was delightful to be home again, and, by Jove! his little Gladys was the prettiest woman in Europe, etc., etc., all of which should have been gall and wormwood to Mrs. Jardyne had her conscience been of the stiff, unyielding sort; as it was, however, the golden-haired little lady allowed herself to be petted and made much of without any very serious moral qualms.

A sin is only a sin when found out, and if the little escapade with Captain Mathurin might, by the hypercritical, be ranged as one, nobody knew or would know anything about it, and what did it matter?

It must be confessed that Gladys was agitated by no stern self-communings as she sat dreaming in her room half hidden in a capacious wicker-chair, on the evening of Lady Vipere's dance. On the contrary, the gown she was to wear was a dream—and what more could woman covet? Besides which, this fortunate little mortal reflected that Gerald was really quite delightfully attentive, and Captain Mathurin was certainly most—interesting! And, then, last, but not least, there was the blissful consciousness that over there, in her jewel-case, nestling in a violet velvet *écrin*, bearing her monogram and the date of her marriage, was a beautiful string of pearls, their exquisite gleaming purity set off by a shimmering, myriad-lighted clasp, which Gladys knew in her secret soul to be far more valuable than its predecessor.

She heaved a sigh of profound content as she turned to ring for her maid, but at that very moment the door opened softly, and, to her unbounded surprise, Gerald entered!

Her exclamation of surprise died on her lips as she saw him advance quickly and silently to the Japanese cabinet on which stood her jewel-case.

What was he going to do? It was evident that he had not seen her!

Vague uneasiness changed quickly to a very definite horror as she saw him turn the key of the leather case. Could he know anything of the pearls? Did he suspect?

She watched him eagerly; he was evidently looking for something. Yes, it was the necklet! He had the velvet case in his hands; he was going to the window with it!

A hundred terrible possibilities rushed through her brain—wild recollections of eagerly read reports of "criminal proceedings." Her conscience revenged itself in a few seconds for its long torpor. Everything was against her—the Empire, the *tête-à-tête* supper, the frantic letter she had written, the pearls! In agony of terror she started to her feet as Jardyne pressed the spring of the case.

"Gerald!"

Case and pearls fell to the ground with a crash as he turned on her a face as white as her own.

"What are you doing?" she stammered.

"I—Great Heavens! Gladys, don't look like that! What's the matter?"

"Nothing. You frightened me!"

"Poor little girl! Sit down. You are not going to faint, are you?"

"No. I am better, only——"

"That's right. Shall I ring for Celeste, or can I get you anything?"

"No; only what were you doing, Gerald——"

"You really must have some wine, darling!" broke in Gerald quickly. But, as Mrs. Jardyne's agitation subsided, she noted with surprise that her husband's agitation seemed to increase; his manner was nervously fidgety, and altogether more suggestive of the sinning than the sinned against. What could it mean?

She interrupted his flow of words with a question:

"I am quite well now. Tell me what you wanted with my pearls?"

Jardyne gave a nervous laugh: "Your pearls, dearest?"

"Yes; what are you going to do with them?" reiterated Mrs Jardyne, her tone becoming proportionately authoritative as Gerald's expression grew mendacious and shifty. "Why did you steal into my room in that way?"

The big man looked supremely unhappy. Gladys' soft brown eyes were fixed upon him with anything but a childlike expression as he began some blundering, hopelessly lame explanation, but he broke off suddenly:

"It's no use, Gladys: I'd better tell you the truth. The fact is, I did want to look at your pearls; I wanted to see if anyone could tell the difference."

"The difference!" gasped Gladys.

"Yes, you'll understand directly; but it's awfully hard to tell you, Gladys. You don't know, but I lost a pot of money over the St. Crispin, and, after my promise to you about the Oaks, I did not dare to tell you, and so—so—dash it, Gladys, you might help a fellow out!"

But Gladys sat motionless.

"So—so," pursued her husband desperately, "I took your pearls and sold them, and got a string at Faulkner's to put in their place until I was in funds again and could buy you some more, and—Good Heavens, Gladys! what's the matter?"

For Mrs. Jardyne had burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter—the situation was too absurd.

"It's awfully good of you to take it like this, Gladys!" resumed Gerald when his wife's hilarity had subsided, and she had expressed her gracious pardon for his heinous offence; "but you can't think how miserable I've felt when I've seen you wearing that gimcrack thing. However, I'm in funds now, and I'll get you a necklet ten times finer than the old one; while, as for this," he added contemptuously jerking the lovely string of pearls, "it may go to the——"

"Let me look at it," interrupted Gladys; "it is really very pretty," she continued with demure condescension, "and no one would ever tell the difference. I—I almost think I'll keep this, Gerald, and you shall give me something else as a peace-offering and a pledge of good behaviour!"

"Anything!" exclaimed Gerald, with rash enthusiasm.

"I saw a lovely set of emeralds at Hancock's; I have always coveted emeralds."

"You shall have them, my darling; you shall have them to-night! I'll rush round to Bond Street at once. You are the sweetest and most forgiving little angel on earth," he murmured ecstatically as he kissed his wife's pretty, childlike face!

WILLARD HOLCOMBE.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 20.] [*SEE PAGE 640.*

NETTIE LITHILL GOT HER PIANO.

The clock on my bedroom mantel struck four. London, that foggy, miserable, November day, as I seemed to grow lighter.

I struck a match, but I did not light my cigar.

For I was extravagant in those days, and said to myself, as I drew out a cigar, and turned to the little figure that stood at my side.

"Will he be blind, doctor?"

"Yes, he will be blind. We can do nothing."

Then this incident happened.

I heard a girl's voice, which sounded far away from Grosvenor Square. Among other things it thanked me very graciously for my services, and seemed to fall to pieces, and rolled over on the daughter, Sylvia, beautiful Sylvia, as cold and earnest, of my adventure of the morning.

A sob came from the girl.

She was dressed all in heliotrope, this quaint colour in my mind's eye.

A little thing in heliotrope—how well I knew the street. Heliotrope! How clearly I can picture the horses.

Next a cool hand was laid on my forehead.

I put up my arms and drew down a tear-stained Victoria Street, and waited for a cab.

"Let *me* marry you," said a silver voice. "You are not going to walk there? It's a long way."

A man's voice answered:

"Oh, no. I shall take a 'bus. But I have never saw her safely to her office.

She was annoyed, there could be no question for all that we did not love each other.

Then came the end; terrific, sickening. For a heartless as marble. It had all been arranged for the wheels creaked.

"It is so confoundedly early," I muttered to remember how you helped me in the fog? It is my voice, "which is the way to the Bank?"

I told them over the tea, half in fun and half in face and tried to kiss it. Then I dropped back on the pillows and fell asleep.

Nevertheless, the following morning, at half-past eight in the morning.

I laughed at the words, and lit another match, The subdued noise of the afternoon traffic below Fleet Street they shied at a boy who happened to reached my ears.

When I awoke I felt quite strong and well, except in Grosvenor Square. I was engaged to her proudly that I had no option but to consent.

* * * * *

That afternoon I called on my aunt, Lady Clarke, and looked anxiously up the street for a 'bus.

I forgot that I intended to go to Victoria.

"You naughty boy," said my aunt. "Aren't you about that. So I did not say anything more.

"All I can say," said Sylvia coldly, "is that if whispered into her ear, I put her in it, and followed ashamed of yourself?"

For several days after that I was at my post, and stood on the pavement outside my rooms in the girl's arm, "through fear of the traffic," as I flourish a morning paper. One horse swung round us long ago, and we were resigned to our fate. But you prefer the company of that sort of girl to mine, and was yet familiar, say in a whisper:

"Can you tell me, sir," said a little, quavering little girl, that sat back in her corner, and looked up to me and laid a hand on my arm. The match loomed out from the fog. I hailed it, and taking on to the pavement, the 'bus knocked against a door to light a match.

In those days I was not often out by half-past eight, I found myself in the street. The sun was unconscious.

At that moment an omnibus, dark and indistinct, threw out a circle of light, and fell on a mass of heliotrope tripped down the road opposite my door, swaying from side to side; the windows rattled; and bolted. The 'bus came lumbering after them, shining very brightly, as a certain little figure in golden, wavy hair and an upturned, anxious face.

Something struck me over the eyes; the iron-shod lamp-post, crashing in a window. The driver lost hoof of a horse, possibly and I fell back on the forehead.

"The way to the Bank?" I repeated, "surely you are blind, it is quite impossible for us to marry."

The conductor stood before us, and asked for the her penny before I could find a coin.

"You must let me pay my fare." She said it so got down at the Bank, and I showed her the way to the office where she had found an employment. She went in, trembling and nervous.

I felt glad enough that I was going away from myself: "Life is a jolly thing if you think of no one for a dull pain behind my eyes. I inquired if there had been harnessed to the 'bus. The driver had all his nerve, and chaos loomed ahead.

Two new horses, great, fiery, untrained brutes, ground, a medley of glass and wheels and struggling rustle of the dress—came forward, and kissed me contained this passage: "Of course, now that you drink and are merry."

For out of the fog came a little figure, that tripped but yourself, and spend enough money and eat, and held it above my head, and looked down on the turn now."

Well, we came to the end of our journey. We must have someone to look after you. You been there before, and I don't know where I am, you had better continue it."

Mad with fright, they took the bits in their teeth, out with her big, frightened eyes into the black fares. I fumbled in my pocket, but she held out he could do to keep them in hand. At the top of moment we remained motionless; then the 'bus were any letters. There was one, as I expected, her.

And the black darkness that surrounded me and—and, I am so afraid of this darkness."

I know better now.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DRIVEN TO EXTREMITIES.

As Olive knelt, pressing her hair back from her brows, the front door closed with a heavy echoing sound, and a quick step told that Braetoun had passed the window.

She staggered slightly, and caught at the back of one of the chairs, as she stood up, holding her left hand to her throbbing heart.

For a few minutes she felt helpless and bewildered, her brain reeled, and she closed her eyes, but the giddiness passed off, and with teeth set she stood thinking of the scene that had passed.

A shudder ran through her, and a weary painful sigh tore its way from her breast, as, forgetful for the moment of Braetoun's threats, her mind was filled with her own, and giving one long look round at the room to which so short a time back she had returned from her honeymoon, a low tremulous cry escaped her lips.

But the weakness passed away, and she was firm. There was the old look of her father once more dawning in her face, and, gazing straight before her, she walked slowly to the door, passed out and upstairs to her bedroom, where she winced on finding her maid busy there.

The girl looked at her curiously, but Olive's face was inscrutable.

"My bonnet and mantle," she said.

"Which will your ladyship wear?"

"Any—the plainest."

The girl glanced at her as she went to a wardrobe, and then turned quickly round with the tears in her eyes.

"Oh, my lady," she cried quickly, "don't think me impertinent, but I can't help seeing and knowing. It hurts me when you are in such trouble."

The stern, hard look passed from Olive's face, and her eyes beamed upon the speaker, her lips quivering a little the while.

"Thank you, Melson," she said softly. "You have always been very, very kind to me."

"Oh, my lady, my lady," cried the girl, beginning to sob, "who wouldn't be kind to you?"

"Hush, pray!" said Olive, in a low, pained voice. "Don't speak to me, please. I cannot bear it. My bonnet and mantle, quick!"

The girl obeyed, and helped, gazing at her the while.

"My gloves," said Olive quietly, and as the girl turned her back she hurriedly took her watch and little chain from her waist, and then as the girl returned pressed both into her hands.

"As a keepsake, Melson," she said, with a piteous smile. "Thank you very much for what you have done for me. Good-bye!"

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"Oh, my lady! What is it? You are not—surely you are not——"

"Don't speak to me, Melson. Yes: I am going home."

She passed out of the room, leaving the girl sobbing violently.

Olive went slowly down the stairs, putting on her gloves as she went, her eyes lowered, and her face calm and stern, but as she reached the hall a change came over her and her eyes dilated with horror, for with crushing violence, as if out of some black cloud, the thoughts which had been dulled by her mental agony came back, and she seemed to hear again her husband's words.

In an instant the import of his threat came upon her in its fullest force, and, horrified now, she hurried out into the Square.

The giddy feeling came back and she shivered at the idea of being too late, and asked herself why it was that she had not followed at once.

Excuse—palliation—everything was swept away now, and she told herself that she had been guilty of criminal indifference and would be doubly blameworthy if anything had happened through her.

Home and flight to her father passed from her mind as the horror increased, and the desire to try and check her husband if he should attempt some insane act of violence.

A cab was passing and she entered it, telling the man to drive to Wimpole Street. Sinking back in the seat she grew half wild with excitement, and could hardly restrain the insane desire to bid the man gallop all the way.

"I shall be too late," she murmured; "I shall be too late." And she shuddered as she pictured what might have happened. What could follow when a weak, sickly man attacked one whose nerves and muscles were of iron? "He would kill him," she said with a shiver as the thought asserted itself that Braetoun was armed.

For a few minutes Olive felt that she was going mad, and she sat with her hands covering her face and pressed upon her lips firmly to keep back the hysterical cries ready to burst forth; and again she wildly asked herself why she had not followed Braetoun at once, instead of sinking into that half-stunned, helpless condition in which she had been ready to mock at his threat, treating it with contempt.

"The pistol—the pistol," she muttered, and the cold perspiration gathered on her brow and in her hands.

Once the thought intruded that she ought not to go to Murray's alone, and after what had passed; but the idea seemed as nothing then in the presence of such a horror, while the horse seemed to her as if it literally crawled.

"I shall be too late!" she moaned. "Oh, faster—faster, for Heaven's sake!" she cried to the man, who opened the trap and asked her the number.

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A maid opened the door, but not until Olive had rung twice, for Rancer was out, the doctor having ceased seeing patients for the day and sent him with a message.

To the maid's surprise, the visitor stepped in at once,

"Quick, Dr. Murray!" she said; "I am Lady Braetoun."

The maid was startled, and, feeling that it was evidently some case of emergency, she led the way to a baize door on the left, opened it, tapped at the inner door, opened that, and before she could utter a word Olive rushed by her into the room.

CHAPTER XLIV.

At a Crisis.

It had been a busy morning, and, after a light lunch, Murray had sought the calm of his library, not to read, but to sit back in the gloom and ask himself whether such a life as his was worth living.

He had brought bottle and glass from his consulting-room, and, utterly exhausted, taken them up to pour out the portion he was accustomed to take as a sedative, and without which he told himself his life would have been unbearable.

"A little more, only such a little more, and the rest would be for ever. No waking to agonising thoughts, no more misery—others' and my own."

He poured out the customary dose.

"Shall I?" he said, with the weary look intensifying in his eyes; "I am so tired: how welcome it would be! Conscience has made no coward of me. No one to feel one regret; many perhaps to be glad. I dare!"

He doubled the quantity, set down the bottle carefully, replaced the stopper, and held the glass in his hand.

"And about my worldly affairs—not set in order. What import we attach to these worldly affairs—the dross that we have treasured up—to leave to others. What are they to a man who has seen the vanity and worthlessness of them all? Let them go. What are they to me? What a miserable mistaken life it has been—not one to regret me when I am gone. Well, I have been a gambler with the good things of life—staked all, and lost. There is nothing left to do but pay."

He sat forward in his easy chair, gazing down at the contents of the glass, with his arms resting upon his knees.

"But what a coward, after all! Too great to even bear my daily misery—fleeing to this relief—that of Braetoun—the miserable drunkard who pours down spirit to drown his woes. And now willing, ready, to take the great step of all—to drown mine for ever.

"Yes, coward, coward," he muttered with a laugh. "Well, I own it; but I have fought bravely. I did fight bravely till that cruel night, and then—ah, what a fall! from a tender love—the genuine sisterly love of a pure, true woman, to her contempt. Enough, this, to drive a strong man to seek his end."

He sat thinking, as he made the liquid sparkle in the glass he slowly turned round and round.

"She will know," he said softly; "she will be sure to know, and she will see the reason; but it can give her no pang now, unless she suffers because I am not at hand to save him. Well, there must come an end to it all, even for him, and I can bear it no longer. Good-bye to all my hopes and ambitions; good-bye to the love that never really lived. Olive, to you!"

There was a weary despairing look in his eyes as he raised the glass to his lips, and in another moment the contents would have been drained, but the door was opened suddenly, and the glass fell to the carpet as he started from his seat.

"Lady Braetoun!" he gasped. "Olive!"

The door closed, and she tottered toward him with her hands extended, her eyes wild and strange, as they darted a swift glance round. Then, with a piteous cry, she yielded to the overstrain, and would have fallen, but he clasped her in his arms, and bore her fainting to the couch.

"At last—at last! Olive, look up," he whispered passionately, as he went down upon one knee by her side, and drew her pale face close to his. "Sanctuary—sanctuary! Let the world say what it will, you shall be safe with me. Look up, dearest; I have loved you so long and so well. All the cruel past shall be like some feverish dream, to be forgotten in our future joys, for I love you, my own. You do not speak. Can you not hear me? Come, forget the past, and let us go at once. Far, far off, where all the many cares will die away, for you are mine—mine only now, at last—at last."

In the mad excitement of his joy at finding that she had fled to him, he could not realise that she heard no single word he uttered, and he went on whispering to her, telling her how he knew that she had borne her terrible lot till the mental strain gave way, and she had fled.

Then reason began to assert itself, and the fond idea that she could hear his words gave way, as he realised that this was no partly assumed swoon, but sheer insensibility.

"What she must have suffered first!" he muttered, as he rose from his knees to obtain water from the *carafe*, but in his mad joy forgetful of everything but the one fact that the woman he had loved so long was there, he bent down to press his lips to her brow, and then started round, for with a cry of rage Braetoun was upon him and seized him by the throat.

CHAPTER XLV.

Braetoun Gets a Check.

When Braetoun rushed out of his house, raging with fury, he leaped into the first cab and bade the man drive to Wimpole Street, but, altering his mind before he was half way there, he thrust open the little trap and shouted: "Eaton Place!"

"All right, sir," said the driver, and then, as the trap fell back: "drive you anywhere you like, captain, as long as the 'oss'll keep on his legs. My word, he's been having a pretty good soaking, and it hasn't done him good."

"I'll have it out with the old man first. It's a card to play. Curse him! I'll threaten to blow the whole affair and set the lawyers to work. He'll do anything, the old idiot, sooner than have her exposed, and he shall, too. I'll make him pay up now, and smart as I've smarted. Yes, it's a chance, and I can face him now. Won't believe me? He must—he shall."

He sat back trying hard to nerve himself for the encounter, and keep his courage screwed up to the sticking-point, but it was hard work. He kept on telling himself that with such a wife there was every excuse for all his own infidelity; but somehow in his heart of hearts he could not bring himself to believe that the charges against Olive were true; and as he drew near to Eaton Place the thought of facing Emsworth after he had goaded him by his charges into a rage, in which he would turn upon him lion-like in his wrath, was too much for him.

"I can't do it," he groaned. "I've got the spirit, but that cursed doctor has drained the strength out of me. Here, hi! cabby!"

"Yes, sir."

"Turn your horse. Wimpole Street."

"Right you are, sir," said the man; and again, as the trap closed and he turned his horse, he chuckled.

"I knowed it. He turned funky before. Going to see a doctor up in Physic Market, and he's scared. My word! he's got 'em coming on. Well, it ain't my business. Anything's better than them blessed shilling fares—unfairs, I calls 'em.—Hullo! Don't have a fit in my cab!"

For the handle of Braetoun's Malacca cane darted through the trap as it was thrown up.

"Yes, sir."

"Stop! Drive to——"

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"The devil, sir?" muttered the man.

"Drive to—to—here, stop at the first tavern."

"Which, sir?"

"Public-house, then, you confounded fool!"

"Right, sir.—I knowed it. Drop to steady him first—'fore he goes to old Bolus's. Seeh is life. We're all alike, from dooks and lords, down to dustmen. Ain't I seen him before, somewhere? Reg'lar swell. Now, where was it? I know: Kempton Park. To be sure. I know. He keeps 'osses. I see him the day I drove a little thin gent down. Why, of course. Well, he's been losing, that what's the matter with him, and applying lotion."

He drew up at a tavern in Knightsbridge, and Braetoun made as if to spring out, but altered his mind.

"Here, can you leave your horse?"

"If you hold the reins, sir."

"Give me hold," cried Braetoun, handing the man half-a-crown. "Go in and fetch me a soda and brandy, small soda and a double quantity of brandy. Get yourself a glass."

"Thankye, sir," cried the cabman. "Now that's what I call a real gentleman. First decent fare I've had for a month."

"Now back to Eaton Place," said Braetoun, as he returned the glass, and the next minute the man was in his place, flicking his horse into a canter, making it look as if the refreshment imbibed by its master were being conveyed to it per whip.

"I can talk to him now," muttered Braetoun, "it's my turn to take the bat. He's had a long enough innings, and I'll let him see."

"Wait," he said, as the man drew up, and then walked up to the door in a manner which excited the driver's admiration.

"Pulled him together fine. Won't want to go to the doctor's now."

Emsworth was at home, and his son-in-law was ushered into his gloomy-looking library at once.

"Morning, Braetoun," he said, as the door closed, and the visitor glanced at the chair to which the old man pointed, but did not sit down. He was agitated, in spite of the fillip he had given himself, by the question how to begin, a matter which seemed easy enough in the cab, but hedged in with difficulties there in face of the enemy.

Emsworth knew that no pleasant mission had brought his son-in-law, and he read at a glance that it was something personal, and as there was only one thing personal—to wit, money—that could have brought him, he quietly prepared himself for the encounter.

"Excuse me one moment," he said, taking a stout, crutch-handled cane from where it stood in a tall waste-paper basket, and limping to the bell, which he rang, and then limping back directed and fastened down the flap of an envelope.

"Take that yourself to the House of Commons Committee rooms," he said to the servant who entered. "You can have a cab."

The man took the letter, and the door was closed.

"Gout's a bit tiresome this morning. How's your wife?"

The way to begin offered and Braetoun seized it.

"Curse my wife!" he cried, facing the old man savagely.

"What!" cried Emsworth, scowling. "Humph! you ought to curse her for saving your life over and over again when you'd have been far better dead. What is it? Won't she come begging for you, and you're obliged to come yourself?"

"Yes, that's it," said Braetoun fiercely. "I'm obliged to come myself."

"Might have saved yourself the trouble, my lad. NO. Is that plain enough?"

"It's plain enough," said Braetoun half seating himself on the edge of the table; "but it won't do this time. Things have gone badly with me lately; I am heavily hit, and people are going to put an execution in the house."

"I'm not surprised," said Emsworth coldly. "May bring you to your senses. Sickness won't, and you've another fit coming on."

"What do you mean?" cried Braetoun, startled by the old man's manner.

"What I say. You look deadly, and you've been making it worse by drinking. I can smell it here."

"And enough to make a man drink—enough to give any man a fit."

"What, losing the money? Shouldn't have risked it."

"Then by your manner you mean that you won't help me now that I'm in this hole."

"That's it, my lad; not even if they clear the house, and take the roof off. I've plenty of room for my child here."

"Then have the room got ready, for unless you come down with what I want, you'll very soon have her."

"Indeed!" said Emsworth coolly, as he watched his son-in-law narrowly. "Well, I'm not surprised, and I'm not sorry. You see, Braetoun, I thought you were a gentleman, and I made a mistake."

"What? No: it was I thought your daughter a lady, and I made a mistake."

"No mistake, sir, I never pretended she was anything but Isaac Emsworth's daughter, well educated, and with a handsome dowry."

"Out of which," said Braetoun, trying hard to restrain himself from playing what he looked upon as his trump card at once, "out of which, as it is by right mine, you will immediately arrange that I have a sufficiency for my present needs."

"Because you have gambled away every shilling you have, and more to, and want to send my poor girl's bit of money after it."

"It's my wife's money, and I want some of it now."

"Because again you've proved that you are unfit to take charge of it—because you have proved that you are a man without a spark of honour in you, and want to go on breaking my poor girl's heart while you amuse yourself with your mistresses and drink yourself into a state of d.t's."

"And what if I do?" cried Braetoun fiercely. "Am I to tie myself down to a woman like that?"

A curious change come over the old man's countenance, but Braetoun did not see it.

"You'd better go now, Braetoun, and keep away," growled Emsworth. "I promised Olive I would not quarrel with you, so be off. My leg makes me hot-tempered."

"D——n your hot temper, sir; what is it to me? I've come here as I have come to let you know the truth. Will you pay my debts out of that woman's money?"

"No, sir, I will not pay your debts 'out of that woman's money.' If you're sold up, let her come home, and if she does she doesn't come back to you."

"Then curse you; you shall have it, and you shall pay the money too. You talk to me of making a mistake, and your thinking me a man of honour. Why, confound you! you miserable old money-hunting schemer, do you suppose that a gentleman in my position is going to tie himself down to all the petty little notions of you narrow-minded people? No, it was not you who made a mistake; it was I. I thought that I was going to marry an honest woman, instead of a miserable——"

"Stop! Mind what you are saying, sir."

"I will mind what I'm saying, but you shall have it straight from the shoulder this time. I say you've got to give me full control of that money—my wife's money."

"And I've told you that you shan't have a penny," said the old man, who was very pale now.

"Then I'll drive it out of you another way, and from him too."

Emsworth started.

"Ah, that hits you, does it?" cried Braetoun, who was

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now beside himself with rage. "I tell you this, that unless matters are made up, the whole thing shall come out. I'll place it in a sharp lawyer's hands, and I don't care now: people will pity, not blame me. I'll have the whole thing in the court: 'Divorce in High Life,' on the newspaper bills, and drag out all the cursed rotten business into the broad daylight for the public to revel on. You old scoundrel: you've known it from the first. There, you shrink and cower before me, you old villain."

He was quite right: Emsworth was shrinking and cowering. He placed his hand upon the table and leant forward, looking ghastly, as he glared at the frantic man before him.

"Mistake? Yes, and you conniving at it all through. Curse her for a miserable baggage. You were all in it for the sake of the title. I believe she was Murray's mistress from the first."

There was a meaning in Emsworth's cowering, for his right hand had been stealing slowly down behind the library table towards the waste-paper basket, till he grasped his stout cane, and then with a roar like that of a roused lion, he sprang at Braetoun. With one vigorous cut across the shoulder he made him stagger back, and before he could recover himself, he had him on his knees, waling him across back and shoulders, everywhere that he could bring the cane down, till, breathless with rage and excitement, he threw all his power into a last cut, and hurled him back, and all in spite of the feeble struggle with which his onslaught was met.

"You dog! You lying, cowardly dog!" he cried, now speaking for the first time, as he stood with one foot resting on the utterly prostrated man's breast. "You mean, despicable hound! You have pretty well broken my poor girl's heart, you whose every touch has defiled her, and now to bully and frighten me into letting you have money, you dare to bring that vile, infamous charge against her, and the noblest, truest gentleman that ever breathed. You dare to threaten to make it known—to publish the lie, the blasphemous lie, against my sweet angel of a girl—why, d——n you, if I haven't killed you by what I've done now, you miserable, pitiful wretch, I'll finish my work and rid the British aristocracy of a hanger-on to its disgrace."

"It's true—it's true!" shrieked Braetoun, as he lay writhing and literally foaming at the mouth. "Kill me and hang for it; but I will publish it now. Your innocent angel! Curse you, you old idiot! There isn't a worse——"

Emsworth literally dropped upon him and caught him by the throat, but he had, big strong man as he was, already overtaxed his strength, and feeble as were Braetoun's efforts to free himself, they were sufficient, and he struggled to his feet panting and holding his hands to his left breast, where there was a sensation as if his ribs had been crushed in.

Then an ugly look came over his face as he realised the cause, and he thrust one hand into his pocket and kept it there with his fingers closing over the butt and chambers of the short, thick revolver he had placed there that morning.

For a few moments, as he stood panting and quivering with rage and pain, he felt ready to draw the weapon and revenge himself upon the man who had beaten him till he could hardly stand; but as he saw Emsworth now supporting himself against the low table, ghastly white and trembling too, a malignant joy made his heart throb, for he felt that he had the means at hand to stab him with a weapon that would pain the old man far more, and better gratify his thirst for revenge.

"You old ruffian!" he gasped out as he saw he had nothing more to fear; and he began arranging his collar and tie and brushing imaginary specks from his coat. "You shall suffer for this. It's true! It has been going on all through my worst illnesses. Lie? Ask Nurse Jennett. Go to your dear friend, Allan Murray—my dear old trusty friend—and charge him with it. What is my little bit of gallantry to that? Yes, go to him, but not yet. Let me settle my business with him first, and after all London has rung with the wretched case—the Fashionable Physician and the Millionaire's Child—make him marry her to hide her shame."

"Stop!" cried Emsworth hoarsely, as he raised his hands, but clutched at the table to save himself from falling. "Braetoun, stop!"

For a moment the young man hesitated, in the half belief that he could make his infamous bargain for silence now; but the pain of the blows he had received sent such a thrill of passion through him that he rushed from the room.

"Better than a bullet," he muttered, and, passing out, he hurried into his cab, unconscious of the fact that the old man had half blindly felt his way to the bell, dragged at it, and then, as he tried to reach a chair, fallen heavily in a fit.

(To be continued.)

Jumbled Story Competition.—20.

On page 636 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *November 16th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

POST-CARD COMPETITION, NO. 20.

A guinea is offered to the first person living within 100 miles of London who sends in on a post-card the longest single word contained in this issue of *Short Stories,* not including advertisement pages. A similar offer is made to those living a greater distance than 100 miles from London.

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INCREASING POPULARITY OF AN EFFECTUAL CURE.

MANY of our readers are, doubtless, familiar with the nature of the extraordinary revolution in the cure of obesity which, within recent years, has been wrought by the original researches of that now eminent expert, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. It is evident that the certainty, the rapidity, and the agreeable surroundings of his curative process have been recognised, in a very large degree, among ladies and gentlemen belonging to the highest social circles. Keen observers who have an opportunity of judging inform us, through the pages of society papers and otherwise, that owing to the general employment of Mr. Russell's treatment extreme obesity is becoming as much a thing of the past, at fashionable gatherings, as intoxication; and, no doubt, it will soon be regarded as nearly as disgraceful. The issue of an eighteenth edition of the author's singularly convincing little text-book, "Corpulency, and the Cure," however, serves to remind us that the popularity of the system has now reached spheres far remote from those of West-end fashion. The book of 256 pages may be had (post free) by sending two penny stamps to Mr. Russell's offices, as above; and it is worth the careful attention of those who wish to free themselves of a burden of fat—not merely because it is unseemly and adds enormously to the apparent age of the sufferer—but because extreme obesity terribly interferes with the energy necessary in these days of competition to make one's way in the world, or even to earn a very modest competency. A large proportion of the letters of Mr. Russell's grateful correspondents refer to their delight at being enabled—within a very brief period, and without any irksome conditions implying semi-starvation—to attack their accustomed tasks with pleasure instead of wearied disgust, through being reduced to their normal weight. The popularity of the system is also largely due, doubtless, to the English hatred of mystery, which is utterly swept aside by Mr. Russell. He fully explains his modus operandi, and supplies the receipt for his preparation.—*Bicester Herald, March 13th*, 1896.

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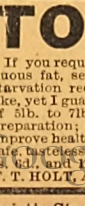

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MR. STEVENSON EXCEPTED.

RULES are illustrated by exceptions. One of the exceptions was the late Robert Louis Stevenson. (Alas! that we should have to speak of him as "the late.")

Afflicted with a disease which was sure to kill him, and right well he knew it, he was seldom in the dumps. His *body* was ill, but *he* was not. What a rare spirit he had! Most of us are put together differently. When an ailment, like a burglar, breaks into our house of dust, we talk, as this woman talks: "I felt languid, weak, and dejected." Dejected *because* languid and weak. Unlike Mr. Stevenson's, our spirits go down with our physical condition.

Describing her own case, Mrs. Lloyd further tells us that her trouble began in October, 1887, with what she styles a "slight stroke." Probably one of those hints of paralysis that Nature gives sometimes, meaning nothing more serious in that line at present. Yet wise people, thus warned, will try to find out the reason, and be guided by it.

"After this," continues the lady, "I felt languid, weak, and dejected. I had a poor appetite, and after eating suffered from a sense of pain and weight at the chest. I was constantly spitting up a sour fluid, and wind from the stomach rushed into my throat as though it must choke me. I soon grew so weak as to be scarcely able to walk about, and was obliged to lie on the couch a considerable part of the day.

"I consulted doctors, as any one would in my place, and took their medicines, but they had only a small measure of success in relieving me. I might have felt better for a day or two, but always relapsed into my habitual state. I have to thank my malady for nine years of bodily and mental misery, for I never saw a well day during the whole time.

"In September, 1893, I read in a little book about the cures Mother Seigel's Syrup had effected in cases like mine. I got a bottle from Mr. W. Colley, the chemist, in Wrentham Street, and after taking it found myself better. Another bottle or two restored my appetite and digestion, and with it my strength. Lightness and brightness took the place of depression and melancholy. Since then I have had good health, thanks to Mother Seigel's Syrup. You may publish this statement if you wish. (Signed) (Mrs.) Sarah Lloyd, No. 1 House, 13 Court, Lower Essex Street, Birmingham, September 18th, 1895."

"In May, 1892," writes another, "I had a severe attack of inflammation of the bowels, and was under medical treatment. On recovering from the acute stage of this disorder, I found myself completely exhausted. My appetite was feeble and fickle, and what little I ate gave me pain at the chest and sides. I seemed to be full of wind, and frequently belched up a sour fluid. I also suffered from continual pain in the head just over the eyes. I was so low and despondent that I took no real pleasure in anything.

"After suffering for six months in this way, I read of Mother Seigel's Syrup, and procured a bottle from the Provident Co-operative Stores, Whitehall branch. Taking it for a few days I felt wonderfully better. My appetite came back and food agreed with me. I continued with the Syrup, and was soon as strong as ever. But you may depend upon it that I have since then always kept a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup in the house, and if I need medicine a few doses always set me right. I have told relatives and friends about this remedy, and am willing you should publish what I have said. (Signed) (Mrs.) Sarah Ann Wright, 35, Duxbury Street, Darwen, Lancs, February 27th, 1895."

As I have remarked, very few of us can be cheerful while the body is for any reason weak and in pain. And of all diseases to depress the spirits and to saturate the very soul of man with gloom I will back indigestion or dyspepsia against the field. It sends more people to the lunatic asylums than all the other complaints combined. A man like Mr. Stevenson may be chick and chipper with consumption, but indigestion would have turned even *him* into a misanthrope. Stop it at the outset with the remedy that cured our correspondents.

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 412. FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 21ST, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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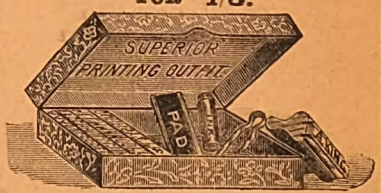

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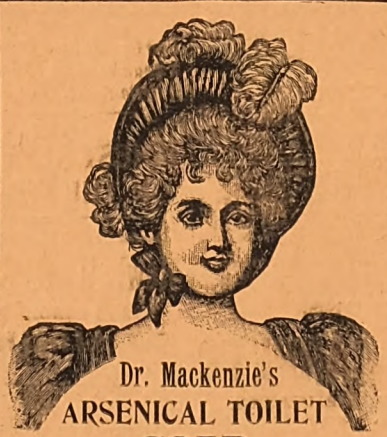

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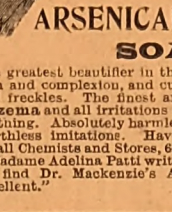

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 412.] For the Week ending November 21st, 1896. [1d.

Through a Glass Darkly.

THE size of the cottage was perfectly ridiculous. The occupants of more pretentious cottages round about spoke of it as the "Doll's House;" the villagers knew it as the "Gladstone Bag," and their humourist had hoped he would be able to master the almost irresistible propensity which seized him on Saturday nights after sojourning in The Ship Hotel, which was, to put a satchel strap round the house and carry it home to his wife.

But cottagers and villagers alike were really consumed with a curiosity concerning the man who was immured in this little, sombre shell of a house, stuck so bleak on an isolated dune. The visitors who came to Selsey during the summer months only occasionally saw him towards nightfall striding away from them down the deserted beach. They saw that he was tall and bearded, and of strong build; and that was all. The villagers saw even less, and knew no more of him, though they had tried hard enough to pump his one servant, the affable "Mooseer" Donc, who went daily on "Meester" Trappe's errands. He was seen occasionally, however, by the life-saving men at the station, and mostly on stormy winter nights.

On one such wintry night, the inhabitant of the "Bag," or the "Doll's House," was, for a wonder to the admirable Donc, not abroad. He sat in a room which was also the hall, before a pine table, the light of a hanging oil lamp above it mingling with the hot blaze of a fire in a wide-mouthed chimney. The little house shivered and shook in the grip of the seaward gale. Trappe's face, though tanned by much exposure, looked sickly in the double glare. On the table was a bottle of brandy and a glass, an ink-stand and a pad of paper. He was writing this:

A LITTLE STORY OF A LITTLE SOUL.

By Louis Trappe.

God save us from all cant and hypocrisy; the pretension of love for "antiques," for "symbolism," for daubs in "yellow" or "green," for abortions in black and white; for all the nastiness of degeneration. Make us honestly grateful for the high privilege of seeing the dawn of spring and smelling the sweet breath of the awakened grass and feeling the jubilant

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sting of the salt spray. Lead us to know that the life of the drawing-room is the death of the best spirit in us; and that to cling to the skirts of society is to be dragged in the dust. Save us from contact with the woman whose touch is leprous, because her heart is flint.

This is such a little story because it must be made to square with the central fact in it, the soul of a woman, and central circumstance in it, the breaking of a man's heart, which, as everybody knows, is the merest fragile trifle. This man and woman met on board ship, and by the time they came to Havre he was very hard hit. So he followed on to Paris, and one Sunday, when the fountains were gushing at Versailles, he walked into the woods with her, and on the edge of the Bosquet d'Amou he made a fool of himself. But he was quite in earnest, mind you. She saw he was. She let him kiss her. She even trembled all over. And he has wondered since whether it was all suppressed laughter or whether he had really stirred up her feelings for the moment—he was so much in earnest.

Well, he stood an accepted lover; a joyous, unquestioning one; a blind, idolatrous fool. Now, at last, he had laid hold of life; the secret of its highest gift was his! His trust was so great that he could read into her eyes a full response to his own splendid joy. Her past was nothing to him—then. He told her to lock it up and put it away (as though she would really have surrendered the key, as she had offered to do!)

His childish confidence was pleasing to her; and certainly it was complete. When she put aside all talk of immediate marriage, and said: "Oh, no, not that. You must not, *must* not mention that to me again. Not till I tell you." He took her at her word, and she kissed his hand and said: "You are very, very good to me. How can I ever repay you?"

As though she did not know the only way to do it! As though she had ever had it in her mind to do it!

He stayed her dupe for three months—the most delightfully willing dupe in all the world. It's a preposterous thing to say, but the ecstasy of those months stands out in such radiant contrast against the dull background of a hard, loveless life, that, despite their cost, he would even wish to live them over again. He paid out his heart for three months' residence in Eden; not such an expensive rental after all.

The end of the lease came one day in September. She had coaxed tears into her eyes the day before. She had taken him by the hands and said: "Maybe—maybe—mind I don't promise for sure—*maybe* I'll have news for you soon. Don't come to me again until I send for you. Now, not another word, dear. Good-night." And he had obediently left her, wondering what was in store for him, and hoping the best.

So he bided his time as patiently as a patient man could, which meant that for three days he never strayed beyond the portals of his hotel, lest he should delay by a second the receipt of the expected summons. By noon of the fourth day he could stand it no longer. The suspense had kept him walking his rooms all night. His imagination warned him; his heart beat so, it hurt him. He rushed to her lodgings. The maid held open the door and he felt so silly and confused upon seeing her so coolly smiling at him that he could not stammer a question. "Will you come in?" she said. "Madame has gone out with Monsieur."

"Monsieur!"

He stared at his feet. "Monsieur? When did Monsieur come?" he asked in another man's voice.

"Oh, pardon. Yes, on Monday."

Monday. That was three days ago.

He leant against the centre table, and the maid went out of the room.

How long he stood there he will never know, nor can he recall the jumble of his thoughts, until his half-closed eyes opened upon an envelope, directed to her in a dashing manly hand.

No thought of the meanness of the act came to him then, and he is not sensible of it to this day. He opened the letter deliberately and read:

London, September —, '93.

MY DARLING LITTLE GIRL,—Here I am in London. I've just got word that all is well. I'll join you in Paris, I hope, by Monday, and then we can lay out plans for a good long picnic. Shall it be Italy or Spain? Algiers or Cairo? Who is this amiable L—— you mention? (Here he read his own name mentioned, with emotions not to be named). *Prenez garde*, my little girl. Beware of Charybdis. However, he's an unknown quantity to me, and I leave him in your hands, only stipulating that, now we're out of the woods, you mustn't do anything to get us back there again.—*A toi toujours*,

BOB.

* * * * *

It's only a little story this, and it is told simply because of its littleness. Here is a woman with a little soul, but big with power of causing pain, who goes out of her way to break a heart that was fairly big and fresh and certainly true. Why did she do this wanton thing? Because, being a woman, she could not help it? Can it be possible that the sleep of this woman has been made all the sweeter for her little act of vandalism?

God save us all from contact with the woman whose touch is leprous, because her heart is flint.

Selsey, May 7th, '95.

Having written this inartistic tale, Trappe wisely refrained from reading it and took some brandy instead. Then casting his eye over some magazines on the table he noted one, and putting the manuscript in an envelope, addressed it and summoned Donc. "Please post this to-morrow, will you?" he said.

* * * * *

Late one spring day the village humourist, who was also the village postman, handed "Mooseer" Donc a letter and a periodical, the wrapper of which bore certain suspicious signs, to which the casual remark of the humourist that he "didn't know Trappe was a writin' man," may or may not had reference. When Donc delivered them, his master glanced at the periodical and threw it unread into the fire. Then he opened the letter and took out of it a little bit of a cheque, such as befitted such a little bit of a story; and he held it awhile in his hands and laughed at it, and said, "Donc, this is blood money and I can't accept it. But *you* may with a perfectly free conscience." Whereupon he signed it, and Monsieur Donc, after handling it gingerly, with one eye upon his master, shook his head, and pocketed it.

Then the days ran on and the weather at Selsey steadily improved, bringing the annual contingent of visitors. This was the most trying period of the year to Trappe. Shut up in his "Gladstone Bag" he had no companionship until nightfall but his bottle and Donc, and in proportion as he uncorked the one he was sure to uncork the other, which sorely smote his self-respect.

Thus matters stood on a fine bluish-grey morning early in September. Trappe stood at the eastern window of his "Bag" looking out to sea. He was tired of it all; he wondered whether the two years had really made a new man of him, or whether the effect of the

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last bottle had brought him for a moment to a sense of his enormous waste of time. The sun fell on the tumbling surf; the gulls lazily soared and suddenly dipped; the soft air, moist with the mystery of the sea, stirred his greyish hair and left a salt kiss on his lips. He turned about, restless and feverish. It was that last bottle. On his cheap dressing table lay his powerful marine glass, aluminium finish. His hand closed upon it involuntarily, as he eyed himself in the mirror. The face was all right. Evidently broken-hearted men didn't die of heart-disease after all; they could even tan like less romantic folk. Perhaps they might even die of delirium-tremens like the most vulgar of gutter people, which reminded him that his linen was none of the cleanest, or his beard well-trimmed, or—— The effigy before him was not that of the gentleman he had seen in Paris. He wondered whether Donc had remarked it.

He swept the sea with his glass. A steamer with no signs of life on it but its belching funnel; and a small fishing boat. He brought the glass round until it rested on the life-saving station. His friends there were cooking their breakfast. Then the cottage between filled the glass, and he rested his vision there in idle curiosity. Green and yellow paint, roomy and ugly verandahs; starved and scorched grass. On the front porch a nurse and several children. Who were these people? He must ask Donc. Then——

Aluminium is as strong as steel, else Trappe's sudden grip on his glass would have bent it. From a window on the second floor of the cottage facing the "Gladstone Bag," a woman was gazing at him through a pair of opera glasses. Trappe was not the sort of man to stand there and flirt with an unknown woman *à la lorgnette*. Why, then, didn't he retire into his "Bag," and pull down the lid, or rather the blind? Above all, why did he suddenly go all a-tremble, and grab the window-frame and drop his expensive glasses and sob like a little child:

"Oh, my dear! my dear!"

* * * * *

"Donc," said Trappe, "come here."

This was an hour later.

"Donc, who lives over there?"

"There, Monsieur? Why——" and Donc went through the most absurd pretension at wool-gathering, crying, of a sudden: "Oh, yes, Monsieur, Monsieur Wilson."

"What!"

It wasn't Trappe's tone or manner which startled the estimable Donc, it was his unwonted vehemence. Trappe looked like a maniac. Then he said, quietly enough: "How long have you known this, Donc?"

"Eh, Monsieur? The Monsieur Wilson? I have not ze plaisure."

"No, no. How long have you known that he has been here?"

"Why, Monsieur, he has been here all summer. He and madame."

Trappe gasped. "And the children?"

"*Oui*, Monsieur."

Trappe's head fell forward into his hands. Then the merciful Donc said gently:

"I could not speak to Monsieur, until Monsieur spoke to me. Is it not so? *Eh, bien.* When Fidele—Monsieur remembers Fidele?—who had the honour of attending Miss Wilson, when I had the honour of attending Monsieur——"

Trappe's hand went into his hair as though to pluck his wits together.

"When Fidele wrote me that she was to come with her mistress to visit here at the pavilion of Miss Wilson's brother——"

Trappe stood up on his only two legs.

"Could I tell Monsieur that she was here? Did I not ask Fidele, and did——"

"Donc!" said Trappe in the voice of a child of four afflicted with weak lungs. "You said Miss Wilson, did you not, Donc?" as he sank into his chair.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Donc, I'm very tired. 'Pon my word you'll have to help me up—up—Oh, I say, Donc. Just you run over to the what-you-may-call-em's and say that Mr. Trappe—you'll remember the name, won't you?—that Mr. Louis Trappe is down with heart-disease and that somebody—Donc, remember!—*somebody's* got to look after him."

Then Trappe went to pieces.

* * * * *

The delight of coming out of dense blackness into the splendour of warm sunlight. That is one and a delicious thing. But to do that and at the same time come unexpectedly from the depths of despair out into the clear light of hope; to revive after many days of apathetic suffering, one's sense of the joy of living—that is a rarer and finer thing—giving adequate compensation, indeed, for much torture.

When Trappe first opened his eyes after some days of lunacy, and knew what he was about, he turned to the very polite and patient Donc, and said: "Where on earth am I?"

"At Monsieur Wilson's," said Donc.

"Oh," said Trappe, closing his eyes. Then Donc glided from the room.

Presently Trappe raised his lids again. And he had cause to. On his lips were lips he had never known; but he was gazing into eyes he knew so well. The lips did not move from his, but they murmured something like this: "Sh-h-h-h, my dear. The doctor won't have it—Ah, Louis, Louis! will you men never know? Why couldn't you trust me? You did until that day. Fidele told me you had been there; I saw you had opened the letter (was it nice of you, Louis?); but even then my brother (he was my brother, my dear) would have gone to you and told you all about it—all about my divorce, a shameful story. Yet you did not wait. Oh, you men! Can you fancy how I felt? Can you understand, my dear, dear Louis, what my brother—look at me—meant? But there, there! It's over now."

Trappe looked up at her with eyes that would have warmed the North Pole.

"Ah, no," she whispered. "You mustn't. Do you think I don't know that you have suffered, too?"

His rapturous look made her blush.

"You're so helpless, Louis, I feel like a coward when I say provoking things to you. But I must. You silly, silly little grey-haired boy. 'A Story of a Little Soul.' Signed Louis Trappe. Dated Selsey. Oh, Louis!"

He lifted himself right out of the sheets and, quivering like a willow bough in a light breeze, held out his arms (they were too weak to clasp her), and said: "If you only knew, my dear, if you only knew!"

As she laid him back upon the pillow, his head upon her breast like that of a little child, she whispered: "Oh, but I do, my dear. Indeed I do."

MELVILLE PHILLIPS.

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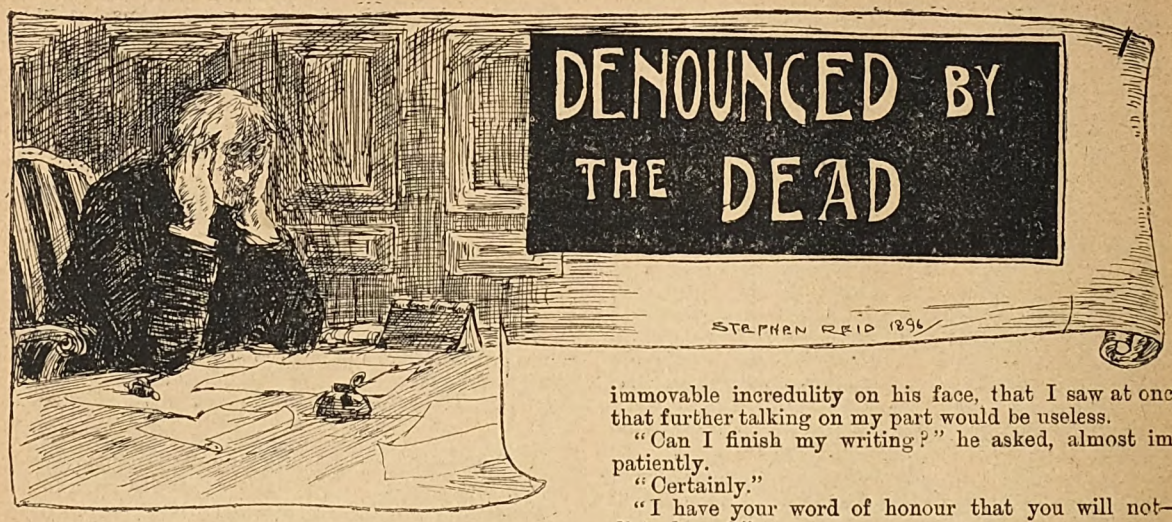

"SCOUNDREL! You have come to kill me!"

My cousin, Sir Richard Terral, started up from his sleep, and stared as if fascinated at the revolver in my hand.

On stealing up to his study I had found him asleep, his arms stretched forward on the desk at which he sat, and his head on his arms. Drowsiness had overcome him apparently in the midst of his writing, for a quill-pen remained between his fingers, and the writing-table was strewn with manuscript.

"One of the old man's interminable essays for the COUNTY GENTLEMAN'S REVIEW," I said to myself. "Enough to send anybody to sleep."

But what attracted my attention most as I quietly entered the room was a six-barrelled revolver lying close to my cousin's arm. The position was a most dangerous one if the weapon were loaded. I took it up gingerly to examine it, and in the moment of my doing so, the old man awakened, and stared at me with terrified eyes.

It was only for a moment, however, while he uttered his exclamation. The next, as I laid the revolver on the mantel-shelf, behind me, the Baronet had resumed his ordinary air of cold, emotionless calm.

"Your visit does not surprise me," he said, in his usual dry tones. "It does not surprise me at all. I expected it, and am aware of your object in stealing into my room in this clandestine manner."

I simply bowed in reply. There was no denying the way in which I had reached my cousin's presence. He continued speaking:

"Perhaps you will grant one favour before proceeding to carry out your purpose, and murder me. There is no need for haste, as you are doubtless aware. Perhaps you will allow me to finish some writing which is of the greatest importance to me. It will not take me many moments."

"But, my dear Sir Richard," I began, unable to refrain from smiling.

My cousin interrupted me.

"You may save yourself the trouble of attempting any disguise," he said quietly. "We understand one another perfectly."

"Excuse me," I said. But the Baronet interrupted me once more, with an expression of such perfect and immovable incredulity on his face, that I saw at once that further talking on my part would be useless.

"Can I finish my writing?" he asked, almost impatiently.

"Certainly."

"I have your word of honour that you will not—disturb me?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you."

Sir Richard consulted his watch, then turned to his desk, and dipped his pen in the ink.

"I rely on your honour," he said.

And as I nodded to humour him, the room became silent, except for the busy scratching of his pen.

In four or five minutes this sound ceased, and the old man looked up.

"I should like to go into the library one moment—alone. You will remember that there is no bell there, nor any means of my calling assistance, even if we were not alone in the house."

"I am entirely your servant, Sir Richard. It is quite unnecessary for you to consult me."

"You are very kind," returned the Baronet, with ironical politeness, and he disappeared into the little book-lined room which opened from the study where I was standing.

"Now," he said, as he returned, drawing a long breath, "let us understand one another, John Terral."

He sat down again in his chair, and faced me as I stood leaning against the mantel-shelf.

"Let us state the case quite plainly," he said, drawing it up into invisible heads with his pen on the table as he spoke. "It is quite natural that you should want to kill me, provided you can do so without detection. You would inherit the estate at once, and be left free to win Mary's heart, as you shall never win it while I live. I do not deny the advantages of the step you contemplate, nor the arguments in favour of your success. As you are aware, my daughter and the servants will all be absent for some hours. I am an old, weak man—you are young and strong. You have obtained possession of the revolver—my only hope of defending myself. So much for your side of the question. Now listen for a moment to mine."

"Pardon me, Sir Richard," I interrupted; "but it is quite unnecessary. I assure you that I have not contemplated for a single moment the crime of which you seem to think me capable. That I came here clandestinely I will admit, but only because you have given your servants orders to prevent my entrance—by force, if required. My one object in forcing my presence upon you——"

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My cousin waved his hand, and smiled with chilling incredulity.

"Kindly allow me to state the case completely," he said. "If you are good enough to do so without interruption, we shall understand one another better, and I shall then be happy to listen to anything you have to say. May I proceed with the arguments against your killing me?"

I remained silent, the only course when a man is so obstinate, and the old man went on in his quiet judicial way.

"I said arguments: but there is only one; it consists of a small sheet of fine India paper, on which I have just written the following words:

"'The study, Terral Court, seven minutes to three p.m., Friday. My cousin, John Terral, has just entered the room by stealth, and is about to kill me.'

"I have added a few words to my daughter, solemnly exhorting her, in case I am found murdered, to see that my death is avenged. In the little while you have been acquainted with her, you will have seen sufficient of my daughter's character, I trust, to be assured that this exhortation from her father will not be neglected. Allow me to proceed, however. You will admit that if that paper is found after your crime, as sooner or later it must be, that it will be a damning piece of evidence against you—sufficient, indeed, to bring you to the gallows. I have hidden it carefully between the pages of a certain book in the library."

"Yes, Sir Richard, the piece of paper is a conclusive

"Let us state the case quite plainly."

argument against murder: I could not dream of killing you now," I said, with a laugh.

I was impatient to say what I had come to say, before I was interrupted. The Baronet insisted on finishing, however. He was evidently proud of his elaborate precautions against me.

"One moment," he said, "and I shall have finished, and will place myself at your disposal. It may occur to you that after killing me you can destroy the denunciation which sooner or later will bring the crime home to you. Allow me to state the arguments against your being able to do so. I have hidden the paper in a book, as I said. I have taken great care that nothing should give you a clue as to which book I have used. There are, roughly speaking, seven hundred in the library. The probabilities are that you would have to examine a quarter of those before selecting the one I have chosen for my purpose. As the denunciation is written on this paper, and carefully placed between the leaves, you would be obliged to spend a considerable time over each book, if you intended to find the manuscript. Let us say that each book takes only five minutes. Then your search will take you, if you are moderately lucky, twenty-seven hours."

The old man paused to work out the calculation on the blotting-pad on his desk.

"Allow me to proceed. Although you can gain no clue to the book I have selected, still, there are reasons why it will be opened by my daughter within a few hours. I think she would open it even if I were killed, because she must consult the book in order to finish for me work of the utmost importance. Of course, there is a chance that she might not do so, and that you might possess yourself of the document before it is seen by any other eye; but you will admit, I think, that the balance of probability tends the other way. I believe I have stated the case clearly and impartially. How it will affect your decision depends, of course, upon yourself."

He paused for a moment, throwing himself back in his chair with the satisfied air of a man who has conscientiously performed a somewhat difficult task. Then, before I had time to think out the best way of answering him, the old man continued:

"There is only one thing more. You are surprised, no doubt, to find me so fully prepared for your sinister visit. I owe it to a dream which has come to me three times with great vividness. I am not a superstitious man, as you probably know, but in the present case I will admit that I have been strongly influenced by a vision. Twice last night I dreamt that a man—I admit I could not tell who; but I guessed that it was you—came to murder me as I sat at this desk. I would not permit the fact to influence me, however, and allowed myself to be left alone in the house, taking the precaution only of keeping a revolver by my side. I must have fallen asleep, however, for I dreamt the whole dream over again as I sat here, and I woke to find you standing over me, with the revolver in your hand. Use it, if you think it a wise thing to do, considering the little witness in the library. I promise you I will make no resistance."

The Baronet regarded me calmly. There was no doubt that he was quite in earnest, yet his lined old face never showed a tremor. I met his steady gaze as unflinchingly.

"I have heard you out patiently," I said. "Perhaps you will allow me to speak, at last. In the first place, here is your revolver, Sir Richard. Perhaps you will feel happier while you listen if you have the means of defending yourself against my homicidal intentions."

I handed the weapon to him as I spoke, and the old man took it without the slightest change of expression.

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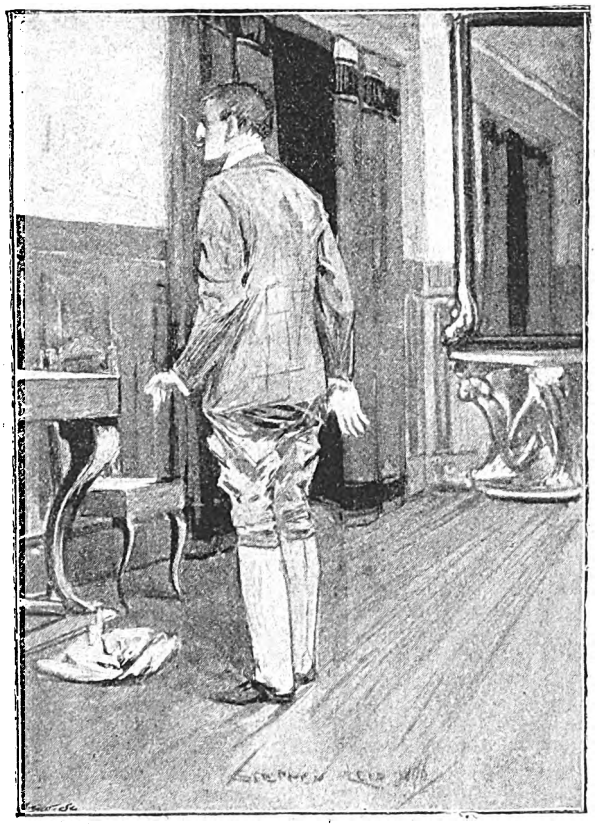
"I came here," I went on, "to make a last appeal to you to treat me fairly. When I came to Terral Court, six weeks ago, I came as a kinsman, expecting a kinsman's welcome. You were pleased to imagine that I was eager



It fell from my startled fingers

for the estate which will be mine when you die, and that I wanted to spy on you. You hated me accordingly, and tried to prejudice your daughter Mary against me. Thank Heaven! she was built in a less suspicious mould than you, and treated me with a frank friendliness. As I told you a week ago, I learnt to love her; but before speaking a word to her of love, I was fool enough to ask your permission. You ordered me out of the house where I had been staying as your guest. Since then I have been unable to obtain a moment's interview. To-day I came determined to see you, and argue my cause, at all odds. Finding the door ajar, and nobody about, I slipped up here, and found you asleep, with the revolver by your side. It was simply a regard for your safety which made me take it from the desk at the moment you awakened."

My cousin's face remained unreadable, and I went on:

"Now that you have kindly allowed me to explain my presence here, I will tell you what I came to say. It is this: With your will or without it, Sir Richard, I mean to win your daughter's heart, and make her my wife. Why, it seems a marriage made by Heaven!—when I shall inherit Terral Court—and should be expected to turn her out of her home when you die, if I cannot make her its mistress. Why you object to a match that ought to delight you—you'll excuse me talking bluntly, sir—I cannot imagine. What I came here for to-day is to give you another chance of acting like a friend and a kinsman. Whether you do or not, I shall marry Mary. Why shouldn't you give me your approval in my wooing? I am not a poor man. Thank Heaven! I don't depend upon your death for the means of giving the woman I marry a home. My father used to tell me that he was looked down upon by the rest of the family, before he emigrated to the States—a sort of fool; but he managed to make a good pile out there, and has left me sufficient to buy a dozen Terral Courts, if fate and the entail didn't make me heir without."

I paused, but my cousin made no reply. He sat in an attitude of studious and unimpressionable attention. After looking in vain for some evidence that my words were taking effect, I went on:

"You can easily be satisfied about my character, if considerations of that sort affect you. It is true that you have not concerned yourself much with my history while I was abroad, but I am sufficiently well known in Sydney for you to learn all about me by making inquiries there. When I spoke to you first about your daughter, sir, I said as much, and gave you names and addresses. I don't see why you should be prejudiced against me; I can't help being next heir to Terral Court. I am not eager for it, although, if I survive you, as in the ordinary course of nature I shall do, I shall be proud and happy to have the old mansion of our family. I came here simply because I am a kinsman. Why *don't* you act like one?"

I stopped then, determined that the old man should say something—good or bad.

"Have you finished?" he asked, after a minute's dead silence.

"Yes, Sir Richard."

"You have determined not to try murder, then? I thought the piece of paper in the library would dissuade you."

"You still choose to be unjust in your estimate of my motives."

The Baronet shrugged his shoulder.

"We will not quarrel about your motives," he replied coldly. "The practical question is, do you intend to kill me?"

"Of course not."

"Then there is no need for us to prolong the interview."

I kept my temper with difficulty.

"Am I to understand that you still object to me as a suitor for your daughter's hand?"

"Pardon me," said my cousin; "but that question was fully discussed at our last interview. Need we go over it again?"

"If you are determined to be deaf, sir, to the voice of reason and of justice," I replied hotly, "it will be idle to talk any more. I will bid you good-day, Sir Richard Terral."

The old Baronet rose and opened the door without speaking. His face wore under its solemnity a ghost of a smile, and I knew well enough as I left the room that my cousin was congratulating himself on the ingenious manner in which he had frustrated the designs of a would-be murderer.

I was boiling with rage, as well I might be. It was bad enough to be given the cold shoulder by my relative,

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with no other reason than that I had been born out of England, son of the only member of the family plucky enough to make money in trade, instead of waiting for dead men's shoes. To be coolly treated as a criminal was beyond endurance. I determined never to set foot in the house again till Sir Richard Terral's death left me owner of it.

In the hall, however, was something which made me cool down quickly, and reconsider my decision. It was only a little pink-ribboned sun-bonnet, thrown carelessly on the oak table, but it conjured up the sweetest picture in the world for me, for it belonged to Mary Terral, whose sweet, womanly welcome had more than compensated for her father's cold unfriendliness.

I took the dainty arrangement of straw and ribbon in my hand, and was raising it to my lips, when it fell from my startled fingers, and went out of my mind utterly.

For I had heard in the house above me, so silent till that moment, the sharp crack of a revolver, and a short and terrible cry.

II.

It was a shocking thing to enter the room, where I had a few moments before left Sir Richard Terral alive and well, to find the difference that those few moments had made. He lay on the floor, a huddled-up heap, from under which a dark mark, like a shadow, was spreading itself silently over the carpet. He was quite dead.

I had rushed upstairs, after the first momentary paralysis of will and thought, straight to Sir Richard's study. A dim idea was in my mind that the Baronet had accidentally shot himself with the revolver I had seen in his room. But when I bent over his inanimate body, trying to staunch the blood which came from a wound in the old man's side, I noticed that no revolver was to be seen. Then it dawned upon me that the window which I had left closed was standing wide open. The draught between it and the open door ruffled the pages of manuscript on the dead man's desk, and two or three sheets fluttered down to the floor, as if eager to hide that dark shadow which crept steadily across the carpet.

It was the manuscript, perhaps, which brought suddenly into my mind the thought of that other paper which Sir Richard Terral had written and hidden in the next room.

The window, as I said, was wide open; beneath it was the roof of the verandah, which ran along the front of the house. It would be quite possible for an agile person to climb up the verandah and so gain the study. He might have escaped that way also, after shooting Sir Richard, while I was running upstairs to the room. I looked out into the garden below, but the murderer, if he had gone that way, must have been long out of sight. That a murder had been committed was clear from the fact that the revolver was gone. The old man's treble dream had come true, after all.

Yes, there was no doubt that my cousin's death pointed to foul play, and lying in the little room beside me was the paper on which Sir Richard had denounced me, with his last written words, as his murderer. If it were found who would believe my explanation of its existence?

Realising how much the fact menaced my safety, I hurried into the library and looked round anxiously for any clue that might guide me to the book in which the murdered Baronet's denunciation was hidden. But as he himself had said, Sir Richard had been careful that nothing should be left to guide me in any search. The room was a small square one, with shelves on three sides. On the fourth were glass cases containing animals which my grandfather had collected. One of them, a hideous blue ape, had been mounted elaborately, with one forepaw grasping the branch of a tree. The other stretched out as if pointing.

With a half-superstitious hope, I followed the direction of the extended finger, and took out the book on the opposite shelf towards which it pointed, but I could find no sheet of manuscript. In the midst of my feverish search through the printed pages, the thought seized me that I was acting madly. Every moment that I delayed making public Sir Richard Terral's death I was adding to my chances of being saddled with the responsibility of it.

Suppose I were found rummaging my cousin's books, while his dead body lay in the next room, how could I avoid suspicion? With this idea in my mind, I put back the book I had taken in its place on the shelves, trembling now with anxiety lest the murder should be discovered before I had given notice of it.

I hurried out of the room and through the study, without stopping to take another glance at the inanimate heap by the writing-desk, and hurried out of the house and along the avenue which led to the high road, afraid to run, lest I might be taken for a fugitive leaving the scene of his crime, and unable to walk quietly in my anxiety to give the first news of Sir Richard Terral's death.

Fortune favoured me. Walking along the high road, not twenty yards from the avenue gates, was Constable Quiner, the Terralcombe policeman.

He turned as he heard my hurrying footsteps and touched his helmet.

"You are the very man I was looking for!" I exclaimed

He lay on the floor.

breathlessly; "my cousin, Sir Richard Terral, has been murdered!"

I wondered, while I said it, whether my manner would appear to him that of an innocent person.

He stared at me for a full moment, his green eyes wide open, and as round as his rubicund face.

"Great Heavens! murdered!" he said; and then a

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smile of professional satisfaction spread over his whole visage, and he rubbed his hands together cheerfully.

"This is a big business, sir," he said briskly. "It is a good job you met *me*."

"Yes," I said. "Now I must go for a doctor, I suppose, although no doctor can do any good. He is shot through the heart."

"Yes, a doctor; I was just going to suggest it," said Quiper solemnly.

"You will go on to the house. Sir Richard is lying in the study. There is nobody at home."

"Yes—yes," said the constable. "I will go and make an examination. I will take your evidence when you come back with Dr. Hugh Smith, if you don't mind, sir."

Dr. Hugh Smith was not at home—a country practitioner never is—so I left a message for him, and hurried back to Terral Court.

Constable Quiper received me in the hall, where he was sitting at the oak table, with his handcuffs laid out before him, laboriously making notes in his pocket-book with a pencil stump. He had evidently been undisturbed in his examination.

"Well; have you discovered anything?" I asked, moving Mary's sun-bonnet further from his arm.

"Yes, sir; I've put down a good many important facts here."

He patted his pocket-book affectionately, closed it, and put it in his pocket.

"Have you a clue to the murder?" I asked, glancing at the handcuffs on the table.

"Possibly."

The man's face was full of unsearchable wisdom.

"Well; are you going to do anything?" I asked. I was anxious to know whether there was a chance of the murderer being caught. It would relieve my own anxiety so much.

Quiper rose solemnly and stood between me and the open door.

"I am afraid I shall have to arrest *you*, sir," he said stolidly. I felt my colour change. Was it possible that the dead man's denunciation had been found already?

"Arrest me? It is absurd!" I said keeping calm with an effort.

"Possibly, sir; but I think it is the course I ought to take. If it was found afterwards that you'd done it, the British Press would be down on me like a hundred of bricks; I may tell you and me, sir, it looks more professional to make an arrest; and besides, you had a good reason to shoot the old gentleman."

"This is nonsense," I said impatiently. The idea of an arrest was unbearable. Just the little time I had to search in Sir Richard's library for the incriminating paper would be lost while I went through the formality of proving my innocence.

"Look here, Quiper," I said insinuatingly, "it would be very inconvenient for me to be locked up just now, when I am anxious to investigate the horrible death of my cousin. You must think of some other means of gaining public approval."

But, rather to my surprise, the man was inexorable. Even the undignified offer of a five-pound note would not melt him.

"No, sir," he said firmly, but regretfully, "now I've got the chance of distinguishing myself, I couldn't play with it, not if you made it guineas."

I did make it guineas, but only to prove that Constable Quiper meant what he said; and as force was out of the question, I walked out of Terral Court a prisoner.

III.

EIGHT days after the death of Sir Richard Terral, I emerged from the Town Hall of Doveton, our neighbouring market town—a free man. After a week's imprisonment, and considerable inquiry, which elicited nothing, the magistrates decided to acquit me, as, in spite of the interest I had in Sir Richard's death there was no evidence forthcoming to connect me with it.

Laboriously making notes.

The eminent barrister I had engaged to represent me made a stirring speech on my behalf, which induced the county magistrates to add to their decision the opinion that no suspicion could possibly attach itself to me.

The inhabitants of Doveton seemed to be of the same mind, for they cheered me enthusiastically when I left the building. I had no taste for public sympathy just then, however. I was burning with impatience to get back to Terral Court, not to enter into possession of the estate, which was now mine, or even to see Mary Terral. I had only one purpose in my head, to ransack the library in which the late baronet had hidden his denunciation of me, to find the paper, at all costs, before it fell into the hands of others, above all, those of the girl I loved.

If I had known that Mary Terral loved me in return, I should not have feared so much. I should have told her everything confidently, expecting her to trust my assertion against her father's last written words. But I did not believe in my heart of hearts that my fair half-cousin did love me. She was interested in me, I knew, and sorry that I was treated by her father so unkindly, and she loved nobody else—all facts that made me hopeful in my desire to win her; but none of them likely to make her believe my word in spite of appearances. Would it be possible, if she once imagined me guilty of her father's death, to consider me with anything but horror?

Outside the Town Hall I pushed my way through the cheering crowd, and was driven off to Terral Court. It was a ride of ten miles; but the Doveton jehu did it very creditably, considering the animal he had between the shafts.

In less than an hour I was inquiring at the door for Miss Terral. It was with a feeling almost of relief that I heard she was away.

"She went away immediately after the funeral, sir," said the girl, "to friends in London."

I inquired their name, and the girl went to fetch the address which Miss Terral had left for her letters to be forwarded, while I waited in the hall, where Constable

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Quiper had arrested me. I had been worrying so much over the hidden paper, and whether Mary would find it, that it actually never occurred to me that I was now master of the house in which I stood. I was soon reminded of it by the old housekeeper, who came back, instead of the maid, with Miss Terral's address.

She curtsied so frequently and so elaborately that I was filled with wonder, till she commenced a politic and complimentary congratulation on my return to freedom, which reminded me that she was my own servant. I copied down the address she gave me: "Miss Lewin-Brown, Eaton Square," and then I said I would run up and see the room where my cousin was killed.

The old lady curtsied lower than ever—perhaps to give me more confidence; for I was feeling nervous and excited, and possibly showed it. I resisted, with difficulty, her offer of refreshments, and walked up alone to the room where I had last seen my unfortunate cousin. There was little change in it, that I glanced behind the writing-desk with a sort of half-idea that I might see that strange huddled heap still lying there, the sight of which had frozen my blood eight days before.

I did not linger in the study, however, but walked straight through to the little library, with a half-superstitious certainty that I should find something there—I knew not what—to tell me how matters stood.

It was there, surely enough, in the form of an empty space on one of the shelves, from which a book had been removed. I had taken only a cursory glance round, while my cousin's dead body was lying in the outer room, but I was quite sure that no books had been missing then.

I called up the old housekeeper, who came in curtsying as though she had never left off.

"Can you tell me who has taken a book away?" I asked, pointing at the empty space; and the old lady bobbed down to the ground.

"Yes, Sir John—Miss Terral, please Sir John. She was correcting an article which poor Sir Richard had written for the papers, and took it to London with her, Sir John. She left word with Mr. Reynolds, the lawyer, that she would return it, please Sir John, as soon as possible. I heard her telling the old gentleman, poor dear."

It was not quite clear whether the epithet applied to Miss Terral or the lawyer, but I was in no mood for wondering. For this book must be the one to which the murdered Baronet had referred—a book to which his daughter would refer for his sake, even if he were dead. My heart seemed to stop beating at the thought.

It was still possible, however, if the fatal paper was well hidden between the printed pages, that it might have escaped her noticed. If such good fortune was possible, I must not lose a moment. I expected I startled the old housekeeper by the abruptness with which I ended my inquiries and hurried down to the carriage, which had waited for me. She actually forgot to curtsy.

I was rather surprised, on leaving the house, to find two vehicles outside. The latest arrival was a private brougham, which appeared to be in the act of stopping in front of the house; an old gentleman got out as I ran down the front steps, and came towards me with a smile on his rotund face.

"Ah, Sir John! I thought I should meet you here," he said. "I was waiting for you in the Town Hall, but you got away so quickly that I was unfortunate enough to miss you. I am Mr. Reynolds of Reynolds and Fox."

I recognised the name as that of the family lawyer.

"Miss Terral wished me to assure you that Terral Court is quite ready for your occupation. She has removed all her own belongings, and is staying at present with friends till she decides where to take up her residence."

He was proceeding to launch into business matters with regard to the estate, when I interrupted him. It seemed a mockery listening to an account of my property when my very life and freedom were in jeopardy. I explained that I was anxious to catch a train at Doveton if he would excuse me.

"Certainly; any time, of course, will do for our business, which is purely formal," he said, and he bade me good-day.

But as I was entering my cab, the old gentleman hurried back from the brougham to me with a parcel in his hand.

"Miss Terral asked me to deliver this to you with apologies for borrowing it. I received it from her this morning by post, and thought I would bring it on myself, as she seemed anxious about it. It is a book out of your library, I believe; perhaps you would rather I left it at the house."

I surprised him by saying I would take it with me; and as soon as the vehicle started on its return journey, and I found myself alone, I tore off the paper wrappings feverishly and began turning over the pages. The book was a pretty large one—a "History of the Devonshire County Families"; to look between every two pages was a work of some magnitude, but I had achieved it by the time my driver drew up at Doveton railway station.

Then I spent the time in the train, while I was travelling to London, going through again and again, but always with the same miserable result. Not a trace of the dead man's denunciation was to be found. If this was, indeed, the book in which he had hidden the paper, there was little doubt that it had already fallen into other hands—Mary Terral's most likely. It was quite probable that the return of the "History" was simply meant as an announcement that the paper was found.

At any rate, I must find out whether Mary had seen it or not. The earliest moment that it was possible for a man to reach Eaton Square, after the arrival of the train at Waterloo, found me knocking at the door of the Lewin-Browns and asking for Miss Terral.

When the footman returned, I knew that the worst had happened.

"Miss Terral was engaged, and sorry she could not see me."

IV.

SINCE Mary must know that I had come from Doveton entirely for the purpose of my visit, her reply could have but one meaning. I turned away from the house in Eaton Square with a mist before my eyes. "What would Mary do?" I asked myself, and the still more important question: "What ought I to do?"

On my quickness of thought might depend both my life and honour.

If it had not been for the thought of Mary Terral, I should probably have made good my escape to a foreign country, rather than risk the necessity of proving my innocence in the face of my cousin's declaration.

But the love of Mary Terral had become already greater than the love of life with me, and the thought that she considered me a murderer lessened by contrast the fear of danger from the law. The thought of Mary spurred me on to a hazardous resolve. I would not wait

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quietly for the dead man's accusation to hound me down. I would face it boldly, and of my own free will publish the whole true story to the world, before I was obliged to do so feebly, as a defence, when nobody would be likely to believe it.

The magistrate who had discharged me in Doveton Town Hall from complicity in Sir Richard Terral's death had struck me during my examination as a kind and broad-minded gentleman. As I had no friends in England, I decided to go to him with the tale of my cousin's unjust suspicion and accusation, and leave my fate in his hands.

If the world accepted my explanation, surely the woman I loved would accept it also! If they did not, well! what was life to me without her friendship and approbation? One thing I felt was impossible: to ask Mary Terral to believe that I was guiltless before I had proved it publicly. She should accept my innocence as the verdict of my fellow men, or not accept it at all. That alone could save her from the life-long agony of wondering whether she had allowed her friendship to bias her judgment.

I thought it all out on my way back to Doveton. There was no doubt that a full confession, so I called it to myself, because I had begun to feel like a criminal awaiting detection, a full confession to Mr. Fitz-Henry, the magistrate, was the best move under the circumstances.

My only fear was that I might be too late. Mary Terral was not the girl, if she thought me guilty of her father's death, to let any feeling of her own, or any fear of family disgrace, stand in the way and prevent her denouncing me. What if I were already a marked man?

I got so nervous by the time I reached Doveton, thinking of the probability of my arrest, that when I saw Constable Quiper standing on the platform, I turned quite cold, and had to wipe the sweat off my forehead and face.

"I must avoid him at all hazards," I said to myself, and luck favoured me.

When the train stopped, the policeman was standing by the little gateway where tickets were collected, looking towards the other end of the train. My compartment happened to stop opposite a great doorway which was not used for passengers, and at the moment we drew up at the platform, a porter was unlocking the door to take through a big truck-load of empty milk-cans.

My short residence in England had already given me an unlimited faith in the power of the shilling. I slipped out of the carriage, tendered the coin and my ticket, and in another moment was out in the street, where fortune favoured me again. One of the three ancient growlers which Doveton boasted was within call.

"Drive me quickly to Mr. Fitz-Henry's," I said, springing in—"Doveton House!"

The driver nodded and shook the reins. As the vehicle began to move, I lay back with a sigh of relief—one danger was past. But the next moment I started up, and thrust my head out of the window farthest from the station front.

"What, in Heaven's name, are you stopping for?" I shouted. "Drive on!"

The man went through an acrobatic performance in order to bring himself within speaking distance.

"There's somebody calling, sir," he exclaimed, in a conciliatory tone.

"Never mind—drive on!" I shouted again.

But it was too late. Constable Quiper, who had caught sight of me, and run out to stop the cab, was already at the window. It was all up with me.

"Well!" I said, forcing myself with a great effort to be calm, "what is it?"

"It is about the murder, sir," said Quiper, with an urbane smile on his round face. "I have been looking out for you in the station, sir."

"And for what, pray?" I felt that I had grown pale in spite of myself.

The policeman smiled more urbanely than ever.

"To tell you the news, sir. We've got the man who did it."

"What! You have arrested the murderer of Sir Richard Terral?"

The man's answer had been so unexpected that I could scarcely believe my ears.

"Yes, sir. I thought you would like to hear the news, seeing that you were a little mixed up in the affair—if we may call it so. Being in Doveton about it, and hearing there that you'd gone up to London without luggage, I thought I'd wait about a bit, having nothing else to do, on the chance of seeing you, and being the first to let you know. I'm told that you were thinking of offering a reward, sir, for the murderer's apprehension?"

"Certainly. Who is the man?"

"A poacher, sir, named Dave Ilack. You may have seen him, sir, idling about the village—a slouching, ne'er-do-weel, always in mischief. I suspected him from the first. You see, Sir John, he owed your cousin, the late baronet, a grudge."

"What for?"

"A pretty heavy sentence for poaching. Sir Richard happened to try him, as Justice of the Peace, you know, and dropped on him heavily. When the man came out he went round the place swearing he'd have his revenge. It seems he's had it. He got in at the window of the study, and shot the poor gentleman with his own pistol."

The cabman must have wondered at my sudden change of mood. The policeman stood talking at the cab-window, and I had not the least desire to hurry him or drive on.

"How did you find it out?" I asked, with an interest that must have rejoiced the constable's heart.

"Well, sir," he began, with an air of impenetrable wisdom, "there were two or three little things I found out when I took the case in hand. The pistol, for instance, was found in the shrubbery——"

"By the cook, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, by the Terral Court cook. Then, again, there were marks of boots with nails on the garden-bed beneath the verandah. That, I may say, removed a good deal of suspicion from your shoulders, sir, although personally I never suspected you in the least from the first."

"But you arrested me?"

"Police tactics, sir—tactics," said Quiper, shaking his head gravely. And he kept repeating the word as though it pleased him.

I asked him to proceed.

"Well," he said, "we—that is, I—set about searching for a man with nails in his boots. You see, sir, we police have to put one and one together and make four of it."

"You have to make a good deal out of a little," I said. "Yes; how did you manage to get from the nailed boots, which everybody in the village wears, to this

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particular poacher? I hope you have quite proved that he is the right man?"

"Oh! yes, sir. We—that is, I—have got it all clear."

"What makes you sure? Has he confessed?"

"No, sir; but the woman he lives with has. He was fool enough to tell her about it, and then vex her over another woman. That is really what finally led us—that is to say, me—to arrest the man."

I could not help laughing at the superfluity of the deductions about boots and pistol on which Quiper so evidently prided himself.

"Well, constable," I said, "I won't forget the reward when my cousin's murderer is convicted, though I am afraid the woman has most claim to it. Meanwhile," I felt in my pocket for a sovereign, "you refused five guineas last time very properly, but I don't think you'll refuse this as a slight token of the appreciation I have of your astuteness and skill."

Dave Ilack.

The cabman was looking down to see when he was to start.

"All right, driver," I said; "I won't go to Councillor Fitz-Henry's to-night. Can you drive me as far as Templecome Inn?"

V.

"VERY nice, the way Mr. Fitz-Henry alluded to me at the magistrate's inquiry, wasn't it, sir?" said Constable Quiper to me. "I suppose it would hardly be in a judge's line to allude to my success, eh, sir?"

We were in the Shire Hall at Doveton, where the assizes were held, awaiting, in the seat allotted to witnesses, the trial of David Ilack for murder. The trial had a tremendous interest for me, for his guilt was still unproved.

At the magistrate's inquiry, less than a month before, the man had stubbornly stuck to one reiterated assertion. He was the innocent victim of a woman's spite. It was true enough, he said frankly, that he bore no goodwill to the murdered man; but he had never thought of killing him, and Liz Smith was lying, if she said he had owned to doing it, drunk or sober.

He stood in the dock, now pale and stern-looking, while the judge took his seat, and the accusation was read out.

"A man who will be resolute to the end," I said to myself; and I wondered whether the crime would be brought home to him. It was selfish of me, no doubt, but I could not help hoping that the case against the arrested man might be proved to the hilt, that no possibility of doubting his guilt might remain; for I felt that if David Ilack left the dock uncondemned, I must enter it.

As the accusation was being read out there was some sensation at the back of the court; a lady had fainted. I could not see from my position who it was; but Quiper, who had slipped out noiselessly, came back with the news that it was Mary Terral. I had not seen or heard from her since the murder. After the publication of Ilack's arrest I had made another attempt to see her, but with the same result as before. Upon which I determined to make no effort to arrive at an understanding until the actual murderer was convicted.

I had been straining my eyes, trying to catch sight of her in the court. I felt that she would be there; but not until the policeman told me she had been carried out in a swoon did I know for a certainty that Mary had put in her appearance at the trial.

I had not much time for thinking about it, however, for before the sensation caused by Miss Terral's illness had subsided, it was succeeded by a fresh and more startling one:

To everybody's surprise, David Ilack pleaded guilty.

The judge was so surprised that he made the man repeat the word which condemned him to death. The eminent counsel who had been engaged—Heaven knows how!—by his friends, to defend the accused man, sprang to his feet with a face full of surprise and consternation, trying to save the man in spite of himself. But the man would not let him speak.

"Shut up," he said roughly. "I did it, and everybody knows I did. What is the good waiting to have it badgered out of me. I don't want playing with, I only hope Liz Smith will like to feel she's hanged me!"

Everybody seemed disappointed. People who had obtained good seats, and brought sandwiches to enable them to sit out a long day's trial, were wondering what they should do with their afternoon. Constable Quiper turned crimson with disappointment and indignation.

"Why, they won't want any evidence," he exclaimed, with a fond look at his note-book. "What is the good of collecting evidence against a man like that?"

Not much good, certainly. The trial that everybody had looked forward to as such an interesting one was over in less than fifteen minutes, and David Ilack left the dock condemned to death.

His departure was followed by a rare hubbub, everybody praising or blaming his conduct. Then people rose, unwilling to relinquish the seats they had fought for a little earlier in the day, and tried to hide the needless sandwiches.

But suddenly everybody started and stood still, for a woman's voice, clear but trembling, sounded through the court.

"Your lordship has made a terrible mistake!" said the voice, and the words were followed by a dead silence.

"That is Liz Smith," said a man near me.

But I knew better. The voice was one which I recognised instantly, and I held my breath, wondering what Mary Terral would say.

People were making a way for her towards the bench, and I caught sight of her at last as she moved nearer the judge, whom she addressed. I was startled by the terrible change in her since I had seen her last; her face was thin and deathly pale, her steps seemed weak and

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tottering as she moved slowly through the people in the body of the court.

The judge had been whispering with those beside him on the bench. Now he addressed the girl who had spoken to him. Did she wish to make a statement! If so, she was at liberty to do so.

Then Mary's clear, thrilling voice was heard again in the silent court.

"They tell me, sir," she said, "that you have just condemned a man to death for the murder of my father. That man is innocent. The real murderer is another. His name is on this paper in my hand."

Then everybody looking saw that she was holding up a small piece of India paper, which trembled in her fingers.

"And who is it you accuse?" asked the judge.

The lovely girl gazed slowly round the court and her eyes met mine.

"The murderer sits there!" she said slowly, pointing at me. "It is Sir John Terral!"

All eyes were directed at me.

"I think I must have loved you all through it, dearest."

The denunciation had come at last. It was too late to affect me, however. Mr. Fitz-Henry explained that I had made a full avowal of the affair to him before the trial, and had left it in his hands whether I should place myself under arrest or no.

It was quite a trial in an informal way, and I think the verdict of all acquitted me.

At any rate—which was the most important thing to me—Mary Terral begged me to forgive her when we were alone, after it, in the little waiting-room beside the public court.

I told her frankly she had nothing to forgive.

"But why did you wait so long, Mary," I asked, "before denouncing me?"

"Oh, I could not bear to do it!" clasping her slender hands. "Nothing but the thought that you were allowing an innocent man to suffer would have made me speak."

"Because I am one of the family?" I asked quietly; and the girl flushed hotly. "Or because you like me—a little, Mary?" I went on, encouraged by the flush.

She did not answer then. It was not till days after that she told me.

"I think I must have loved you all through it, dearest, or it could not have been so terrible!"

"Nor could it have been so terrible for me!" I answered.

GEOFFREY SULLIVAN.

Jumbled Story Competition.—21.

ON page 653 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *November 23rd,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

HAVE YOU S(C)ENT

For a sample bottle of *HOME NOTES BOUQUET?* If not, forward 1s. 2d. without delay, which sum includes postage. This perfume is of the most elegant and refined kind. Like many another good thing, it is, however, put up "in small parcels," or rather, let it be said, is sold double-distilled. Its virtues must, therefore, not be judged by its bulk for, owing to its extra strength, it is very lasting, so but a few drops are required.

ANY CHRISTMAS GIFTS

you wish to present to lady friends might well take this form, so it has been arranged to supply this beautiful scent in three sizes. No. 1 is to be had for 6s. 6d., No. 2 for 4s., and No. 3 at 2s. If you wish to receive the *HOME NOTES BOUQUET* per post, kindly inclose 3d. extra for that purpose.

MOST LADIES ARE VERY PARTICULAR

as to what perfume they use, so take the advice of one who knows when you are assured that this scent is not of the cheap, overpowering kind. It is, moreover, sold in handsome cut-glass bottles, an ornament in themselves to any toilet-table.

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SEE PAGE 652.

PARDON—MR. FEREURAFUL

Jumbled Story No 21.

The two men faced each other. One lay back in an easy chair before the fire, and closed his eyes.

He rose from his chair, and from a cabinet drew Lord Eskdale."

Paul Arnoff's chambers in Piccadilly were the essence of luxury and refinement. His furniture, his innumerable curios were the envy of all who were approaching the door. He looked hurriedly out a little phial, marked "Poison."

A grand piano nearly filled up one side of the mantelpiece was covered with invitation cards. Then I shall be rich—rich."

He was tall, olive complexioned, with rough black work to do yet.

Paul Arnoff himself looked handsome enough as stronger will than he had thought. He sank down in a chair, weak and ill. The other stood before him, I am tired of living My property and money will die."

A heavy tread was coming up the stairs. Arnoff knew him.

With a fierce curse of mingled anger and fear, he curled up in his basket. The mirror over the picture over the piano. A paroxysm of anger came obedient, sprang on to his knee. He shook out a little heap of ashes that lay in the fender.

Such was Paul Arnoff.

"Now," said Paul Arnoff, "you will take that room. In a corner beside it a little white dog lay on to the ground.

"He *shall* die," he cried. "Why should he live? Come and see me."

A door banged.

A letter lying on the table, addressed in his his priceless inlaid cabinets, his pictures, his silver, breathed heavily, and gradually dropped asleep.

"Why didn't he die?" he cried. "Why does he live?"

A coal dropped with a click to the grate.

An oil painting of a pale, weak man hung over and shivered. When his master went over to him a moment later a little mass of ashes was all that go to my brother, Paul Arnoff.'"

He called his dog to him, and the little animal, will kill him—stay.

Arnoff did not hear it. His head nodded, he paralyse you, and you are at the man's mercy, and blunder."

A moment later his body fell with a crash.

How warm it was there! How comfortable! He rattled. He upset his chair, and glanced underneath. The door opened. Then his eyes fell on a woman looked down from their frames.

Someone opened the door, and closed it again, as he swaggered past them.

Arnoff uttered a fierce curse.

"Fool! Fool, that I am," he hissed. "I have heard the sound and started to his feet. The steps worked, and turning out the lights, went to bed.

He dwelt lovingly over the word.

He would move in a moment.

The wretched man did so.

* * * * *

And Paul Arnoff was cruel and diabolical.

Arnoff took the confession in his hand and read the piano. This was Lord Eskdale, Arnoff's brother, one of the richest peers in the kingdom.

"Now go to your basket, and let me see if you free will—that is—my will."

"To-morrow, I will go and see him. My mind whom people avoided instinctively when they met few grains of powder from the phial into his palm.

He drew off his gloves, and threw them savagely round for his brother's confession. The handle though his black brows were drawn together in a hair, which sparkled and glistened like a cat's when he does what he likes with you."

"Write this: 'I am going to kill myself of my gambled away everything—everything.

The confession of the dead man that was to clear shall master his. My will shall be his will. Then I would like to go sleep. But he must not. He had he fell into a hypnotic sleep.

He leant his elbow on the mantelpiece, and gazed it through. He was exhausted. The man had a teeth in a cruel, sneering expression.

Arnoff took a phial from his pocket, and shaking him in the street, and then turned and gazed after my hunting accident now, but as weak as a baby. Below this, photographs of more than one beautiful pen in your hand, and write as I tell you. It will gave it to the other. He drank it off eagerly.

He laughed when he saw how well the poison brother's handwriting, caught his eye.

The dog crept to his corner, curled himself round, out some powder mixed a little water with it, and the strong arm of a policeman upheld him.

"First I must test it," he said. "I must not not be long," he added to himself, "before I am right through you, and get into your brain and fierce scowl, and his lips came back over his white moment later he was stiff and stark.

"Thanks for inquiries," it ran. "I am almost over strong, masterful, his mind taking control over passes. Presently the weak man's eyes closed, and one of his enemies once said. "Then they burn over him.

"First he shall write a confession. Ha, ha! yes, his, his eyes flashing, his hands making soothing his murderer's name slipped from his fingers. It would have fallen in a swoon to the ground, had not he strode into his rooms that cold November night, slid down his knee, and shot off into the fire. A side, and drink it off, and so kill himself of his own own free will. No one is to blame for my death. and there was a sound of hurrying feet.

"His eyes repel, and yet fascinate you horribly," he shall write his own confession, and sign it, and then he will take the poison that I shall put by his into the fire. Presently his eyes wandered to the one laid one's hand upon it; in a word, a man remained of it.

"Sign it," said Arnoff.

"Eat it up," he said, and the dog obeyed him.

It was a cruel, diabolical deed.

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ZETTE.

Upon the posters which hung on the outside of the carriage she was styled:

MDLLE. ANTONIA,

Somnambule Extralucide.

Her mother called her Zette—her real name was Suzanne.

She was a pretty girl, not very tall, with fair complexion, and long black hair that she let float about her during her consultations, though ordinarily she wore it in a loose coil upon the nape of a neck that was perfect.

Never having done much work, her hands were delicate and well-shaped—she was enough of a coquette to wish to keep them so. She had a finely moulded form, and to have seen her simply dressed in some quiet colour, with the gait of a wise little work-woman, one would never have suspected her strange calling.

Her mother, Madame Floury, was as little, like others of her class, as her daughter. About her there was nothing in common with the shrews who frequent fairs in red dresses and soiled skirts. She had the air of a little merchant who was good and proper, with a winning, honest smile, and people stopped before the carriage, and even entered there (without thinking of the charlatanism on the posters) in order to see the interior of this small dwelling that smelled so sweet.

The vehicle was painted brown, with a thread of gold running the length of the plinths. There was a tiny balcony in front of it, and on this balcony convolvuli and nasturtiums, planted in boxes, twined about wires up to the roof, where they clustered in bright-hued bunches.

Along the route persons stared in amazement at this queer coach all covered with garlands of flowers.

The two women were always together, but associated very little with their neighbours. They were not proud, and having the best of hearts were the first to offer to care for a sick child, or to give to others in distress. Indeed, the foreigners who knew them well loved them sincerely, even though they did feel somewhat oppressed by what they termed "their grand manners."

There was, however, someone who was all devotion to Zette and her mother.

It was a young gymnast of two-and-twenty, in a large travelling circus, that had very nearly the same itinerary as Mme. Floury. His name was Jacques, but on the play-bills they spelt it Jack. He was exceedingly handsome and of no common type. There was fire in his eyes and much intelligence in his smile. There was, too, much tenderness in this same smile, especially when he spoke to Zette. His love for this pretty brunette—so unlike any other woman he had seen about him in his wanderings—was very sincere.

Near her he felt himself quite another man to what he was in the circus. There was such an atmosphere of honesty surrounding Zette that his own manners, when with her, were altogether different from what they had been, and he was astonished at how well they became him.

Then, too, he had dreamed of being loved by this sweet girl, and of never being separated from her. Their positions accorded admirably. His salary was good, and some day perhaps he might enter one of the great circuses of Lyons, or Paris. It would be charming to find so sweet a little wife awaiting his coming after his work was done.

He had often spoken to Zette of these plans. He loved her so dearly that it could not be possible she did not love him at least a little.

Zette always listened silently, visibly touched by what she heard, and he thought each time she would say "yes," but when he had finished by asking, with such pleading eyes: "Will you be my wife, Zette?" she replied very gravely: "No."

Then Jacques would be astonished. Why not? Could it be that she did not believe him when he said he loved her—that she had no confidence in him—that she did not love him?

"Yes, I love you," Zette answered sweetly; "but I do not wish to marry you."

And she would never say why.

One day, however, Mme. Floury blamed her for refusing the hand of this brave lad.

"Listen, mother," she said; "I adore Jacques, and I

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believe I shall always remain single because I do not wish to marry him. Do you remember the day when we went together to the circus? I saw, as we entered, how all the women who were there turned their *lorgnettes* towards him, and afterwards they smiled and talked about him, and tried to attract his attention by applauding him. I ought, perhaps, to have been proud to think that this man, whom they all wanted, loved me, and that I had only to say the word to be his wife. Ah, well, in my heart there was nothing but jealousy. I wanted to tear the *lorgnettes* away from those women. From what I suffered that evening I understood how much I might suffer if we were married. No, that cannot be. He is too handsome, see? Suppose, some day, when he had grown tired of me, one of those women should take him away from me. I would die, surely. You know now, mother, why I cannot say yes."

But notwithstanding this obstinate refusal, which he could not explain, Jacques came every day. He no longer mentioned the subject to Zette, understanding that he was contending against a fixed resolve, except once when he said to her:

"You will not have me, Zette, and I do not wish any other woman. Some day, though, you may change your mind, and then you need only hold out your hand, and say to me: 'Let us be married,' and it will make me happy."

So, after thus simply settling the affair, Jacques was like a brother in the house. It was he who in the spring-time planted the seeds in the boxes upon the little balcony; it was he who twined the tendrils about the wires; and it was he who, at all seasons, furnished the gilded porcelain vases that held the flowers.

These flowers were a great luxury to Zette.

This state of things did not long continue, however. The young girl was now twenty and Jacques twenty-six. One evening he presented his friends with tickets to the circus. It was the last day of a long-continued fair, and Zette and her mother had nothing to do. So they decked themselves in their best and went early.

Mme. Floury was much amused with the horses, the rope-dancers, the clowns, the trained dogs. Zette thought only of Jacques, whose name on the programme occupied a line to itself, and whose apparatus was hanging up at the top of the high tent. The latter consisted of bars, with copper balls that shone, a maze of trapézes, ropes and pulleys, and the young girl, a little frightened, inquired if it all was secure.

At last the first part of the performance was over, and, keeping time to a slow waltz, Jacques appeared. He was as beautiful as a god in his silk tights that displayed to advantage his superbly moulded form, and, for the rest, his costume consisted of a black satin *caleçon*, spangled with gold.

After having responded by a bow to the applause of the crowd, and by a smile to Zette's smile, he darted up a rope to his trapéze.

The preliminaries were gone through with amid prolonged bravos, for the handsome gymnast was a great favourite, and it was truly a pleasure to see him act—the supple body so pliant yet so marvellously exact in its movements.

Then there came silence—even the orchestra was still. It was to be the hit of the evening, and a new feat that was to give an added glory to the circus. He was to leap from one trapéze to another, with his face and head covered, then suddenly drop from this giddy height upon a net stretched below him. The two trapézes were swinging with a regular movement. Jacques, standing on a little board, his head enveloped in a black velvet bag, put forth his hand blindly. The crowd held its breath. The man was going to jump—he had jumped!

A piercing cry rent the air.

Missing the second trapéze, which had been badly regulated, Jacques fell to the net, but it proved too frail to support his weight, and striking upon the seats, he rolled to the ground, where he lay motionless.

With a cry of horror, Zette sprang to her feet, rigid and pale, her eyes fixed upon the spot where the men were now carrying away the apparently lifeless body of her friend.

Then suddenly seizing her mother's arm, "Come," she said, in a hollow voice.

Breaking through the crowd, the two women reached the stables, but were there refused admission. For a long while they remained at the entrance, listening to what was said around them, but no one knew anything. Finally, Mme. Floury saw a clown whom she recognised as one of Jacques friends. He was just coming out of the refreshment-room when she called him.

"The net broke the force of the fall," said the man, whose face looked troubled, even under the paint. "The doctor says he will be lame for life, and that this ends for him his profession as a gymnast. Poor fellow! But he has something laid up for a rainy day."

Mme. Floury looked at Zette; she was very pale, and her eyes were fixed upon the man as he spoke, as though trying to find if he lied. At least she said: "Let us go."

The two women did not speak as they traversed the grounds of the fair, and they were still silent as they ascended their own little staircase. But when Mme. Floury had lighted the candle, she saw Zette sitting beside the bed with a strange smile on her lips; she felt frightened for her, and went to her.

"Of what are you thinking, little daughter?" she asked, trying to reassure herself.

Then Zette laid her head upon her mother's shoulder, with a childlike gesture.

"I think—that now I can marry Jacques," she told her.

EMILE ROUSTAN.

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION, No. 18.

£5 has been sent to Miss Mary E. Spencer, 8, Bettridge Road, Fulham, S.W. (first correct attempt); and £1 each to Miss J. Walker, 24, Porchester Gardens, Hyde Park, W.C.; Miss Smyth, 129, Forton Road, Gosport, Hants; Mr. A. W. Clarke, Divisional Superintendent's Office, G.W.R., Bristol; Mr. Nicholson, Red Hall, Gainsborough; Mrs. C. Miller, 16, Mark Lane, E.C.

KEY.

7	13	88	103	102	72	104	80	29
8	109	107	83	73	62	116	27	56
1	47	23	64	94	22	14	76	127
3	91	110	71	70	34	121	118	38
2	42	49	12	111	69	130	115	101
5	59	25	68	74	15	50	63	67
4	46	119	55	39	17	112	97	129
6	105	51	79	40	28	93	58	20
9	100	95	44	120	45	108	131	106
48	99	33	19	26	60	21	98	37
82	43	87	77	126	24	90	18	117
41	75	65	124	92	35	30	16	85
84	96	114	57	122	54	52	61	133
113	125	10	123	89	132	32	31	
86	81	11	78	128	66	36	53	

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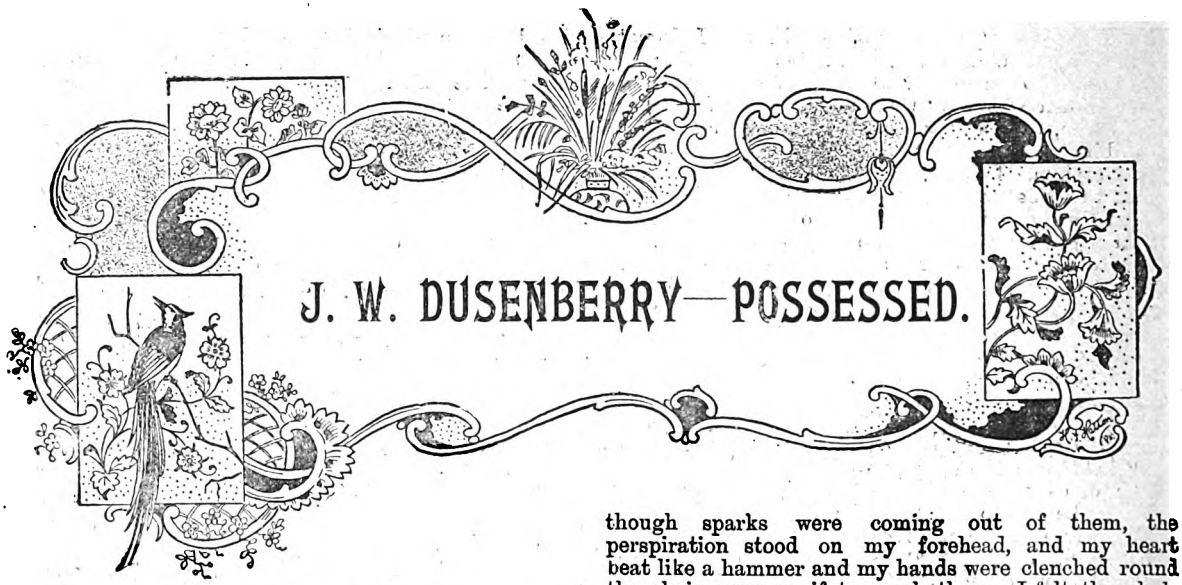

J. W. DUSENBERRY—POSSESSED.

Transmigration of souls? Yes, sir, as true as daylight. A few weeks ago I read an account of a man who dreamt that he had substituted himself for another man, taking on his appearance and his manner of speech.

The story laid so powerful a hold on me that I was unable to settle down to my evening's work, and I started out on an aimless walk, to meditate upon it. The supremacy of will; that was what it meant—individual strength. Why might it not drive the consciousness of somebody else out of him and allow the stronger mind to take possession?

From sheer force of habit, because business takes me there almost every day, I turned into the lobby of the D—— Hotel. It was the echo of my own feet on the tiled floor that made me look up to see where I was and how I got there, and it vexed me a trifle to see how absent-minded I was becoming. Absent-minded! There you are again. What does that mean, if not that the mind may take excursions out of the body? Humph!

I dropped into one of the arm-chairs that are ranged along the lobby, and lit a cigar. They knew me quite well there, so I was sure of remaining undisturbed for some hours, if I chose. I became meditative again, and as the smoke of my weed circled round my head, I noticed J. W. Dusenberry lazily sprawled in a chair, across the way, and drowsily reading an evening paper. I was glad that he had not seen me, for I do not like him. He "did" me in a whist deal once; he received a pair of embroidered slippers intended for me, by mistake, and kept them; but worst of all he went to the West-end when he learnt that I was negotiating for a choice corner there, and bought that identical place—at my figure, too, virtually turning me out.

Great heavens! Why not effect a transmigration and occupy him! I felt that in a single evening I could revenge myself on this man, and none would be the wiser. I determined to try, and bending my eyes on him I willed, with all the nervous power that was in me, that he should lose his consciousness, and that my own should replace it. My eyes tingled as though sparks were coming out of them, the perspiration stood on my forehead, and my heart beat like a hammer and my hands were clenched round the chair arms as if to crush them. I felt the whole force of my being gathered into focus, and just in that focus sat Dusenberry, oblivious to what was happening to him.

Presently his eyes grew heavy, his head sank forward, the paper dropped from his hand; I saw a little shudder pass through him, and at the same instant I heard a ringing in my ears and felt a momentary darkness closing upon me; I was giddy and clutched my chair still harder for support; then I shook myself together, convinced that it was better to leave experiments of that kind to the professors, for it was too weakening.

But, hullo! What did this mean? How had the door, which was on my right, got so suddenly over to my left? And who—what—that man! Asleep in the chair! It was myself! I looked down at my clothes. Amazement! I was Dusenberry!

I uttered a faint cry, that caused two or three loungers near me to look up, but affecting to have been choked with cold I caught at my throat—no, it was Dusenberry's throat—and coughed savagely a few times, in a voice that was harsh, and that I recognised as never having been mine before. Then I dropped back into my chair and stared at my recent self in sheer amazement. The fascination of my old body was too tense to endure long. The sight of it filled me with a kind of dread, as if I might, after all, be looking at it from a wholly disembodied standpoint. How, if I were really to die and be unable to get back, thus keeping Dusenberry out of his place for the rest of his days? It was too uncanny.

I sprang to my feet; that is, I should have done so, if I had my own feet to spring to, but I found that the ones I was using were Dusenberry's, and there was not much spring to him, for he weighed three stones more than I. It also surprised me a little to find that Dusenberry did not see colours precisely as I did, for through his eyes there was a prevalence of yellowish tints, but that might have been because he was bilious. With studied carelessness I started towards the bar, thrusting my—that is, Dusenberry's—hands into my—that is, Dusenberry's—pockets, as I went. There was a purse of sovereigns in the right pockets.

It was no part of my scheme to rob my victim, though

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I intended to have revenge on him before I was through, and I did not want to touch his money. I had enough of my own. But, good gracious! it was on my other self. There were twenty good £5 notes in the pocket of that unconscious figure across the lobby that belonged to me. After some delay caused by an unaccountable aversion to touching my body, I went over and shook myself. I was breathing heavily, and was, apparently, in a deep sleep. Somehow I appeared different from the way I supposed I did, my impressions in that respect having been based partly on the reports of my mirror and partly on the assurance of my wife—made soon after we had been married.

I never realised, for instance, how large the mole on my cheek was, and I resolved to raise whiskers forthwith. But the money. Dropping into a chair beside myself I began to explore my pockets. My fingers had just closed over the notes and cash when I felt the clasp of a stout hand on my shoulders. It was one of the porters. "Aha, ye blatherskite!" he cried. "We've caught you at it."

Then the situation dawned upon me. I was a thief. But no. Dusenberry was the robber, and would get the blame. He was something of a thief, after all, confound him. Yet, if he were arrested I should be the sufferer, for the time being, at least, and to all appearances I was the sufferer anyhow; but for this once I would not complain of Dusenberry. I—that is, he—assumed a dignified air and said: "Desire the clerk to step this way."

The porter would not leave me, but he held up his hands and beckoned with four fingers to the night clerk, who came directly. I knew him, so it was one of the most natural things in the world to remark: "Good-evening, Mr. Martin," through Dusenberry.

"I do not know you, sir," he answered.

I had forgotten who I was, and the porter took advantage of my momentary confusion to say in a loud voice, full of disbelief, "Look at that, now."

"My friend, Mr. Ferguson," I continued, pointing to my sleeping self, "is subject to a curious lapse, like catalespy. He is liable to be in this condition for a day or two. Kindly keep his watch and money, and give him a room at my expense. I will pay for a day in advance."

I had not intended to do it, but under the circumstances, I had to draw out Dusenberry's money. My manner was so frank, and the purse was so large, that the clerk was impressed and the porter quieted. He summoned another man, and the two of them carried me—that used to be—off upstairs somewhere.

"I know Mr. Ferguson," said the clerk. "I'm afraid he's been drinking."

"Never, sir," I answered, "he would not allow himself to be overcome with liquor. Mr. Ferguson is one of the most moral, most temperate, most admirable young men of my acquaintance. Drinking? Absurd! Take the best care of him, give him what he likes, and I will pay the bill." I slapped a note into the hand of this functionary, and left half a sovereign for the porter; then I left the hotel in a hurry, while the good impression was strong, wiping the perspiration from Dusenberry's brow. On reaching the street I started to walk West, but I noticed a tendency in my legs—I mean Dusenberry's legs—to go the other way. Presently I was startled by a remark: "It's pretty tough, I think, that a man can't do as he likes with his own body."

I had not authorised that statement; I was thinking of something else at the moment, yet the voice was the one that I was using! Horrors! There were two of us in Dusenberry! He had partly reoccupied himself. The situation was perilous. I asserted myself at once by crying: "Silence!" in a loud voice—same voice. "Another word and I will go to the foot of the street and jump off the Embankment."

"And my insurance premium not paid for this quarter!" groaned Dusenberry.

"I command you to subject yourself to my will, and if you behave yourself I shall probably give you back yourself in the morning, for you don't improve on close acquaintance. Go to sleep and remain in that condition until I call you."

Dusenberry subsided, and I was in charge once more. As a reward for his obedience I took him into the best restaurant in town and gave him a good dinner; then I let him go to the opera and occupy a box, though he did not care for that, so I went out after the first act and went into a few bazaars and things. I loathe a bazaar, but I was teaching Dusenberry a lesson. I subscribed with his hand and in his writing to various building funds and missionary funds and charity funds and funds for orphans, and funds for clergyman, and I don't know what all—funds aggregating a stiffish little sum of several hundreds.

But I knew that Dusenberry could stand it, and he was mean in money matters. It would serve my vengeance and be for the peace of his soul to do some good with his money. On leaving the last place I slipped and fell downstairs, for I could not get used to Dusenberry's thick legs. Good! I was bruising Dusenberry. I went into a café and drank a pint of heavy, sweet liqueur. Good! Dusenberry would have the gout. I went into the park and sat on a bench in a chill wind with hat off and coat unbuttoned. Good! I was giving Dusenberry a cold. I returned to the hotel, a little anxious about my real self, when an important person blocked the way and said in a loud voice: "Now then, sir, I want to know when you're going to pay my bill."

It was humiliating to be detained and addressed in this public manner, and I started to blush; but, after all, this was Dusenberry's business. Let him blush if he knew how. I would see if he did. "Never, sir," I answered. And Dusenberry didn't blush. "After being dunned in this open and offensive way I shall not pay you one penny."

"You won't, won't you? We'll see to-morrow."

"Go away. I do not know you."

"Ha, ha! That's good. You'll make my acquaintance in the courts, then, soon."

"Go to the devil!" You see, I was getting up a reputation for rudeness for Dusenberry, and now I had precipitated him into a lawsuit.

Presently I found that I was growing tired, for Dusenberry must have been up late on the night before. And it seemed to me then that I had had enough of my present form. I began to think strongly of home, of my comfortable bed, of my bath, of my cool, fresh linen in the locker. Yes, I would go there, but first I would go to the hotel, get myself, and leave Dusenberry asleep there.

I entered the hotel, looked at the register and requested to be taken to room 24.

"That's where Mr. Ferguson was put, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's gone."

"What!"

"He sobered up just a little while ago——"

"How dare you say that he has sobered up? He was no more drunk than I am."

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"Excuse me, but you are quite sure—I thought—as you were coming in, that your breath—however——"

The cordials, the fatigue! Had I been getting Dusenberry drunk?

"You are sure he has gone?"

"I saw him leave half-an-hour ago."

"Good-night." And I strode from that place in an agitation of soul that ought to have turned Dusenberry's hair grey. I had left that place unguarded. I was now, most likely, walking about the streets of that city, perhaps in the vilest slums, a prey to villainy and accident, a creature without a mind, deaf, blind, unfeeling! What would—what had—become of me? Suppose I were at the bottom of the river at this moment and should be doomed to occupy the inferior body that I lived in at present? Despair! Suppose that Dusenberry's personality should wake up and try to evict my personality and suppose that while I was asleep he should succeed in doing it!

Again, despair! I might be maimed or crushed; my clothes might at this moment be in possession of a gang of corner loafers who would pawn them on the morrow for beer, obliging me to be *perdu* in the friendly screen of a coal yard until night fell again and I was enabled to steal home without exciting comment. I rushed aimlessly from street to street, making Dusenberry puff as I did so for some minutes before I could form any plan of action, the dread of being permanently locked in with Dusenberry, in his now hated form, driving me almost mad. I went to the nearest police station and inquired if anything had been seen of a tall, good-looking man of thirty-seven, dressed in excellent taste and of polished demeanour, who had left the D—— Hotel while suffering from the effect of a sunstroke?

"Sunstroke in October?" asked the sergeant, lifting his brows.

"Oh—ah—well, it was something like it."

"Well, we ain't seen nothin' of 'im."

I left the place in a new frenzy. On reaching a dark and lonely street I sat on the curb stone and tried to weep, but there were no tears in Dusenberry, and I had to give it up. All this time I had a vague sense of relation to my old self that kept me from utter loss of hope. I remembered that during my ardent wish to be at home a vivid picture, almost like a sensation, of myself going in that direction accompanied the thought. How if, after all, I had retained enough power over my unconscious self to cause it to make that journey? I rushed away in the direction of my flat, and arrived at the door in a bewilderment of hope and fear. The clock struck three as I turned the corner. What a night it had been! I felt in my pocket for my key. Chump, that I was! I had only Dusenberry's key. I knew that if I broke into the house I was liable to get Dusenberry shot and also arrested, and I did not want to go as far as that with him, so I resolved on an expedient hardly less bold; I rang.

Somebody was up and moving about the place. Oh, if it could only be—if I dare hope—I bent all my thought to it.

In three minutes the knob rattled, the door swung open. Dim as the light was, there was no mistaking the figure that stood there. It was myself. "Saints be praised!" I cried. I did get there ahead of myself, after all.

The figure in the doorway stood still, gazing straight into the dark with fishy, unseeing eyes, and breathing heavily, like one who walks in his sleep. Listening at the stair foot I could hear no sound except the snoring of the man on the third floor. The arrival of this automaton of myself had not been known to anybody. My wife was asleep. The bell had been unheard, and only my will had brought this figure to the door.

Seizing it I drew it passively out, closed the door softly behind it and led it up the street to where the shadow of a lime tree fell in a black gloom round some yards of pavement. I leaned it against the tree trunk, grasped its hands and put every atom of my will into an imperious demand to change.

Again, the momentary darkness, faintness, giddiness; then I found myself supported by the tree, looking at Dusenberry, who was tightly clutching my hands and perspiring. I shook him off. He was dazed, and showed a desire to sit down. Taking him by the arm, I walked him to the corner, where a bright light threw a garish illumination over the street.

A policeman approached. When he had come up I said: "Officer, I found this man on my doorstep just now. He rang my bell. He has evidently been drinking, is fairly well dressed and may have money about him. Will you kindly see him away from here?"

The officer nodded and winked, and Dusenberry, dazed but docile, went along with him. He was taken to the police station, but as by that time he had recovered enough of his senses to find the way to his station and thence home, he was allowed to go, no record of the arrest being entered. Both of us slept late next morning. I awoke with a feeling of deep thankfulness and went to the hotel for my watch and money, which I secured only at the cost of a knowing look from the clerk.

Dusenberry awoke to embark in a sea of troubles and misunderstandings. He remembered nothing of what had happened while I occupied his tenement of clay, and to this hour he does not know where he got his cold, or his bruised shins, or his twinge of gout: the papers in a lawsuit gave him an awful shock two days later; but worst of all are the people with subscription books, who came to his house and office at all hours to show him pledges made in his writing, and demand money. Shall he confess that he was drunk and try to beg off from payment, thereby injuring his social and business standing, or shall he give up the sovereign, and further postpone that day when he shall be rich? I do not know. It seems to me that he has been punished enough, and perhaps I owe him a little conscience money. But, at all events, he has shown that the transmigration of identity is fatally possible.

C. S. MONTGOMERY.

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THE LAST KING OF ATLANTIS

Or, THE ROMANCE OF A LOST CONTINENT.

By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of *"The Winning of Gunhild,"* etc.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BURNING OF MIROPIS.

NAYRAHN sat alone in the tent, gloomily drinking, and at my rough-and-ready intrusion rose in sullen anger, demanding what brought me to his presence then, and in such manner.

"I came to ask you help me capture this town for the Queen before another sunrise," I made answer.

He looked at me more closely, then, seeing I was not of his command, asked my name.

"Arnon, the son of Didron," I responded boldly.

"The same who was thought to have perished in a burning house in this very town and was afterwards sent as a prisoner on board a slave-ship?" queried the astounded soldier.

"The same," I replied, "come back to take my revenge on the town and its perfidious governor."

"It cannot be done until I get more men," said Nayrahn despondingly. "I have already been repulsed with loss. And also, what authority hast thou, who wert a pirate and an outlaw, to beard me in my den thus?"

"None," I said, "but that of the knowledge that with my aid you may drive out these invaders before the night has passed; and do that with the sanction of the Priests of the Sacred Grotto."

The dark-bearded warrior, prone to vacillation then as since, considered awhile before he decided.

"Out with your plan then, Sir Pirate—if you have one," he ventured at length, "and I'll see what may be done."

"Now art sensible," I observed. "As to my plan, 'tis simply this: that you let me pick out a chosen band of two hundred men and steal quietly into the town—I know its by-ways well—and to hold the rest of your troop in readiness for an attack the moment you see the glare of a burning house, which will be fired near the middle of the town by nightfall. I need no more."

"Shalt have thy desire, then," said the Captain, fired by my confidence at last. "Pick out thy men as soon as is needful, and I will risk the hazard."

I stepped out of the tent at once, and chose my little band from amongst the veterans, not liking the appearance of the young recruits, and after enjoining the necessity for instant action on his part directly I gave the signal, led the way slowly and noiselessly from Nayrahn's camp. When I got my men outside I halted and gave my instructions.

"Follow wherever I may lead without a word or a sound," I said, "and do not draw a sword or bow, or twist a sling until I cry 'Now!' Remember that I am your leader from here, and that these two comrades of mine, Valdo and Atris, are my second officers. Also, that you may know whom you are serving, learn that my name is Arnon, erstwhile a reckless pirate, once renowned as Phrena the Iron-Fingered."

A faint murmur of surprise and admiration burst from the men at this, some of them, doubtless, recalling my doings at the Court of King Dulo. At which I was greatly gratified, feeling also, I think, not displeased at the luxury of revelling in my rightful name! However, assuming a stern air, I commanded silence, giving the word to advance without more ado.

It was rapidly growing dusk, and a moonless, cloudy night was setting in, as I led my band towards one of the barricades, but from which I turned off before we reached it into a thick copse of cedar, near which was the great house, under whose sheltering shadow I had rested fifteen years before, blackened and blistered. Here a trio of sentries paced across the garden in which that house stood, trusting to the nearness of the troop camped behind the barricade to prevent the enemy's entrance through that flowery avenue. Vain hope, when "Sunderer" was amongst the enemy's swords!

Creeping stealthily, slowly, up the mossy banks, taking full advantage of every tree and shrub, my two officers and I contrived to spring upon and finish the unsuspecting sentinels without a sound betraying our success. I caught a glimpse of my man's face, as he fell, before I had given him his quietus, and I swear it would have wrinkled the

Nayrahn sat alone in his tent.

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face of an owl with laughter to have seen the consternation pictured on it! Our way thus made easy, we passed through the still, shadowy garden as though we ourselves were but shadows, noiseless, ethereal, like the rest, instead of grim visaged warriors armed to the teeth, and held on till we were fairly inside the enemy's lines.

Now I gave the word to go forward boldly, with studied unconcern, and thus we marched through the streets, none taking alarm at our appearance, plainly taking us for a troop of their own men, indistinct as all objects were fast becoming in the gathering gloom.

I made straight for the governor's house, where I supposed Sothi would be holding his headquarters, and commanded my men to surround it quietly, to rush to the attack immediately they heard the signal-cry of "Now!" and to fire the house when compelled to retreat, but not until. This manœuvre was accomplished successfully, though a few loitering servants saw us with alarm, and made the building all astir with confusion by the time my men were all in place. My own station was directly facing the great central door, which was all hung with flowering climbers, sweet-scented, and flanked by giant statues of dead kings and noted heroes. Out from this portal, with a very puzzled look, came an over-fed, round-bodied, gaily-bedizened guard grasping a long spear—more ornamental than deadly—in his sleek, fat hands, peering about him as though to ascertain the reason of the sudden disturbance.

"Ha!" thought I, "an you want to know what's towards, my friend, shalt have thy want attended to!" and putting my hand to my mouth, sailor-fashion, I roared "Now!" with all the strength of my lungs. So affrighted was that pampered minion that he dropped his spear, and started back to run as fast as his bulky legs could carry him into the house, bellowing loudly as he ran that the enemy were at his heels. I could have laughed at the sight till my sides ached, but my men were now pressing in on all quarters, and the clash of arms rose deafening on the air, no time being left for mirth to have its sway, so I quickly fitted a bullet to my sling, whirled it round my head in a hissing circle, and stayed his noisiness for ever before he had gone many paces.

Then I rushed at the great door, which was slightly barred, and, helped by two-score of my band, forced it open and strode into the house, where chaos ruled supreme. The inmates for the most part had but just risen from the feast-table, and met us feebly with hastily-seized weapons. The soldiers within, scarcely fifty in number, fought as well as in them lay, disputing our passage from room to room, and terrified women, screaming and weeping, with hair dishevelled and robes flying, ran hither and thither to escape the fray.

"Spare the women!" I cried to my followers, "but slay all the men without mercy, and be speedy with it!"

So, indeed, they were, for, taken by surprise and overwhelmed, and appalled at the penetrating swiftness of my sword as I followed them from chamber to chamber without a pause, the fight soon came to an end by the death of all the resisting defenders. But, to my intense disgust, I saw no sign of Sothi, whom I had come specially to seek.

The street outside and the space surrounding the house was by this time filled with soldiery drawn from the barricades, and our position was becoming one of imminent danger, yet, bidding my men hold ground for a little longer, I flew from room to room, searching among the slain and in every corner and every secret recess I could discover to see if Sothi were indeed within, but all to no purpose. Then, raging bitterly at my ill-luck, I gave the word to retreat and to fire the house in so doing—the inmates left alive having taken flight—and to make for the harbour at once.

Into the dense mass of foes we charged, collecting together and issuing from the main entrance, cutting our way through them, flushed as we were with success, and nonplussed as they were with our boldness, with greater ease than might have been expected, and, once free of the great press, we hastened down a street that led to the sea, hotly pursued. Now, as we ran, we heard a crackling noise, saw a bright glare light up the murky sky, and noticed a sudden murmuring behind us.

The pursuers stopped, then turned back, and presently, above the roar of the fire and the shouts of dismay, heard the sound of fighting all along the landward verge of the town, mingled with the battle-cry of the Queen's troops, and we knew that Nayrahn had kept his word and advanced to the attack.

Relieved of immediate danger, we went on with greater caution, and soon I led my little band out upon the almost deserted stone-faced quay, near which lay the eighty vessels of the rebel fleet. Already their crews were preparing to bring up anchors ready for any emergency, when we came to where one lay with its bow touching the stone work.

"Into it, men, and fire it!" I cried, leaping on the deck as I spoke. "Drive these varlets overboard, fire the rebel craft, and cut her anchor chains, and then leap back again. Tide and wind will do the rest, and we'll clear the shore of this traitor squadron in the porting of a helm."

But that crew were a tougher sinewed set of fellows than we bargained for, so that our task was not at all an easy one, and had not some of my men managed to cut their way down between decks, and loosen the rowers from their seats and bring them up to help us, I fear it would have gone ill with us at last. Thus aided, however, we achieved our object, and having set the great, two-hundred oared ship aflame in a score of places, scrambled back on the wharf, followed by the unfettered slaves, and, severing her cables, let her drift with the flowing tide in upon the vessels betwixt her and the shore.

These became at once all hurry and confusion, when that most dreaded neighbour of the seas swept down upon them slowly—a fire-ship flaming furiously, with not a soul on board. They made all press of sail and cut or slipped their cables clumsily in haste to escape from close proximity to their unwelcome consort, and, to my delight, as the last ship cleared out in safety, the wind, freshening from the north, caught the burning vessel, and, fanning the flames into greater intensity, sent her out again from the land in hot pursuit of the flying fleet.

Every vessel was now under weigh, so great was the terror inspired by the dreaded barque as she bore towards them, her spars banging heavily in the breeze, the water curling up under her prow, the flames bursting out from her bows and splitting the deck and side-timbers with short, sharp, whip-like cracks, and lighting up the seventy and nine sail as they stood out to sea, crowding together and sinking one another in their mad haste to avoid the vicinity of the craft blazing away so weirdly over the dark water and mingling the lurid reflection of her fires with the sky-glare from the burning house in the town behind her. It was a grand sight, and I smiled a wolfish smile as I stood and watched the enemy routed by a single ship.

I led the way back into the town, pushing headlong through the crowds of terror-stricken townsfolk who had come down to the water's edge, and so into the thick of the fight that was being waged in the middle of the town, where our own men had now reached.

The fire from the governor's house had meanwhile spread to others, and round the blazing area the contest was being fought with unabating zeal.

Into the enemy's rear we charged then, "Sunderer" piercing its way as though it were intoxicated with the gore it drank and spilled and the spirits it let loose to wing their way to the Shadows; and, small as was our force, the diversion was enough to turn the battle tide, and change the rebel confusion to a hopeless rout.

Up narrow streets and gloomy by-ways, down festering lanes where offal lay in sickly heaps beside the doors, in and out of this house and that, right to the water's brink, and out upon the wharf and back again into the town, and

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thence to the barricades, now thrown down in parts, we drove the defeated foes with relentless slaughter, giving no quarter, taking no prisoners, letting none escape, and making the gutters of that bibulous town run red with a liquid that is redder and dearer than wine.

Then, paying no heed to Nayrahn's orders to spare the town, I commanded all who were within hearing distance to fire every house and building that would burn, and then strike out of the maze of masonry into the suburbs. In vain the Captain strove to stay the progress of the conflagration when once started, for the wind was still rising, and, fanned into fury by it, the flames spread with marvellous rapidity, leaping streets and open spaces in their heedless advance, roaring awfully from the windows of doomed dwellings, and licking up the timber and the dry tropical shrubs in the gardens with their long serpent-like tongues in the passing of a thought. Soon the evacuation of the town became compulsory, and out upon the plain and among the canebrakes—now trampled into worthlessness—a motley multitude of houseless, homeless men and women and children poured, fleeing in breathless haste from the falling fragments of their town.

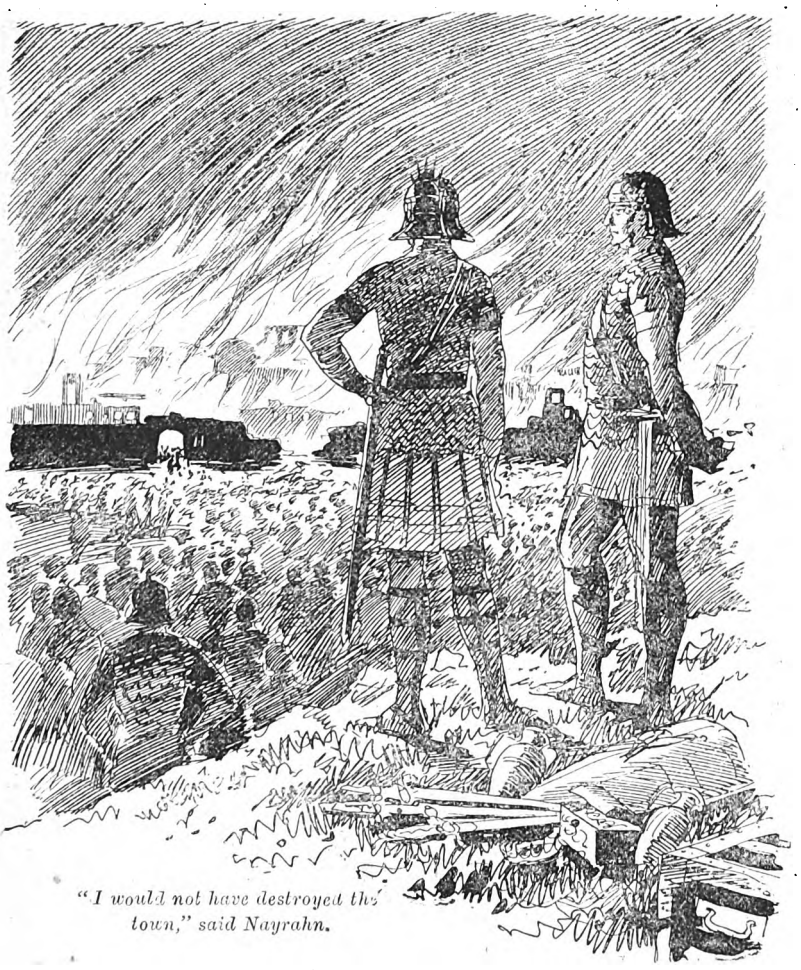
Fiercer and fiercer grew the fire, soaring skyward in a myriad tapering, tossing spires of lurid red, as though 'twould scale the very heavens and set the clouds a-burning. Louder and louder roared and hissed the blaze, as street after street was caught and consumed in its hot embrace. Often and more often charred buildings, crashing, fell, as one by one or score by score, shrivelled, burnt out, they collapsed into indistinguishable ruin, and showers of sparks shot up to show the place where they had been.

I stood with my two officers and Nayrahn, the Captain, on a little knoll, watching the awful scene in all its indescribable grandeur, and thinking exultingly how I had escaped from the clutches of the same devouring element so many years ago.

"I would not have destroyed the town," said Nayrahn gloomily, "but as you gave the command, on you shall rest the blame or praise when I make report to the Queen."

"So be it," I said, "I wish no fairer judgment." For now I know from Unim that Briseis was no party to the treachery that I had so long held her guilty for, though I could not see how else my name had leaked out, I felt the old love and the old self-confidence in her affection return with ten-fold force. I saw now, clearly as though a veil had been drawn from before my eyes, that I had never loved Viol, or Vesta, or the Princess Listra with the same deep, true, lasting love that I felt for my Briseis, who was now my Queen. But you wander from the straight path of your narrative, Arnon!

Towards the dawn the fire had near spent itself, only a sudden blaze here and there, the orange glow of smouldering beams, and the duller colour of heated stone and brickwork, giving evidence that it still existed; and when the morning sun arose in its brilliancy, dispersing the cloud and smoke rack that lingered overhead, it shone slanting upon a great blackened expanse of smouldering, hissing ruins, with scarce a building standing whole in that which but the day before had been a thriving town, well filled with a busy populace. Our victory was, indeed, complete; the enemy had been annihilated almost to a man, and the seaboard towns that might be tempted to go over to the rebels had been given a salutary warning.



"I would not have destroyed the town," said Nayrahn.

Out in the offing, as soon as the light became strong enough, we made out the sixty sail flying the rebel flag—all that remained of their four score—evidently waiting to take off any survivors who might wish to leave Atlantis. Hoisting a white flag as a token of truce, we allowed them to do this, Nayrahn saying, to my entire satisfaction, that the fewer of the treacherous citizens we kept on shore the better. Some four or five thousand were embarked, and the fleet started westward immediately, whilst we, as soon as the noonday heat had passed its hottest point, set off towards Kronos, many of the soldiers loaded heavily with the loot they had obtained in the brief fight. Valdo and Atris and I were encumbered enough with the gold we carried, it is true, but we could ride with ease compared with the discomfort and awkwardness of some of the greedy troopers.

As we drew near to Kronos, traversing much the same ground that I had once crawled over, a burnt and blistered fugitive, I saw with grief the ravages that the great army

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had made on the surrounding fertile lands for its own support. Vast tracts of maize and wheat, that ought then to have been waving in yellow billows 'neath a ripening sun, lay gaunt and bare, or covered with short stubble, the precious grain having been cut and taken before it was fairly come to maturity. The aloes and the ceiba trees were stripped of their fruit for leagues, and the country-folk wandered, disconsolate, about their empty villages and lands or sat moodily by their doorstones, scowling evilly on us as we passed or muttering curses on all who bore arms.

Gods! it wrung my heart to see the misery on some of their faces as our men rode by, well-fed, with ribald jests and coarse laughter and brutish jeers at the cravens who stayed at home instead of seeking glory on the field; to see the wasted forms of the women who had denied themselves for the sake of their little babes—and oft in vain, as was testified by the sad processions that at intervals crossed our path, bearing tiny biers to the village burying-grounds.

CHAPTER XVI.

"QUEEN BRISEIS COMES!"

FAR and wide over the landscape stretched the mighty host, the thousands of its tents whitening the ground as though that tropic region had received a heavy fall of northern snow; the glittering of the thousand weapons of its sentinels reflecting the rays of the morning sun in line after line around the great circumference of the encampment; the armour of the officers and horsemen glinting fitfully as they rode to and fro in the streets of that city of soldiers; the heavy fodder and lighter commissariat waggons lumbering and rattling along the canvas-sided avenues or discharging their loads in the several market-places set up in that white wilderness; and the confused murmur of its many voices hanging over it all like the sound of a busy town.

Southward the camp reached to the villas and gardens of Kronos, eastward to the sea line, northward to the three great burial pyramids, unequalled in size save by the mighty monuments I have seen in the Land of Khem, and to the westward to where we sat in our saddles, looking upon the animated scene. Nearly two hundred thousand men were there congregated—a vast and seething flood of human energy, held in bounds, but ready to overflow or burst its banks and rush with devastating impetus wherever it might be needed, a very deluge of war and death.

"Let the rebels land, with all the men they can muster," said I to my couple of worthies; "let them land, and I will wager but little on their chances against this brave array!"

As we rode into the camp and down the widest of its myriad wide streets, I observed that it was all astir with excitement, as though some startling news were passing from lip to lip, and all was bustle and gossip, even the tawdry-dressed and bedizened camp followers taking unwonted interest in the words that fell from their temporary swains as they drank their morning allowance. Scores of messengers were afoot, rushing from tent to tent with wonderful alacrity, and stopping one of these by neatly throwing my loosened bow-string over his head—to his great surprise and indignation—I inquired what was in the wind that everyone must know about so urgently. After fulminating for a while at my rough and ready mode of detention, he choked down his choler and proceeded to enlighten my darkness.

News had that morning arrived, he said, that the Prince of Aidè had returned to his province, collected its soldiers, and thrown in his lot with the rebels. The Princess and her subjects had rallied to his side with marvellous unanimity when his object became known, and he had unfurled the rebel flag over the palace of Thinæ. Also Nayrahn had brought tidings of the fall of Miropis, and the scattering of the fleet that lay there. Also the Sleeper, who had slept in the sacred Grotto near Miropis, had been awakened by one Arnon, who had been a pirate, the son of the noted Didron, erst known as Phrena the Iron-Fingered, who had likewise played a brave part in the defeat of the renegade Sothi; and more than that, the Sleeper, who gave out his name to be Marenso, had appeared in the encampment but three hours ago, accompanied by two priests, and had gone thence to the Royal Palace in Kronos.

"Small wonder, then," concluded my informant, "that excitement reigns and all minds are unsettled, for the prophecy that was foretold of Marenso, who has slept a thousand years, is in all men's mouths, some fearing thereat and all greatly amazed."

"Small wonder, indeed," said I, "that such a budget of ill and good news together should cause a passing turmoil. But canst tell me the nearest way to the Palace? For I have a message that will startle thee, I think, when I say that I am the Arnon of whom you have spoken, who captured Miropis and awoke the Sleeper, and I would fain see the Queen."

Rendered almost speechless with surprise, the messenger pointed me out the way, and then ran with fleeter feet than before to spread the added item of news that I had given him.

"Now you know my name and fame, will you still go with me or mingle in this throng?" I asked my comrades, wishing to test them once more.

"We go with you wherever you wish," said Atris.

"We follow your fortunes through bright days or dark ones, in war or peace, and like you all the better for knowing who you are," said Valdo, "for we heard the story of Didron and his son years ago."

"Then come with me to the Palace," I said, assured now of their lasting fidelity, "and before many weeks have passed, if I mistake not, we shall all three be in high position, either in the army or the fleet."

So we threaded our way along the avenues of the camp, now nearly in an uproar with the morning's strange intelligence, passed into the city streets, making our way with difficulty through the thronging crowds of people, scarcely less agitated by the flying rumours than the soldiery, and gaining the Palace grounds, pushed ourselves unceremoniously amongst the crush of courtiers who aired their finery and simpering gracefulness for the benefit of the ladies engaged in similar posturings, and at last, dismounting, stood within the great hall that leads to the audience chamber of the Sovereigns of Atlantis.

Further we could not penetrate for some time, so great was the press of nobles and functionaries, but by dint of lusty elbowing and shouldering, and taking advantage of every inward rush, we won through with linked hands into the audience room itself and stood amid the throng before the famous Silver Throne, which was polished as a mirror and all inlaid with intertwining patterns of smooth rose-coloured granite, worked in so dexterously as to seem but one united whole. Its richly cushioned seat was vacant when we entered, and all eyes were directed towards the heavy hangings beyond it, where the Queen would presently appear.

Whilst we waited thus, expectant of her coming, I felt more fearful, more nervous, than I had ever felt before, even in direst danger. My heart throbbed violently against my side, my knees trembled, and the flesh stood up in chilly pimples on my body—strange symptoms, truly, in one so little used to indulge in weak emotion. Not strange, though, when all the causes are taken into account, for surely 'tis not often man stands face to face with a climax like that I felt approaching, when the drapery behind the throne swayed slightly, as with someone shifting it aside.

At that moment the great chamber, with its costly tapestries worked in with the history of our rulers, the swaying sea of human faces, with eyes upturned and necks strained to catch the first glimpse of their sovereign; the throne itself and the purple curtain, all seemed to swim in a misty haze, and then to vanish from my senses. Instead, out of the blackness that succeeded, grew a snow-white cloud, that, as in thought I gazed, took shape and lessened

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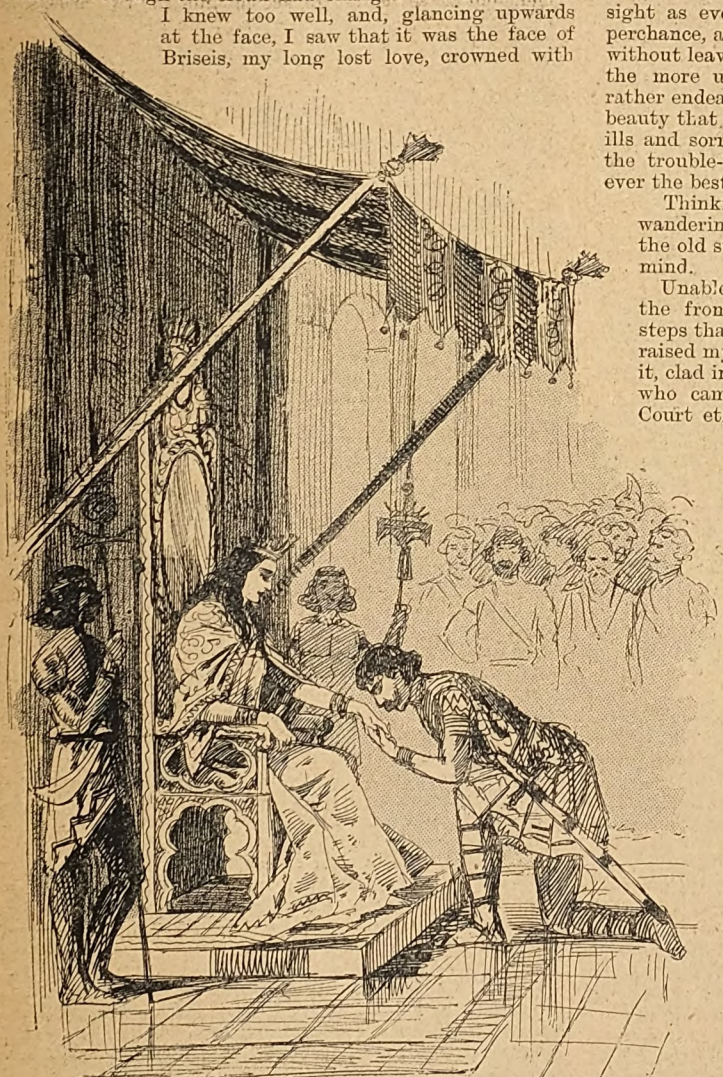
and drew nearer, and as it came, stretched out two arms towards me in loving greeting. I looked again, and it seemed as though the cloud had changed to a female form I knew too well, and, glancing upwards at the face, I saw that it was the face of Briseis, my long lost love, crowned with



Gave me her hand to kiss.

her wealth of raven hair, which, escaping from its fastenings, fell in rich and ample folds upon her shoulders.

A moment I looked on that cloud-born image, speechless in its astral thinness, then it slowly faded away into shapeless nebulosity, while in my ears rang an usher's cry, taken up by a thousand voices all around in the joyful shout:

"Queen Briseis comes!"

The cloud-mist vanished into the dark whence it came, and out of the dark grew in an instant the great chamber in which I stood, its crowded audience, and the silver throne in view of all, not empty now, but occupied by the counterpart of the vision I had just seen with my spirit eyes. 'Twas Briseis' self who sat in that regal seat.

Long I gazed at her before I ventured forward, scanning every detail of the well-remembered form with hungry eyes. She was still as witching-figured as when I first saw her as I lay in her garden, still as queenly in her royal robes as when she had walked beside me on its blossom-bordered paths, the mistress of that dear domain, still as thoughtful in her winsome glance as then, and still as lovely in my sight as ever, but cares of state and private worries, and, perchance, a pining for my long absence, had not passed by without leaving their marks upon her in the thinner cheek, the more unresting eye, the sharper word; yet all this rather endeared me the more than broke the charm, for the beauty that survives the years, that outlives and defies life's ills and sorrows, the beauty that beams the brighter for all the trouble-tests that would destroy another's charms, is ever the best and purest loveliness that earth can show.

Thinking thus, as I gazed my fill on the Queen that I, a wandering adventurer, dared to covet for my own, I felt the old sweet longing stealing unresisted through my mind.

Unable to bear the strain without a word, I pushed to the front and stood at the foot of the three oaken steps that lead to the Throne-seat, and standing there, raised my eyes unflinchingly to the lady who sat upon it, clad in her royal vestments. She looked at me then, who came forward so roughly and so disdainful of Court etiquette, and amid the angry murmurs of those around who waited for a hearing, our eyes met, and all travel and war marked as I was, and changed from fiery youth to graver manhood, she knew me in an instant, and heedless of the cynosure of those thousand eyes, gave me her hand to kiss, and whispered to me, soft and low, her voice thrilling on the chords of memory with sweet reminiscence:

"Art returned at last, thou wanderer! But know this for thy comfort and greeting, that though I have awaited thee so long, my patience is not yet gone."

"My Queen," I murmured faintly, "those are the sweetest words that I have listened to since last I saw thee!"

"Now rise," said Briseis, in the same low tone, "it is not meet for us to consummate our reunion here, for cares of State are heavy and pressing;" then, in a louder voice, that rang with truly regal hauteur, she went on: "Thy petition, O Arnon, is granted, and henceforth thou art one of my trusted officers. Now stand thee on my right hand, and thou, usher, bring in the Sleeper who has wakened from his rest of a thousand years."

The command was instantly obeyed, and the attention of the audience was happily diverted from us to the wondrous Sleeper, who, dressed in his antique garb, was led before the throne by Unim and his fellow-priest. At the Queen's desire Unim related the tradition that had been handed down from generation to generation, and recited the prophecy that was told concerning the waking of Marenso.

His words rang clearly in the deathlike silence that prevailed, and many a face blanched fearfully as the saying of dread import sounded in their ears:

"For whoso wakes the Sleeper shall bury him, dead truly, in the Sacred Grotto, and whosoever shall be king of Atlantis in the day that the Sleeper dies, shall be its last king, and the end of the land itself shall not be far away."

At another time, I, too, should have been impressed with the message of hovering doom, but now I saw nothing but Briseis, sitting there in state, her lovely face unmoved by either joy or sorrow, and heard nothing that I cared about save the music of her voice.

Then Marenso stood forth, looking as a man who had passed through a stern struggle with a great grief, and coming out triumphant, had nevertheless emerged with the marks of the conflict upon him. He confirmed the words of Unim, and proved, by describing the land as he had known

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it and telling what king reigned when he was last awake, that his slumber had lasted a thousand years or more; and adding that it was held in his day, as a message from the gods, that the end of Atlantis would come by water and her people and her greatness alike would be buried beneath the sea.

The faces of his hearers whitened still more as they listened to him, speaking as one who had risen from the dead and was revealing to them the secrets of the Shadow Land, and all hailed with a sigh of relief the appearance of Nayrahn, who recounted the capture of Miropis; and the messenger who brought the tidings of the secession of the Province of Aidè. Then, to my immense satisfaction, the Queen intimated that the audience was at an end, and all saving myself, Marenso, Unim and his fellow-priest, Nayrahn, and Valdo and Atris, withdrew from the chamber.

"Now we can talk in peace, my faithful subjects," said Briseis, "now we can consider what measures to take in face of the dangers that are threatening us on every side, undisturbed by a frivolous and fearful crowd of sycophants. And first I would know how we are to proceed against the rebels in our motherland?"

"Since you ask, my Sovereign," said Marenso, "I would advise that you send the half of yonder vast array to reconquer the recalcitrant province where rebellion has uplifted its evil head; and that it be done speedily, before the foreign traitors can pour their forces into it."

"'Tis good counsel, Sleeper," said the Queen, "and showest that thou hast soon busied thyself with the affairs of this age. But which of my generals can I best trust for this immediate and important task? I have none, well tried, such as Quitzaal has in his army."

"If you need a man who may be trusted and has lived in the service of arms," cried Marenso eagerly, "you might do worse, O Queen, than appoint me the leader of this expedition. Trust me, and I shall not fail!"

"What wast thou, Marenso, when last thou wast awake?"

"I was King Monteza's general-in-chief," replied the soldier, "and so established his throne that no enemy dared lift his head in our dominions for seven years before I fell asleep."

"Is it your wish, my councillors—for such henceforth you seven shall be—that I make Marenso my general?"

"It is," we answered, though Nayrahn did so doubtfully, as was his wont, agreeing that the sooner the troops were set in motion the better, lest they should succumb to a universal panic.

"And 'twill be something to divert my thoughts," said the Sleeper, bowing low as the favour was bestowed upon him, "for all things are strange to me here, and the sudden loss of friends and relatives and everything I cherished is still bitter upon me."

I pitied him, then; for an awful thing it must be to awake from slumber to find the darkness of a thousand years fallen down between oneself and all familiar forms and places.

"And also," continued Queen Briseis, "I need a captain for my fleet, to lead it out to meet and conquer the great company of ships that Vichri is reported to be bringing to the attack of Kronos."

"For that service there are few so well fitted as Arnon the Pirate," said I, "who loves the sea as his childhood's home, and glories above all things in the sailing of a ship!"

"'Tis thy old fault, Arnon," smiled my royal mistress, "to know thy own merits so well and so witlessly to noise thy knowledge abroad! Nathless thou hast the duty thou cravest."

This time I bowed low in token of thanksgiving for the honour thus laid upon me, and Briseis went on:

"As to you, my priests, do you strive to quell the fright that has come upon the people because of the prophecy. It were ill for them to grieve before the evil falls, and though the sea is rising ever, Kronos and Miropis are still untouched by its advance, and the worst may be long in coming. Go, then, and do my bidding, and a royal present shall be forthcoming to enrich your Sacred Grotto."

"We go, and willingly," said Unim, "for of a truth your Majesty speaks as one inspired of the Spirits," and they departed.

"And thou, Nayrahn, I appoint the Captain of my Guard, for art a brave, if a careful soldier."

Together with Marenso, after making due obeisance, the officer withdrew, followed by Valdo and Atris, whom I motioned to await me outside the palace precincts. Alone I lingered by the throne, fidgeting nervously with the hilt of my sword, seeming unable to break the spell of the silence of that empty room.

"Why stayest thou, Arnon?" asked the Queen.

"Why?" I said, the sound re-echoing round the vaulted hall. "Why? Because, my Queen, whom once I called my love, because—because—forsooth, I cannot go."

"I knew it, my Arnon," said she, "and have waited with scant patience to rid me of these pestering courtiers and councillors, that we may talk alone for a moment. Say, hast never forgotten me in all these years?"

"But once, my Briseis," I answered, "in a way that I will tell thee if thou wishest, although, till a few months agone, I thought 'twas thou betrayed me into exile, using Sothi as an instrument."

"That is what I ever feared," returned my love, "and but that the traitor Sothi stood high in favour with King Dulo, and latterly with his regiment, I had punished him for his evil-doing. Some time I will tell thee the foul story, and thou shalt tell me the tale of thy wanderings, and how thou didst come to forget me even once; but it is not seemly that we stay longer here together, for subjects will talk, and a queen must have regard for their gossip though she despise it in her heart."

"'Tis true," I answered, "and I go, if you will grant me but a lover's kiss to seal the re-uniting of our lives."

"Shouldst have thy boon, my long-lost one," said the Queen, looking at me as though half afraid I meant to take it by violence, "shouldst have thy desire were I as I once was; but slaves and spies are ever round a sovereign's throne, and who knows what eyes may not be on us even now? Nay, who knows what ears have heard our talk already? 'Twere not safe for thee to stay a moment longer. Yet stay"—as I turned to go with a leaden heart—"where art going to lodge thyself and thy followers?"

"I know not, nor care," I said gloomily.

"Then obey thy Queen," said Briseis, looking at me with the old light in her lustrous eyes again, "and take thy quarters in the house where I lived when I first saw thee—thou know'st it, dost thou not, Arnon?—and make it thy home till such time as fortune may favour thee with a change. Thou mayst be wandering in the garden some even—who shall say?—and maybe I visit that same tree-shaded nook at intervals to gain an hour of solitude. There, take what comfort thou canst from that, my Arnon, and put not my good repute in jeopardy by lingering more."

Thus reassured, I turned and went, though slowly, and often looking back before I reached the door. Passing out as the usher re-entered with a score of female waiting slaves, I strode off rapidly to seek my inseparable worthies. They found, I directed my course without delay to the house I remembered so well, near the western outskirts of the city, and took up my abode in its luxurious interior, together with Valdo and Atris, who never tired of commending themselves on their great good luck in being attached to so favoured a patron, and of being waited on with such ceaseless, tireless zeal by the retinue of obsequious slaves that the great establishment maintained, and whom we endeared to our service by a profuse outpouring of golden largess on the first day of our residence there.

Full often the place was thronged with guests and officers of State and many sea captains, till I was nigh distraught with divided attentions and constant banqueting and long confabulations; for none could discuss the least matter of national import unless their paunches and

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tongues were well lubricated with plenteous repasts and copious bumpers of hill-side wine.

I was soon heartily disgusted with them all, save the sea captains. Those I favoured above all the others, seeming to hear the song of the sea in their rough and rollicking talk and spicy yarns that smacked full strong of the briny wave! With them I grew a favourite, as with most others I met, for was I not rich and great and patronised by Royalty, and singled out by the Spirits as their Instrument of Fate?

Yet I would gladly have foregone all this cringing subservience and flattering attention, all this pomp, and glitter, and show, and tinsel, and gaud, for the life that I lived a few short months with Briseis in the years gone by.

It was with unconcealed joy that I escaped from it an hour or two each day to visit the army on the plain, assist in the preparation of Marenso's force for departure, and, finally, to see him start north-westward with his battalions in brave array; or to go down to the Bay of Kronos to supervise the manning and victualling of the huge fleet of five hundred sail waiting there for news of the enemy's movements.

One thing I discovered on these latter visits that gladdened my heart next to the sight of the Queen was that tight old ship, the *Ravager*, that had carried me in triumph over many a league of tossing, heaving billows, whereon my youthful hands first learned to steer, to warp, to heave to, to slip cable, and hoist sail; whereon I fought 'neath lusty Didron, rough-hearted but true, and whereon I slew cantankerous Zerah for slighting my golden-haired, sunny-tempered Viol.

There she lay by the wharf, that tough old ship, her long, low hull dwarfed by comparison with the great warships around her, but herself more than a match for any of them, I stoutly avowed.

Remembering the swiftness of my lost *Seamew* and the rig of her Egyptian sail, I had like spars and canvas, though heavier and larger, put on my veteran ship, adding to the prow a sharp iron beak like that I had noticed on Strong-Arm Thaska's vessel, also increasing the number of rowers by fifty; and now I had a craft that I dared against the fleetest in the bay for a ten-league spin—the stake a bar of gold, for I had now fetched all the treasure from my cave and lodged at my home—and, though ill-served by tide and breeze, the good old *Ravager* outpaced them all with many a length to spare, from that time till now remaining my flagship, the most famous vessel that has ever ploughed the deep Atlantian seas.

Atris and Valdo were numbered amongst her crew of two hundred sturdy sailors, all picked men, and 'twas my greatest joy to tread her deck and make short voyages along the coast to try her speed and toughness.

Many days passed thus busily, and often I wandered in that fair garden, waiting for my love, listening to the birds' sweet carillons, the tinkling of the little rills, and the plashing of the fountains; revelling in the rich odours exhaled by its myriad vari-coloured flowers, and oft reclining silently upon its mossy banks, or sitting on the rude timber seat beneath that well-known leafy grove through which at night the moonbeams stole; yet for weeks she for whom I waited came not.

Then tidings reached us by couriers from the north of the great success of Marenso and the utter rout of the Prince of Aidè's force, which, the messengers said, had been driven after many losses to take refuge in the mountains once infested by robbers, and was there beleaguered by the loyal hosts.

Many of the rebels had deserted to our standard, but the chief nobles and their two leaders were with the remnant in the hills. All accounts spoke highly of the military genius and popularity of the awakened Sleeper, who seemed as one come down from another world to aid Atlantis in her need.

Also news was brought by a swift-sailing merchant vessel that at last the rebel fleet was fairly under weigh, and making for our southern shores, the captain of the ship having seen the great flotilla not many days' voyage beyond Miropis, moving slowly as though weighted down by a full complement of soldiery and stores.

Directly I received this information I proceeded to hasten the preparation of the fleet for taking the sea, and the following day saw everything in readiness for the start. But there is one thing I ought to relate here, that happened before these tidings arrived.

It was one forenoon, when the city was given over to rejoicing at the victories of Marenso, that I observed Atris, alone amongst the merry-makers, wearing a most woeful countenance, and hanging about me as though wishing to say something, but scarcely daring to. At last I grew tired of his hesitancy, and asked him to out with it and let me know what troubled him.

"Thou'rt ever favoured by beauty's smiles," said he mysteriously, "and even the Queen, if I mistake not, looked on thee with love when we stood by."

"'Tis not of myself you wish to speak," I said impatiently, "'tis of thy own affairs, I warrant. Come, man, say what ails thee or what boon thou cravest, and not go round and round the subject like a love-sick maid!"

"Though 'tis not thyself I wish to speak of, thou hast greatly to do with my desire," answered Atris, finding his tongue more readily now. "There was a maiden whom thou didst save from a bullying soldier on the road between here and Miropis. Dost remember?"

"I do," I said, starting, for the affair had slipped my memory.

"And didst thou not promise her to put the matter before the Queen, lest a similar evil should befall her?"

"So I did," I answered, self-condemned.

"And hast forgotten thy promise, and is that lovely maid to be left whatever fate may pass her way these troublesome war times?"

"Thou art right, my Atris," I made reply, "for, truth to tell, I had let the matter slip my mind, so pestered are we with these crowds of hollow-hearted hangers-on at Court. I'll see the Queen this very day and ask her royal permission to send for the maiden and her father to the city, out of harm's way."

"But will the maiden be safer here, think'st thou, than under her father's humble roof?"

"Why, art much concerned regarding this maid, I vow!" I laughed boisterously. "Hast fallen in love with her pretty face?"

"In faith, I think I have," he answered, so solemnly that I roared again.

"Then shalt have my aid," I said, clapping him on the shoulder, "for of all afflictions thou has been seized with the worst. I say it knowingly."

"Yet seem in no haste to cast off thy own fair share of the affliction," returned he, smiling in his turn.

So, in my official character, I asked my boon of Briseis, which she graciously granted, saying that if I feared for the maid's safety she would take her as her own especial waiting-girl, thus keeping her within watch, "for thy follower is a brave man, I hear," she said, "and well deserve some recompense for his devotion to thee."

Hugely delighted, Atris at once brought them to Kronos, and placing Izitla with the Queen, as desired, installed her father in our palatial house, where we heaped every kind attention possible upon him, and almost caused a youthful glow to faintly tinge his aged cheeks.

Only Valdo, sternly practical, and ever with face set against women and their wiles, shook his head, saying 'twas a thousand pities that Atris had ever seen the winsome maid.

"For me," he grumbled, "I shall go through as I have managed till now, with a keen and trusty sword as my only companion; and one, moreover, that never plays you false, nor leads you into reckless, foolish, ape-brained schemes."

That was *his* philosophy; as for Atris and myself, we only laughed at him and said we'd take the risk.

(*To be continued.*)

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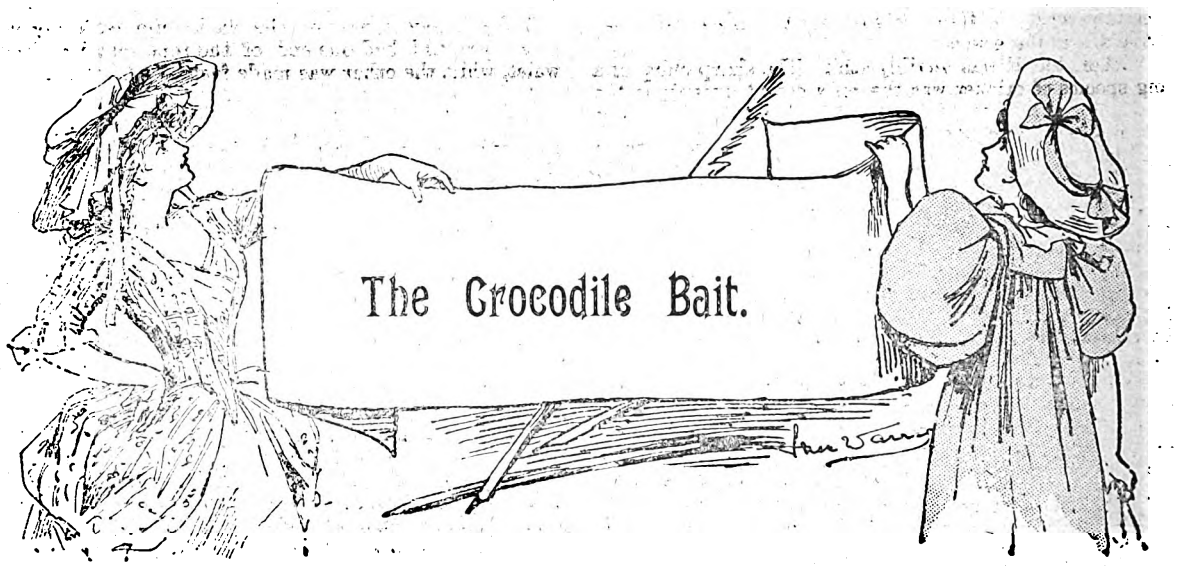

The Crocodile Bait.

"WHAT, my boy there? He is a pure-blooded East Indian, aren't you, Decoy? You see, sir, he speaks pigeon-English tolerably well, though. That is because I brought him up from a baby. Why did I give him such a peculiar name? Thereby hangs a tale. While we're sitting here under the awning on deck, I'll spin you the yarn.

"Calcutta is much improved since my young days. Then there was hardly any steam navigation. The big East Indiamen came to anchor at Kedgeree, thirty miles down, and sent freight and passengers up in lighters.

"I had never been up country any distance. So as the rice wasn't coming in very fast, I made arrangements for a little jaunt up the Hooghly after pea-fowl. I hired a native boat-owner, who spoke fairly good pigeon-English, to take me some fifty miles up river.

"The boat had a roofing over the stern to keep off the sun, and I enjoyed the day part of the trip very well; but what with the stifling air and mosquitoes, at night it was almost intolerable. So after we got as far up as Bramapore—a small native village on the left bank of the Ganges—I paid off the boat owner and his men. Then, taking up my gun and a few traps I had brought along, I went ashore to the only thing like a house of entertainment the village afforded. It was a low structure, with thatched roof and mud walls, divided up into perhaps a dozen sleeping rooms, the size of a closet.

"I hired a native to sit by my canvas cot all night, and keep a big palm-leaf fan going. Sleep? Well, there wasn't much for either of us. Big lizards, singing out 'ghek-hoe' as plain as I can say it, chased beetles and mice in the cloth ceiling overhead all night long. I could hear big toads 'flop' along the floor every moment. Mosquitoes sang inside, and outside the bullfrogs kept up a roaring chorus—jackals and owls joined in.

"Next day another man landed from a native boat and hired one of the rooms. He was an East Indian, rather well educated, and spoke English with fluency.

"I soon discovered that he was an agent for the Zoological Society in London. His business was employing natives to catch for him different birds and animals. These he sent to a Calcutta agent in a big lighter which he had chartered. The tiger cats in the yard I soon found belonged to Nana—the only name I knew him by. And the same day a boa-constrictor was captured in the reeds by the river, and was boxed up and put aboard the lighter.

"Of course I was greatly interested in what he had to tell me of his various adventures. He had assisted in the capture of elephants in Ceylon, lions in South Africa, and had taken tigers in the jungle pitfalls.

"'What I look for, Sahib,' he said, as we were talking together the morning after he came, 'is the big crocodile that has slain more men of Bramapore than I can count upon the fingers of both hands.'

"'To capture him?' I asked, in surprise, for I supposed that only the young or half-grown monsters were taken for the purposes Nana represented.

"'The Sahib has said it,' was the cool reply. 'Nana has man who throw the noose with skill; I hope by to-morrow to lure the crocodile far enough from the rushes so that we can overpower it.'

"'But how?' I questioned again.

"Now, at the best, Nana hadn't a very prepossessing face. His features were regular enough, and he was no darker than a Brazilian as to the colour of his skin. But there was something cruel and sinister in his expression. And when I asked the last question, the yellowish centre in the pupils of his eyes expanded and contracted like those of the tiger cats in the cage.

"'I have that my secret,' he said; but I said nothing more.

"Of course, I was curious to find out his secret; but I said nothing, and presently took my gun for my daily tramp.

"How hot it was! Not a breath of air stirring, and the sun pouring down from a cloudless sky. I began thinking that I had been a thousand times better off under the ship's awning, drinking cool *sangaree*, than potting

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pea-fowl with the thermometer at 102 degrees in what little shade there was.

"Then, too, it was terribly still. The sharp chirp of a big species of cricket was the only sound excepting the soft gurgle and flow of the muddy Ganges, a few rods distant—till all at once I heard a baby giving tongue most lustily.

"If this had sounded in the direction of the village it would not have seemed anything unusual; but Bramapore was half a mile distant, and the noise proceeded from somewhere near the river, whose parched banks were barren of verdure. A few beds of rushes and a big boulder or two were in sight, and nothing more, till at the edge of the rushes I saw a black baby crawling on its hands and knees as fast as it could, and shrieking like a little demon.

"Well it might! For, all at once, as I hurried forward, I saw the enormous snout of the very biggest Indian crocodile I ever saw before or since, poked up through the rushes a little in the rear of the baby. Before I could pull myself together the monster's shoulders and part of his mud-caked body were clear of the edge. There would be no time to rush forward, grab the little one, and beat a retreat.

"Dropping behind a boulder, I cocked my right-hand barrel, which was loaded with heavy swan-shot. The crocodile in clawing himself upward over a clay hummock exposed for one brief moment the dingy-white patch of flesh behind the foreleg, which, next to the eye itself, is considered the most vulnerable spot. Resting my gun over the boulder, I aimed for this and fired.

"The swan-shot, at such short range, clumped together with deadly effect. The immense reptile uttered a sort of bellow, and heeled over on its side. At the same moment a shout from a jungle patch a few paces away caused me to turn suddenly.

"Nana, followed by half-a-dozen natives carrying small coils of flexible coil rope, came running towards me. Nana's face was distorted with rage, and as he neared me, I saw him snatch his short tulwar, or native sword, from its sheath.

"Of course, there was only one construction to be put upon his action, though for the moment I did not understand what my cause of offence had been.

"'Stop, you black scoundrel!' I shouted. But he was as wild as a Malay running amuck. He never paused an instant, despite my levelled gun; and, seeing that in another moment he meant to cut me down, I aimed at his upraised arm and fired.

"Well, the barrel was only loaded with birdshot, but it was quite effectual. Nana dropped his tulwar with a a yell of pain, and two or three natives behind him, who were slightly peppered, turned and ran for dear life, followed by their uninjured companions.

"I had aimed hastily, and only about half the charge had struck the East Indian in the fleshy part of the arm. He snatched up his turban and bound it up, cursing me the while in the choicest Hindustanee.

"'You brought it on yourself,' I said, as coolly as I could, while I was reloading—for I didn't fancy his fiendish look in the least.

"Nana didn't seem to hear what I said at all.

"'Five thousand rupees I have lost by this,' he yelled, pointing with his left hand to the crocodile, which was in the agonies of death. 'Five thousand rupees that I was to have for taking the big man-eater alive!'

"'Would you have had him swallow that baby?' I said indignantly, as I turned towards the little one I had nearly forgotten.

"If you believe me, sir, the black child, certainly not over a year old, had one end of the rope round its little waist, while the other was made fast to a dead stub.

"Then I saw it all. *This* was the brute's secret for decoying the crocodile from his muddy bed! I don't get angry very often, but when I do, I'm mad clear through.

"'Get out of this, you copper-skinned hound!' I shouted, throwing up my gun. 'Quick time, too, or I'll put a double charge of shot through your worthless carcase!'

"Well, Nana was wise enough to take the hint without any delay. And he didn't go back to the inn, either. I untied the naked young one, and carried it up to the village. No one pretended to know anything about it. The brute had probably bought the baby for a few rupees of some of the very poorest and most degraded of the natives, and they, of course, would not let themselves be known. The man whom I employed as an interpreter told me very coolly that I musn't think anything of such little affairs—they were common enough in this part of India. I think he was rather inclined to blame me for spoiling Nana's plans.

"I congratulated myself on having prevented a foul murder, but I could get no thanks for it from anyone—not even from the rescued infant. So, quite disgusted, I packed up, hired another boat, and took the young one back to the ship. My stewardess was a Mahrattah women, and her husband, my cook, persuaded her to take care of the child.

"We went back, and loaded for Ahangai, the stewardess and her husband staying by us for three round deep-water passages. I got quite fond of Decoy, who grew fat and tough every voyage.

"When he was three years old, he would follow me about like a little dog, and at five he would go up the rigging like a monkey.

"Time went by, and when Decoy was ten I came to Calcutta with him as my cabin-boy in the old *Akbar Castle*. We were ashore for next day's marketing one evening, and Decoy, I noticed, was very uneasy as we started back for the landing-place.

"'Sahib Cap'n got him pistol?' he asked, as he came trotting up behind with the great vegetable basket. And I said: 'No. Why?'

"'Bad man keep watch, Sahib Cap'n, all time we to market—man one arm no good,' he said.

"We had just got to the upper end of Garden Reach as Decoy said this, and I was making some careless answer when someone ran up behind me with an ugly-looking knife in his left hand.

"Decoy sang out, and, dropping his basket, grabbed the man round both knees, just as I turned in time to dodge the knife blow, which dashed little Decoy quite badly in the shoulder. But he hung on like a trump, and a minute later I had the fellow disarmed and handed over to the native police.

"As you may have supposed, it was Nana, who had managed to recognise me after all those years. And when he appeared before the magistrate next morning when my complaint was entered, you should have seen his face, when it came out in the examination that little Decoy was the black baby he intended as crocodile bait.

"He was sentenced to hard labour for ten years, I think. I hope he got it, too—the hardest kind. Decoy has been with me ever since. Please God, always will be while I live—eh, Decoy?"

J. M. M.

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THE ISLE OF LEPERS.

THERE was an awful beauty on the Gulf of Georgia that summer night. It was as if all the golds and scarlets and purples of the sunset had been pounded to a fine dust and rolled in from the ocean in one great opaline mist.

The colouring of the sky began in the east with a pale green that changed delicately to salmon, and this to rose, and the rose to crimson—and so on down to the west, where the sun was sinking into a gulf of scarlet through which all the fires of Hades seemed to be pouring up their flames and sparks. Long, luminous rays slanted through the mist and withdrew swiftly, like searchlights—having found all the lovely wooded islands around which the burning waves were clasping hands and kissing. The little clouds that had journeyed down to see what was going on in that scarlet gulf must have been successful in their quest, for they were fleeing back with the red badge of knowledge on each breast. Only the snow mountains stood aloof, white, untouched—types of eternal purity.

Through all that superb riot of colour that heralded the storm that was sweeping in from the ocean moved a little boat, with a flapping sail, lazily. In it were a man and a woman. The woman was the wife of the man's best friend.

They had left Vancouver—and all else—behind them in the early primrose dawn. Trying to avoid the courses of steamers they had lost their own, and were drifting. In less than an hour the storm was upon them. All the magnificent colouring had given place to white-edged blacks. Occasionally a scarlet thread of lightning was cast, crinkling, along the west. Then in a moment, followed the deep fling and roar of the thunder. Fierce squalls came tearing up the straits where the beautiful mist had trembled.

The little boat went straining and hissing through the sea. As each squall struck her the sail bellied to the water. There was no laughter now, no love-glow, on the faces in that boat; they were white as death, and their eyes were wild. Veins like ropes stood out in the man's throat and arms, and the woman could not speak for the violent beating in her throat. She held on to the tiller with swollen hands and wrenched arms. When the boat sunk into the black hollows she braced herself and looked down into the water, and thought—of many things. And through all his agonised thought for the woman, the man had other more terrible thoughts too.

Straight ahead of them arose the white, chalky shoulder of an island. He realised that he was powerless to avoid it. There was one low place, sloping down, green, to a beach of sand, but the sharp outlines of rocks rose between them—and there was no shelter from the wind. Still, it was their only chance. That or death. (He wished afterwards that it had been death.) He braced himself and pulled at the ropes until spots of blood quivered before his eyes.

"Port!" he yelled. "*Port hard!*" But the woman gave one gesture of despair; her hands fell from the tiller and she sank in a heap to the bottom of the boat.

It seemed but a moment till the boat struck and they were struggling in the waves. But a strip of headland now cut off the worst fury of the storm. The water was calmer; and as the man was a powerful swimmer, they, after a fierce battle with the waves, reached the shore and fell, dumbly, in each other's arms, upon the beach, exhausted.

Suddenly, as they lay there, above the noise of the wind, the waves and the crushing to pieces of their boat upon the rocks, another sound was borne to their ears—a long, moaning wail that was like a chant of the dead, so weird and terrible was it.

They staggered to their feet. Coming down to them from a little row of cabins above were a dozen human creatures, the very sight of whom filled them with terror. Some were without eyes; others without hands or arms; others were crawling without feet. And as they approached they wailed over and over the one word that their poor Chinese tongues had been taught to utter: "*Unclean! Unclean! Unclean!*"

Both the man and woman understood; but the man only spoke. "Great God! It is D'Arcy Island!" he said in his throat. "*The island of lepers!*"

The woman did not speak; but she leaned heavily upon him. The waves pounded behind them, and the firs on the hill above them bowed, moaning, before the storm—some never to rise again. And still, above everything, arose that awful wail: "*Unclean! Unclean!*"

The man looked down upon her. Already she seemed far, far from him. She had lost everything for him—but he was thinking, even now, of what he had lost for her. They were stranded upon an island whereon there was no human being save the lepers placed there by the British Government—an island at which steamers never landed, and from which escape was impossible, unless they signalled—and those two dared not signal—for lepers there are only silence and opium—and death.

His voice shook when he spoke again:

"What accursed luck steered us here!" he cried bitterly.

Then the woman spoke, lifting herself from him and standing alone.

"It was not luck at all," she said steadily, "it was God."

Then suddenly she cast all her trembling, beautiful length downward and lay prone, with her face sunken to the wet sand. And lying so, she clasped her hands hard, hard behind her neck, and cried out in a voice that lifted each word, clear and distinct, above the storm—so deep, so terrible was it with all passion, all submission, all despair—the most sublime prayer ever uttered by a woman: "Oh, Thou God—Who hast guided us two to the one spot on earth where we belong! I see! I understand. Oh, Thou awful God—*Thou just God!*"

The lepers, crawling back to their hovels, left those two alone; but their weird wail still sank through the falling darkness—"*Unclean! Unclean!*"

ELLA HIGGINSON.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XLVI.

UNDER THE BLACK WING.

"WANTS another pick-me-up," said the cabman to himself as he received his orders to drive to Wimpole Street. "'Bliged to go to the doctor, after all. Lor', what a blessing it is not to be born a swell! Ain't got nothing to do; money comes in without having to be out all weathers, fare or no fare, and then not having enough to pay the guv'nor and the yard. Consekens is they sets to work on their B.'s and S.'s all times o' the day to kill time as they calls it; and the end on it is, time's too much for 'em and they gets killed instead. Ah, seems precious hard lines to be a poor man sometimes, but it's a blessin' arter all, leastwise it would be if the guv'nor'd give me a better horse. Gann with yer! Never see a lady on a bike afore?"

This to his horse, as one of the two-wheeled vehicles was steered rapidly by.

"All right, old man, I forgives," continued the cabman, with a broad grin; "what are we a-comin' to next! Why, if I'd seen her first it would ha' made me shy, let alone a horse. It would ha' made my missus blush."

Bractoun's throbbing weals increased in their smarting as the cab was driven across the Park, and by the time he reached Wimpole Street the thirst for money to free himself from his difficulties had given place to an intense desire for retaliation upon someone.

"Curse him! he shall pay for it in more ways than one," he muttered, as he got out stiffly. "Wait."

"All right, sir," said the man, and then to himself, "look as if you'll want a hambylance. My word, he do sim bad!"

The door was answered this time by Rancer, who had just returned, and he drew back to admit the familiar friend and patient.

"Where's your master?" said Bractoun sharply.

"Library, sir."

"I'll go in."

Rancer did not hesitate, but opened the outer baize door, looking upon Bractoun as one whom his master would see at any time, saw him turn the handle of the inner door quickly, and enter, and then closed after him the thick baize door which deadened all sound.

Consequently he did not hear Bractoun's cry of surprise and rage, nor, as the inner door closed and that at the top of the stairs, as he went down to the pantry, the sounds which followed.

Startled, but hardly surprised after the first moment—for the sequence of events seemed natural that Bractoun should follow his wife upon her flight to him—Murray recovered himself after being violently thrown back by the sudden assault, and after a brief struggle, dashed his infuriated assailant staggering away.

Brief enough encounter, but the moments were sufficient to enable a feeling of determination to flood Murray's brain—to die sooner than give up the woman he worshipped to him who would part them; while, frantic with jealous rage, the desire to kill was growing in Bractoun's heart.

Both stood panting with exertion, and for a moment Murray turned to where Olive lay motionless upon the couch.

Bractoun saw the wildly passionate look in the other's eyes, and a low, angry utterance that was hardly human escaped his lips. Maddened by pain and rage, he made as if to spring at Murray again, and nerved by the sight of Olive, and fully aware of his superior power, the latter stood firmly on his defence, meaning to close with him or disable him with a blow—anything to gain time enough to get the insensible woman away. He knew that they would not be interrupted. Shut in by the walls of that substantially built old place, no sound would reach the servants, and even if a cry were heard there would be no interference, for more than once he had met a surgeon there in consultation over a painful case, and stood by while some slight operation was performed. The room was secure from intrusion when visitors were there; and, feeling this, Murray's brain was active as to what he had better do. For all compunction was for the time gone. Olive had taken refuge with him, and, no matter what was at stake, in his then state of nervous exaltation he was prepared to go to any extreme.

The next instant he was awake to the fact that his adversary was as ready, and that it was a case of life or death.

For there was a sharp click, click, and Bractoun raised the pistol he had snatched from his breast, and took careful aim at his adversary across the table.

Murray did not hesitate; he dashed round the end to strike the pistol up, when there was a flash; he felt as if he had received a tremendous blow on the left arm which spun him round, and half stunned, he heard the sharp clicking sound again. Then, recovering himself, he once more dashed at Bractoun.

Again there was the flash, and the blow, as the smart crack of the pistol rang out—a keener and more cutting blow, which sent him staggering back, to sink upon his knees by the fireplace, conscious of a deathly sickening sensation, and incongruously enough noting the smoke and the foul odour of discharged gunpowder.

Then, as he knelt there, confused and for the moment helpless; he saw through the noisome vapour Bractoun turn his back, and the pistol again cocked, before he raised his arm once more, and took aim at the figure on the sofa.

A spasm ran through Murray, and he tried to rise, but could not, but only gaze wildly for what seemed to be a long period before there was a dull rap.

The pistol had missed fire.

An oath rang upon his ears now, followed by the click of the pistol as it was cocked, and the chambers revolved.

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Once more Braetoun took aim at the insensible figure, but with a cry of despair Murray was upon him, armed now, for in the brief instant he had snatched the poker from the fender; and as Braetoun drew trigger, Murray used all his remaining force in the delivery of a blow from which Braetoun dropped as suddenly as if he had received his own bullet in the brain.

Sick at heart, and half fainting, Murray reeled to the couch on the other side of the table, after flinging the poker aside, striking feebly here and there to sweep away the smoke, which, assisted by his natural giddiness, interposed between him and Lady Braetoun.

He did not see that the last bullet her husband had fired had passed into the wall several feet above her head, but dropped upon his knees mentally, as well as bodily, stunned and helpless, filled as his brain was by the one supreme horror that Braetoun in his jealousy had slain the woman he loved.

For some moments he remained motionless, his hands to his throbbing temples, gazing at her in mute despair, while in the utter silence which now reigned, the thin blue smoke wreathed softly above their heads, rising slowly toward the ceiling.

"Dead!" he groaned, at last; "dead! and through me. Olive, Olive, my darling, speak to me—one word!" and in his profound misery he caught her hand in his, and pressed it wildly to his lips.

At the touch, Olive's eyes slowly opened, and she gazed straight before her in utter vacancy, seeing nothing, recalling nothing, till he bent more over her, when as her eyes now met his, they remained for a time fixed, till the reality of where she was and why she had come, came back.

With a look of horror she sprang from the couch and stood gazing at him. Then backed towards the door, as he slowly rose to his feet.

"Roderick—my husband—where is he? What has happened? He came here and I followed him. Why don't you speak?"

As she backed away in her horror and dread of the wild-looking, dishevelled being who came slowly toward her, she kicked against something with her heel, and slight as was the impediment, she nearly fell, while in recovering herself, she saw almost in the same glance the pistol against which her foot had struck, and her husband's prostrate figure, half hidden by the table, and grasped the fact that the room was full of smoke.

With a wild cry she ran to where Braetoun lay, and flung herself upon her knees by his side, trying to raise him, looking wildly in his face, feeling his heart, her hands passing rapidly over his face, and ending by drawing his head upon her lap.

"Dead!—dead!—too late! You have killed him!"

Still half stunned, and with the deathly faintness upon him, Murray stood supporting himself by the other end of the table, swaying to and fro like a drunken man, and watching her with half closed eyes.

"Help! help!" cried Olive at last, but in a low half-stifled voice. "What have you done? My husband—my poor, weak husband; he is dead—he is dead."

She drooped over him now with a piteous wail, kissing his face passionately, and calling him to come back to her by every endearing word she could command, but there was no reply, no movement, and a wave of rage and despair swept over her, as she now raised her head and with eyes flashing with the fierce anger within her breast, she turned upon Murray.

"You have murdered him!" she cried; "my own husband! Wretch! Monster! What have you done?"

Murray uttered a low groan.

"Too late—too late!" she cried. "You have been like a curse to me and mine. Roderick, my husband, I forgive and love you still. Oh, come back to me, come back. Help—a doctor—help! Why do you not come to him? Your cruel work! Do you not see?"

"Olive, for God's sake, hush!" groaned Murray at last, feebly, as he clung to the table to save himself from falling. Then in his mental anguish, as he saw her redouble her caresses, and listened to her words, he gasped faintly: "Have some mercy—have some pity for me. It was in self-defence—yes, in self-defence. What could I do?—he would have killed me."

"Well," she cried, in her mad rage against him; "why should he not?—you, you who would have robbed him—have dealt a cruel blow at the man you called your friend. Roderick! Husband! Oh, my own, my——"

"Are you quite pitiless?" groaned Murray. "Better that he had killed me, or that I had slain myself. I was defending you—it was for your sake."

"My sake!" she cried wildly. "Oh!"

"Yes: I was fighting for you more than for my wretched self. Olive, have pity. After what has passed can you throw me off like this! You cannot turn away now. Am I nothing to you now?"

"To me?" she cried, with a look of horror. "Nothing! I came to save my husband, and I find him dead."

"No, no," he panted feebly, "for God's sake, don't tell me that. It is not true. If I have killed him it was to save your life—the pistol—I thought you were dead."

Olive gazed at him wildly, and his distorted face endorsed her belief that he was mad.

"You came to save him? No!" he cried. "It is a horror, but I tell you it was in self-defence."

He paused to try and gather strength, and there was a low, piteous wail in his tones as he went on:

"Don't—don't turn from me now—at a time like this, when you had fled to me—to your only refuge—to him who has always loved you more than his own life. Don't turn from me now. No one will believe the truth, but there will be time for us to escape."

"Oh!" panted Olive, and she looked wildly at the door for help, but in her terrible dread of the ghastly-looking speaker, she did not dare to call.

"Be calm—try and be calm," he continued. "Give me time to think. The world is nothing to us, and I could not bear to be separated from you now. If I have killed him we should meet no more. Yes, that is it. We must go at once. There will be no shame for you. The sin is mine. No—no sin, no shame, dearest, for you, and I am glad. You are a free woman, now, and you cannot turn from me. I struck him down as he fired at you. Murderer? No, no, you must not call me that!"

He tried to take a step towards her; and she uttered a cry of horror, and in her abject fear she clung to Braetoun's arm.

But she had no further cause for fear. Murray lurched forward, and barely saved himself from falling. He noticed her manner, though, and his tones were full of pleading, as he went on faintly:

"You shrink away. Oh, my love, my love! Can you not see that there was not room in this world for us both? He tried so hard to kill me—to kill us both, but it was not to be—it was fate. Now, quick—listen—while I can speak—before this dreadful cloud closes me in—Olive—you must help me. We must go before it is too late."

"Oh!" she cried wildly. "Can you speak to me like this?"

"Yes," he said, as he pressed his hand to his hot shoulder. "There is no time to lose. Place first; some place of safety."

She turned to him fiercely, and with such a look of horror and disgust that he groaned.

"Oh, my husband, my husband!"

"A woman!" he cried, "a true woman, after all. And yet I loved you, and have proved it even now. Well," he said feebly, once more, "it does not matter. Look there, on the table—the draught I was about to take to end all my misery, when you came and seemed by your presence to snatch me back to life. There is the bell—call for help.

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You know what it means. They may not believe, they will not believe, for I shall not speak. I have killed him, and at the worst I can but die. Take him to your heart again; forgive him. I tell you it would bring me back to life."

She had in her dread crept closer to her husband's side, and once more drawn his head upon her lap, as she knelt, too much stunned by her position to act, and feeling in her horror that there was protection for her in the act; and as Murray wildly uttered those last words, Braetoun moaned.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A Woman at Bay.

Murray winced as he heard the cry of hysterical joy which escaped from Olive's lips:

"Roderick!" she cried; "speak to me, oh, speak!"

He slowly unclosed his eyes and stared at her; then round the room, and full consciousness came back as his eyes lighted on Murray. Then with a quick, angry gesture, he thrust himself away from his wife and rose slowly and stiffly to his knees, to glare at both in turn.

So fierce and full of disgust was his look that Olive shrank away, crouching low upon the carpet, and, after trying to speak, covered her face with her hands to try and check the passionate outburst of tears which would have vent.

"Ah! Curse it all!" groaned Braetoun, as he made an effort, rose to his feet, and pressed his hand to the side of his head, took it down and looked at it as if expecting to see blood, but there was none.

Then he turned his eyes upon Murray, who still stood by the table, to which he held fast, and uttered a low savage laugh. Another searching look showed him where the pistol lay upon the carpet.

He crossed to it, tottering a little; and he groaned again and nearly fell as he stooped painfully and picked up the weapon and cocked it, stood looking from one to the other and ended by pointing it at Murray, who drew himself up a little and looked him unflinchingly in the eyes.

Olive uttered a cry, and started to her feet.

"Roderick!" she cried.

"Down, curse you!" he said, turning the pistol muzzle upon her. "The right position for an abandoned woman like you."

"Oh, for pity's sake, don't think that of me, dear, don't think that," she cried, as she threw herself at his feet, and tried to grasp his knees.

"Keep away!" he said savagely, and he struck her with the pistol barrel across one hand.

Murray uttered a groan, but he did not stir.

"Roderick; how could you!" she cried, with a piteous wail. "You don't know—I was frightened—I was afraid of something terrible if you two met, and I came on to try and prevent it."

"Yes, but you managed to get here first," he cried mockingly.

"Oh, Roderick, you don't understand."

He laughed derisively. "I understand enough. Lucky for you, madam, that he struck me as he did, or you'd have had a bullet through your wretched heart."

Perfect confirmation of Murray's words, and Olive's jaw dropped, and she stared wildly at her husband as she realised the danger she had escaped. Then she tried to speak to him from where she knelt, but no words would come; and as he stood there pistol in hand, he seemed to find a fiendish pleasure in threatening her with it, and then changing its direction to Murray.

"I could easily do it," he said; "but he has his dose—a dose for the doctor—and one that he won't forget if he lives; and as for you, it would be a mercy to shoot you, but I'm not going to hang for a harlot."

"Roderick!" she cried, with her hands clasped to him. "You are half mad! You don't know what you say."

"Half mad? Enough to make me quite; but it doesn't matter now. Things have come to the worst, and I hope you'll be happy in your lot."

Again her lips parted to speak, but no words came, and in her despair she turned to Murray, but he made no sign, and Braetoun laughed bitterly.

"Well," he cried, "why don't you make him turn me out of his house? Your house, I suppose, now."

"Roderick!" she cried. "I cannot bear to hear you speak like this. Pray, pray listen to the truth."

"I know it," he cried mockingly; "and I'll have a divorce, and shame you both if it is possible. That is what you would like, but there shall be damages tacked on to it heavy enough to ruin him. You'll get the old man to pay them for him, though you could not get him to help me; but it does not matter. I'm reckless now."

Olive had risen, to stand silent and too indignant to attempt any defence. With her brow knit and eyes half closed, she waited until her husband had ceased speaking and replaced the pistol in his breast.

"There," he said, with a savage look at the half fainting man, holding on still by the table; "the old fashion has gone out, and they say that you can't have satisfaction in a case like this; but I've had mine. Do you hear, Murray? I've had one, and I've a greater one to come yet—a better revenge yet, as you'll see."

He limped across the carpet, wincing the while with pain, and involuntarily raising his hand to his injured head. But before he could reach the door Olive was by his side, and had caught his arm.

"Roderick!" she cried passionately. "You cannot go and leave me."

"Why not? What are you to me? You are no longer wife of mine. Let go! Do you hear me? Let go!"

He wrenched himself free, and sent her staggering back, to save herself from falling by catching at a chair.

But she recovered herself and ran to him again.

"You cannot mean to do me this horrible wrong," she cried piteously. "I forgive you all you have said, but take me away."

"Take you away!" he roared. "No; go to your paramour."

"Oh!" she cried; and she pressed her hands to her ears.

"Go to the cowardly hound who has not spirit enough to defend you."

"Don't, don't, pray don't talk to me like this. It is too horrible. Take me with you—take me home."

"Home!" he cried. "You have no home, unless it is here. Take you with me? Never; and besides, I am going *there!*"

"Oh!" she cried with a shiver of misery, "you don't know what you are saying and doing. Roderick, dear, listen to me. I am your own true wife. You must—you shall believe me. Listen before it is too late."

She was clinging to his arm, and looked in his eyes imploringly, but with a savage oath he threw her from him again.

"It is too late," he cried. "I tell you that you are no wife of mine. Go to that cowardly hound, as you have chosen him. Take you with me!"

"Yes, yes; you cannot leave me like this."

"Can't?" he cried bitterly. "I'm going straight away to the only woman who ever loved me, so as to be at peace."

"No, no," she cried frantically; and once more she clung to him; "you cannot mean it. I forgive you everything, only take me, take me to your heart again, and believe me true."

"I believe you to be as vile and bad as woman can be," he cried. "Loose my arm, curse you! Let go, before I do you a mischief. You escaped it once; am I to try again?"

"Yes, anything. Kill me," she cried, wild with horror now, "anything—only believe me, and take me away from here."

She uttered a wild shriek, and staggered back, sobbing hysterically, for he had struck her savagely with the back

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of his open hand across the face; and with her arms thrown up as if to hide the blow, she fell backward, without an effort to save herself, heavily on the floor.

He turned as he flung open the door, to dart a savage look of hatred at Murray, and then stood in the open doorway to gaze when Olive had risen to her knees, and in spite of all, even the blow, strove to reach him again; but before she could reach the door he had dragged it to, and directly after there was the dull thud of the outer one of baize, followed by the sharp sound of a key being turned.

The noise of something behind her made her turn sharply and stand with her back to the door, about whose panels she hurriedly passed her hands, feeling blindly for the handle, and in her dread pressing it to, instead of drawing it open.

For at last Murray had left the spot where he had stood so long clinging to the edge of the table; and he was now advancing towards her with extended hands.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

FOR LIFE—OR DEATH.

As Murray advanced slowly towards her with his eyes full of appeal, Olive made one more effort to tear open the door and escape; but in her horror and excitement she turned the handle in the wrong direction, uttered a cry of agony, and dashed across the room to avoid the outstretched, trembling hands; but before she reached the window with an insane idea upon her that she must fling it open and spring out, a low agonising cry thrilled her to the heart, and she turned at bay, trembling, and unable now to stir, though feeling that she had nothing more to bear.

For she grasped the fact that Murray was reeling, his eyes were fixed and vacant, and his hands were striving feebly to catch at help.

Then he uttered a low piteous cry, his glazing eyes staring and his words rang in her ears;

"Olive, where are you? In pity help me—I love you—don't let me die."

As the last words were uttered, Murray's hands dropped to his sides, and he fell forward upon his face, while for the first time Olive fully grasped the fact that he had been indeed fighting in her defence, for the carpet where he had stood, clinging to the table, was deeply stained with blood, and he was now apparently dying at her feet.

Stunned by the horror of her position—forsaken by her husband, thrown, as it were, entirely upon Murray's mercy, and with him wounded perhaps to the death, Olive stood with eyes starting and hands clasped, looking down at him, for the moment not daring to move.

In a confused, helpless way, she realised that her reputation was at stake; that at all costs she must escape from that house, and go back home or seek her father; but how could she go and leave Murray dying there without first giving the alarm by summoning help?

It was horrible! What would the servants say—what would they think of her! They must have heard the noise, and perhaps were now listening at the door.

"God help me! What shall I do?" she cried; and she ran to the door, trembling so, that she felt that she must faint; but as her hand rested upon it and she was about to rush out and flee as if for her very life, she turned to gaze back at the prostrate figure with a feeling of horror and dislike rising above every other thought. But at the sight of the blood staining his shoulder, a shudder ran through her, the natural compassionate woman asserted itself, and with a piteous cry she sank down upon her knees to search for the wound and tear out first her handkerchief and then his, to try and stop the bleeding.

Before a minute had passed she awoke to the fact that her efforts were perfectly useless, for the bandages she applied were soaked directly; and, forgetful now of everything but the peril in which Murray seemed to be, she rose from her knees and rang violently at the bell, to stand shuddering as she gazed down at her hands.

There was a sharp knocking at the baize door almost directly after, then the clicking of the lock, and Rancer entered looking rather wild, and as soon as he saw his master extended on the carpet, he cried excitedly:

"Then they were shots! Oh, my lady, what does it all mean?"

"Don't, don't talk! Help!" she cried.

The words were hardly needed.

Rancer had had his experiences, and he was already throwing off his coat and turning up his sleeves.

"No, no, a doctor—a surgeon," panted Olive.

"Directly, my lady. Must do something first. Here, you ring again—twice," he cried, with the authority of one who knew what he was about. "Don't let any come in, but send the maid to fetch Mr. Gainsford. She'll know where."

"Yes—yes—Gainsford," she said excitedly; and she obeyed, and waited trembling in the hall till the woman servant came up from below, heard her half incoherent orders, and as if she too were accustomed to emergencies, went to the front door at once and hurried out.

Olive passed back into the library, to find Rancer busy on his knees with Murray's coat ripped off with a knife, and the shirt sleeves cut away from the left arm.

"Open that wash-stand, my lady. Basin, sponge, and water, please—quick!"

"Yes, yes," panted Olive; and she obeyed eagerly, bringing the objects asked for, to set them on the floor.

"Towels out of the stand drawer, my lady."

These were hurriedly fetched, and Olive looked on with lips quivering and hands tremblingly eager to help.

"How was it, my lady?" said the man sternly, as he busily prepared to bandage the wounds, which were bleeding freely. "But there, I know. His lordship had one of his attacks on, I suppose. Not fit to be trusted at such a time. I've seen how bad he's been getting. Regularly mad, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes, half mad," cried Olive, snatching at the exclamation.

"Quite, to do this. Now, my lady, hold his arm, please."

Olive shuddered, but knelt down at once, and took the white, firm arm between her hands, seeing that the bullet had ripped a gash deep into the biceps on the inner side, almost as cleanly as if it had been done with a knife.

"This isn't bad, my lady," said the man, as he bandaged away; "only bleeds freely. It's that shot right through the shoulder that I plugged. I'm afraid of the bone. Try and bear up, my lady. You're helping me almost like a trained nurse."

"Don't speak to me, please. Go on."

"Oh, yes, my lady; I'll go on, but you'd better keep on talking to me. You musn't faint, please, now. I shall want you to get a bottle and glass from the cabinet directly. You'll see one with L—i—q—u—— A—m—m—o—n—— on it. Not yet. Hold the bandage tightly. That's the way. Blood comes through, but we're checking the bleeding, and Mr. Gainsford won't be long if he's at home. Very horrible for you, my lady. Where's the pistol?"

"I—I—don't know—I think Lord Braetoun took it away with him."

"Tut—tut—tut!" muttered Rancer, "and in such a state as he was. Thank you, my lady. There, that's a hospital knot. I used to be in the Middlesex, close by here."

He looked up with a quiet confident smile in the ghastly face gazing wildly into his.

"Will he die?" said Olive, in a strange whisper.

(To be continued.)

POSTAL RATES.

SHORT STORIES will be sent direct from these offices, post free, to any country within the Postal Union, at the following rates, prepaid:

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THE CELEBRATED BIJOU MAGIC LANTERNS AND SLIDES.
English Make Throughout. Splendid Value.

No. 1 set comprises a best English lantern, fitted with two lenses, paraffin lamp, glass chimney, silvered reflector, 60 really comic figures on twelve long slides, 6 extra slides, 3 complete Nursery Tales, each tale having 12 pictures on 4 slides, making 36 more pictures: 2 Comic Slipping Slides, 2 Moving Panorama Slides, 1 "Goodnight" Slide, 1 "Welcome," 1 Man Swallowing Rats, 2 Chinese Firework Slides, 1 Rackwork Slide, 2 Lever Slides, 1 Queen and 1 Curtain Slide, making 120 pictures in all, complete with instructions, giving a picture on the sheet of 3 feet diameter. Price 10s. 6d. No. 2 precisely similar, but having a No. 2 Lantern and No. 2 Slides, forming a larger size throughout. Gives a picture 4 feet in diameter. Price 14s. 6d. No. 3 size, much larger still, very suitable for a special present, gives a 5 feet diameter picture, 21s. Special Bottles Chemical Oil, 1s., 1s. 6d., 2s. 6d.

OUR SUPERB PARCEL OF CHRISTMAS CARDS.
Magnificent Prizes given away Free of Charge to our Customers.

Prize Coupon in Every Parcel. One Prize guaranteed to every ten persons sending in.

PRIZES: 100 Golden Sovereigns, 100 Half-Sovereigns, 100 Five Shilling Pieces, 100 Real Silver Watches, 500 Framed Oil Paintings, 500 Clocks, 500 Keyless Watches, 500 Real Gold Brooches, 500 Real Gold Rings, 500 Silver Brooches, 500 Silver Rings, 500 Silver Pins. These Prizes are actually given away; there is no trickery about them.

No. 1 PACKET OF CHRISTMAS CARDS, 2/6, carriage free, contains cards to shop value of 10/6. The parcel, weighing 1lb., consists of 100 cards, comprising the Mechanical Negro Lover's Card, with moveable donkey; Magnificent Three-fold Embossed Shaped Card, "For Auld Lang Syne"; a Three-fold Embossed Shaped Horseshoe card, embossed frosted ivy leaves, with laced edge, and trellis work of gilded bells; a unique Three-fold Jewelled Card, "For auld acquaintance," with embossed heather corrugated edge; "The Old Window Casement," unique mechanical card, with windows to open, and moveable heads, with effect of sunlight glow and evening shade, prettily embossed, and with trellis work; "The Dear Old Homestead," with overhanging eaves, cut out to shape, embossed swallows nesting, beautifully frosted with floral emblem, three-fold; The Ideal Mechanical Shipping Card, with moveable changing sails, corrugated border; "The Swallow's Return," embossed primroses with ferns, corrugated edging; Three-fold Comic "Caudle Lecture" Card, with changing heads; "The Bicycle Girl in Rational Costume"; Beautiful Four-leaf Booklet, with Cupid page; Mechanical Circus Card, a really funny pig jumping through hoop held by comic French clown; "The Judge and Jury Poultry" Card, three-fold, with comic wording; "A Christmas Message," pretty two-fold landscape card, surmounted with loops of Forget-me-nots; also 12 Frosted Cards, 6 Two-fold Cards, 6 choice Ivy and Rose Cards, 6 Comical Cards, 12 Floral Cards, 6 Landscapes, 6 Sea and Lake Scenery, and 31 other Choice Assorted Cards. Entire lot carriage free for 2/6. Two parcels for 4/6.

The No. 2 Parcel contains 24 all Recherché High-grade Cards, 2/6 post free.

No. 3 Packet, 50 Cards, assorted, 1/3 post free.

No. 4 Packet, 12 Cards, assorted High-grade Cards, 1/3 post free.

Each packet contains a Prize Coupon. Buy your cards where you not only get the best possible value for money, but where you get the chance of a valuable prize in addition, free of charge.

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Powerful Gas Engines, 18/6, 35/-. Hot-Air Engines, 5/6, 8/6, 15/-. Electric Bells, 2/9. Electric Lamps, 1/3; with Two Batteries, 3/6. Electric Telegraph Instruments, 1/3 per pair; 3/- complete with Connecting wires, Batteries, &c. Pair of Real Telephones, 10/6.

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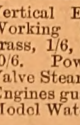
NIGGER WIGS, 1/3, 2/6; Beards, any colour but blue, 1/3, 1/9; Whiskers, 1/-; Moustachios, 6d.; Boxes Theatrical Make-up, 2/9, 5/6; Nigger Collars, 1/3, 1/9; Cuffs, 1/3, 2/6; Front and Collar, 2/6; Nigger Suit, 12/6; Clown's Suit, 15/-; Black for faces, 8d., 1/2; Nigger Dialogue Books, 1/2; Secret of Ventriloquism, 1/2; Magic and Mysteries, 1/2; Thought Reading, 1/2; Wigs, Masks, and Costumes of every description. Father Xmas Mask and Beard, 1/6, 2/6; Clown's Hats, 1/6, 2/6, 4/6.



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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 413. FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 28TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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GIVEN AWAY Free of Charge to our Customers, 100 Golden Sovereigns, 100 Half-Sovereigns, 100 Five-Shilling Pieces, 100 Real Silver Watches, 500 Framed Oil Paintings, 500 Clocks, 500 Keyless Watches, 500 Real Gold Brooches, 500 Real Gold Rings, 500 Silver Brooches, 500 Silver Rings, 500 Silver Pins.

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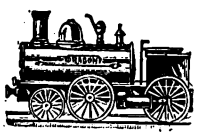
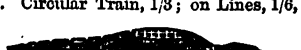


MECHANICAL NOVELTIES.—Performing Leopard, 1/-. Jumping Horse, 1/3. Mouse, 8d. Rat, 1/3. Circular Train, 1/3; on Lines, 1/6, 2/3, 4/6; with station or tunnel, signals, etc., large size, 7/6, 10/6, 15/-, 21/-, 30/-. Fisherman and Boat moving along and Fishing, 1/3. Blacksmith's Forge with Smiths at work, 1/6. All the above fitted with best mechanism and guaranteed. Pair of Wrestling Figures, 1/3. Flying Bat, 1/2. Moving Beetle, 1/3. Mechanical Models for Window Attractions, &c. Set of Working Signals, 1/4; large size, 2/10.



OUR SUPERB PARCEL OF CHRISTMAS CARDS.

Magnificent Prizes given away Free of Charge to our Customers.

Prize Coupon in Every Parcel. One Prize guaranteed to every ten persons sending in. These Prizes are actually given away; there is no trickery about them.

No. 1 PACKET OF CHRISTMAS CARDS, 2/6, carriage free, contains cards to shop value of 10/6. The parcel, weighing 1lb., consists of 100 cards, comprising the Mechanical Negro Lover's Card, with moveable donkey; Magnificent Three-fold Embossed Shaped Card, "For Auld Lang Syne"; a Three-fold Embossed Shaped Horseshoe card, embossed frosted ivy leaves, with laced edge, and trellis work of gilded bells; a unique Three-fold Jewelled Card, "For auld acquaintance," with embossed heather corrugated edge; "The Old Window Casement," unique mechanical card, with windows to open, and moveable heads, with effect of sunlight glow and evening shade, prettily embossed, and with trellis work; "The Dear Old Homestead," with overhanging eaves, cut out to shape, embossed swallows nesting, beautifully frosted with floral emblem, three-fold; The Ideal Mechanical Shipping Card, with moveable changing sails, corrugated border; "The Swallow's Return," embossed primroses with ferns, corrugated edging; Three-fold Comic "Candle Lecture" Card, with changing heads; "The Bicycle Girl in National Costume"; Beautiful Four-leaf Booklet, with Cupid page; Mechanical Circus Card, a really funny pig jumping through hoop held by comic French clown; "The Judge and Jury Poultry" Card, three-fold, with comic wording; "A Christmas Message," pretty two-fold landscape card, surmounted with loops of Forget-me-nots; also 12 Frosted Cards, 6 Two-fold Cards, 6 choice Ivy and Rose Cards, 6 Comical Cards, 12 Floral Cards, 6 Landscapes, 6 Sea and Lake Scenery, and 31 other Choice Assorted Cards. Entire lot carriage free for 2/6. Two parcels for 4/6.

The No. 2 Parcel contains 24 all Recherché High-grade Cards, 2/6 post free.

No. 3 Packet, 50 Cards, assorted, 1/3 post free.

No. 4 Packet, 12 Cards, assorted High-grade Cards, 1/3 post free.

Each packet contains a Prize Coupon. Buy your cards where you not only get the best possible value for money, but where you get the chance of a valuable prize in addition, free of charge.

SPECIAL PRESENTS.—Ladies' Real Gold Brooches, 3/6. Fancy Dress Rings, all Gold, 4/6. Ladies' Silver Watches, 10/6; best quality, 18/6. Gold Watches, 28/6. Gents' Silver Watches, 10/6.

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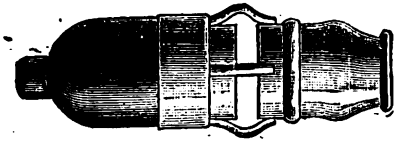

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Ladies desiring any improvement in this direction should send me stamp for free particulars of a simple, inexpensive, harmless self-treatment, whereby a *full natural bust* can be obtained. Address, in confidence, Mrs. B. K. NORRIS, 7, Addington Crescent, York Road, London, S.E.

A SUM of from 10s. to 20s. per week offered for spare time to either sex, everywhere; work can be done evenings.—Send addressed envelope to Box 60, Eclipse Works, 92A, Aldersgate Street, London.

S.S. S.S.

PEARSON'S £100 COUPON.

No. 43

Nov. 28, 1896.

S.S. S.S.

HAIR DESTROYED.

A doctor's widow knows of a simple, inexpensive remedy that permanently destroys the roots, and will forward particulars free to all those afflicted sending stamped envelope. Address Mrs. B. D. WOOD, 4, DUKE STREET, VILLIERS STREET, LONDON, W.

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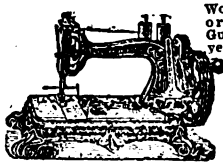
Permanently cured. A Pamphlet giving sound practical advice and particulars of a successful treatment for a rapid, simple, and inexpensive home cure, forwarded free to all upon receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—Prof. B. L. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

Dr. Mackenzie's ARSENICAL TOILET SOAP.

The greatest beautifier in the World. Produces a lovely skin and complexion, and cures spots, pimples, redness, and freckles. The finest and purest soap made. For Eczema and all irritations it is the most emollient and soothing. Absolutely harmless. But beware of the many worthless imitations. Have Dr. Mackenzie's or none. At all Chemists and Stores, 6d. and 1s. a tablet.

Madame Adelina Patti writes from Craig-y-Nos Castle: "I find Dr. Mackenzie's Arsenical Toilet Soap most excellent."

ATLAS LOCKSTITCH MACHINE.



Works by hand or treadle. Guaranteed 4 years. Equal in quality and size to any machine. To ensure satisfaction, we will send machine on receipt of 5/- P.O. for ONE MONTH'S TRIAL. Balance can be paid 5/- Monthly. Call or write for designs and Samples of work.

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A SUPERIOR PRINTING OUTFIT FOR 1/6.

Consisting of 74 letters, points, and ornaments, a type-holder, supply of ink, pad, and tweezers. Any name, &c., can be made at pleasure for stamping books, papers, and printing cards. Postage 3d. extra.

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All Wool Under-clothing.

HAWICK HOSIERY is the BEST.

Lamb's Wool Shirts and Pants, 3/6 each.
Men's Socks, 1/6 each.
Ladies' Stockings, 1/6 and 2/- each.
CARRIAGE PAID.

THE TEVIOT TWEED CO., HAWICK, N.B.

TOO STOUT

If you require a reliable remedy for the relief of superfluous fat, send for a box of my "H.D." Pills. No starvation required; you may eat and drink what you like, yet I guarantee to either sex a permanent reduction of 7lb. to 7lb. weekly. They are a harmless vegetable preparation; successful in the most stubborn cases, and improve health and figure. Their action is rapid, certain, safe, tasteless, and highly recommended. Prices, 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d., and 11s., post free, plain wrapper. PROFESSOR F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

No. 413.] For the Week ending November 28th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

Mrs. Colonel Thornhill's Escape.

THE Hon. Tom Dunscombe, attaché of the Vienna Embassy in England, on sick leave, slumbered peacefully in the library at Sufton Court. Presently he awoke, shivered slightly, and, as his eye fell on a huge pile of MS. plays at his side, groaned audibly. "They must weigh quite two hundredweight," he murmured. "Critics, I fancy, must be a fortunate race; they only have to see such plays as are performed; they should have the readings of all those which are not. Think of reading all that. Still, the only way to stop this confounded Frenchman's game will be to change the play. To put a spoke in his wheel I'd wade through the lot, so here goes."

Animated with this resolution, the Hon. Tom resumed his reading, and after a good deal of "Pish!" "Bah!" "What rot!" "Pooh!" "Very likely!" "Idiot!" selected a four-act drama.

To judge from the rueful looks he cast on the MS. Tom was not pleased with his choice. "I am no expert on plays," he thought, "but if the critics don't give this beans may I never be promoted.

"However, it will suit the condition of things here, and as I am stage manager, they'll have to play it whether they like it or not." He then made out the cast, rang the bell, sent the parts downstairs, and crept upstairs to bed.

The Hon. Tom Dunscombe was generally subject at the fall of the year to a complication of disorders, which yielded only to special and peculiar treatment—a month in England, with some good shooting. The latter he generally obtained at Sufton Court, the seat of Colonel Thornhill, whose regiment was stationed in India, but as he regarded Tom more as a son than a friend, having been his guardian, the young diplomatist got to look upon Sufton Court as his home.

He had been delighted to find the house full. There was Mrs. Thornhill, the Colonel's young wife, who was in England on a flying visit to her sister, Lady O'Hara, and Sir Patrick her husband. The Damers, the Elibank girls, the young Finchs, and the Vicomte D'Artenare, a man of polished manners, unknown antecedents, seemingly rich, but with that undefinable something clinging about him which bespeaks the adventurer. Tom took a dislike to the Vicomte from the first. "Wherever did Mrs. Thornhill pick him up?" he thought, "and how is it they are so thick, and why is it he can't sing unless she accompanies him?"

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Tom knew all about the Colonel's marriage. How he had met Mabel Desmond eighteen months before, a fashionable beauty then in the zenith of her popularity, and how her parents had badgered her into accepting a man old enough to be her father, but the largest landowner in Downshire.

After the marriage the Colonel, accompanied by his wife, returned to India, and here she was in England again on a visit, which he presently discovered had already lasted over three months. One morning Mrs. Thornhill informed Tom that an actress she had met in India, and who had since blossomed into the manageress of a West-end theatre, had prevailed on her to give a performance at her theatre for the benefit of the East-end seamstresses then on strike.

The manageress proposed that all the performers should be distinguished amateurs, and that, to prevent comparisons, a new play should be performed. Tom, who had had considerable experience in amateur theatricals, was then prevailed on to do the stage management. The first few rehearsals revealed a state of things which filled him with great uneasiness. He had cast Mrs. Thornhill for the heroine and D'Artenare for her lover, and before a week had expired he noticed, with a distrust he could not conquer, that the love scenes were being rehearsed much more frequently than there was any necessity for. Although Tom was quite aware that diplomacy engendered distrust, he could not help feeling alarmed when one day he came across them unawares in the conservatory. She was listening eagerly to the whispered words he was breathing in the soft ripples of her brown hair, his arm was round her waist, and she made no effort, during the few seconds Tom remained, to wrench himself from that forbidden embrace. Tom went straight to the library to think it over.

Whatever the man might be, adventurer, beggar, or scoundrel, it was evident that Mabel loved him with all the strength of her weak soul. Tom wondered what diabolical charm the villain could possess that Mrs. Thornhill should prefer a lazy, sensual dawdler to the English gentleman who was serving his country out yonder. He didn't believe the fellow cared two straws for the foolish woman, but he probably knew that the Colonel had been extremely generous in the matter of settlements. If she went off the track it would break his old friend's heart; he knew how the Colonel doted on his wife. But would she? As a woman of the world she must know that the stream she would have to cross—if she elected to follow this man's fortunes—was more terrible than the Rubicon. The stream was not crossed yet, but he could see that her footsteps tended that way.

How could he save her? The Vicomte was not his guest—lucky for him he wasn't—and he dared not tell his hostess that a constant wife was a noble and beautiful thing; but he could send a telegram to the Colonel, telling him to return home at once as his wife was dangerously ill, but not to wire back he was coming for fear of alarming her. If he did that, mused Tom, she would bolt before he arrived. He could send the Colonel a telegram and he did. He could also change the play for one which would provide no love scenes at least for these two. He could do that, and he did as we have already chronicled. He could also try to make it warm for the Vicomte and get him out of the house, and so cure his hostess of his mad infatuation before the Colonel arrived. He couldn't pledge himself to accomplish this, but he would have a good try.

Next morning the storm burst. Mrs. Thornhill sent for him and asked him why he had cast the new play so curiously. Tom looked her full in the face as he replied: "D'Artenare, to conceal his passion for Kate, is made to carry on with Maud, who he dislikes, so I thought it best to cast your sister for Maud."

Mrs. Thornhill turned deadly pale and left the room. She knew that her secret was discovered. Now for the others. "I say, Tom," exclaimed Sir Patrick O'Hara, a genial Irish gentleman, bursting into the library, where Tom was writing a letter to the London manageress announcing the change in the programme, "there's a devil of a row going on. You've cast D'Artenare for Reginald Bamber, my wife's lover, and me for George, Mrs. Thornhill's lover; I suppose it's all right?"

"Quite," was the calm reply.

"Well, I'm deuced glad of it, for I'm hanged if I can see any fun in making love to one's own wife."

"You didn't always speak like that, Sir Patrick," replied Tom.

"No, my boy; when I was a poor man, living on my estate in Ireland, before the death of the Admiral made me a rich one, I remember saying to Fanny: 'My darling, your great charm in my eyes is the entire absence of those qualities which command admiration in the fashionable world.' But since I've lived in an atmosphere of scandal and fine phrases, and mixed with people who, if not remarkable for original thought, can tear a character into such tiny little shreds that one would be puzzled to find the pieces, I've changed my opinions. I have noticed that husbands who are always dangling about their wives' skirts are not popular, and that, between ourselves, is what I complain of. My wife's never happier than when she's with me, and when anyone speaks to her she blushes and looks down. It makes me wild. I've told her a hundred times that bashfulness and simplicity are not understood in the great metropolis, but she won't believe it. Why, I give you my word, Mr. Dunscombe, it was only the other day I overheard a lady say that bashfulness was only another name for slyness. Nobody notices my wife now. They treat her like a housemaid. If I could only see her with a crowd of admirers in her train I should be happy."

"A crowd!" said Tom musingly, for an idea had just entered his mind, "a crowd!"

Sir Patrick winked. "The more the better," he replied, "there's safety in numbers. They'd all spy on one another."

"Now look here, Sir Patrick," said Tom, "will you be guided by me in this affair, and promise if you see your wife behaving as you wish, not to speak till I give you permission?"

"I will," replied the baronet.

"Well, I think I know a way of curing your wife of this excess of affection. It will be rather a shock, I'm afraid."

"Let me see her the centre of an admiring throng and I'll stand the shock. Hush! here she comes."

Lady O'Hara was a striking contrast to Mrs. Thornhill, her sister. A slim, shy, affectionate little creature, literally worshipping her husband.

"Mr. Dunscombe," she exclaimed, with as much asperity as she could infuse into her soft voice, "I don't like the play at all; the motive, to begin with, is wicked in the extreme, and some of my speeches are most heartless and indelicate."

"Indeed," said Tom gravely, "I thought I had exercised a most rigid censorship; I don't think there's

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a line suggesting anything by which the merest school girl could anticipate her future. Will you please read me the lines?"

"Patrick may read the speech; I shall not do so," said the little lady.

"Give me your part," said her husband, and he read: "There are thousands of ladies, my lord, who are keenly alive to the advantages of securing a husband a little older than the majority of husbands. The older he is the less chance of a young wife being subjected to personal violence—the older he is the sooner she will become a widow."

"We will cut that speech," said Tom, thinking of Mrs. Thornhill and her husband.

But the lady was still unappeased. "I don't think the motive a good one," she said; "my uncle, the Bishop of Zanzibar, has promised to be present."

"I don't see why your uncle should complain," interrupted Sir Patrick. "The clergy have it all their own way on Sundays, they might let us enjoy ourselves on week-days."

"Be quiet, dear. And then, why is Mr. D'Artenare to play my lover? I am sure Patrick would do it quite as well."

"I am afraid I can't agree with you there," said Tom. "The part is a very romantic one, and your husband's figure quite unfits him for romantic parts."

"I do not think so," said Lady O'Hara haughtily.

"Too stout," said Tom, shaking his head. "Now, the Vicomte will look the adventurer to perfection. Slim, pale, a beautifully shaped nose, and an air of distinction conferred by a first-class tailor."

But Lady O'Hara didn't like the Vicomte. "I think his stare most offensive," she said, "the way he looks at you."

"His looks may be a little more ardent than good taste permits. But looks are difficult things to interpret. He may only admire you as he would a beautiful picture. Remember he is pretending to be madly in love with you."

"Yes, that's the worst of it. I see in the part that he has to kiss me."

Sir Patrick now lost all patience. "Now, my dear," he cried, "do be reasonable; these pastoral sentiments are quite unfitted for the vortex of London society."

"Oh! Patrick, you wouldn't like another man to kiss me, would you?" she said, bursting into tears.

"I know how deep is your attachment," replied her husband soothingly, "but if you could only suppress it in public I should have no cause of complaint. Are you aware, my darling, that people call us the Siamese twins? Think of that. Now, if you can only innocently, quite innocently, my darling, contrive to inspire one of our friends with an incurable platonic passion."

The poor little woman gazed at her lord bewildered. "I am sure I couldn't," she gasped; "I shouldn't know how to do it."

"Tell everyone in strict confidence," said Tom gravely, "that you are a little weary of your husband; you would scarcely believe how greatly your popularity would increase."

Lady O'Hara shook her head. "I could never do that," she said, with an air of conviction, gazing fondly at her husband who responded with a groan, "unless I really grew tired of him, and as I am not likely to do that I must decline to play this part unless Patrick is my lover."

At this moment the Frenchman's voice was heard. "Keep him out of the way while I persuade your wife," Tom whispered, and the Baronet darted out.

"I can speak to you without reserve, Mr. Dunscombe, because you are such an old friend," said Lady O'Hara. "Some people find no attraction in goodness. My husband has sadly changed. He actually wishes me to imitate my sister."

"I should be sorry to see you do that," said Tom gravely. "I know I may confide in you," he continued, in reply to her questioning look, "for I am sure you love your sister very dearly."

"Oh, yes," was the reply. Lady O'Hara turned pale; she felt what was coming.

Tom went on: "Colonel Thornhill is my very dear friend. I have no right to interfere, but I cannot help seeing that people are talking about his wife as they have no right to talk. D'Artenare is a scoundrel, who has done this sort of thing before. Woe to the woman who listens to his insidious tongue."

Tom knew nothing of the Frenchman's past, but he wanted to frighten Lady O'Hara, and he succeeded. She gazed at him horror-stricken. Could it be possible that Mabel was prepared to wreck her husband's honour and outrage society? She thought of the paragraphs in the newspapers, and she thought of what her sister's life would be after she had slipped out of the public mind. She was not so unsophisticated but that she could picture two guilty wretches hiding away, probably under a false name, and the woman awaking one day to find the love look absent from the eyes of the man she had staked her chances of salvation for.

But supposing they were exaggerating the circumstances. Mabel, she felt convinced, loved this man; still she did not think she would cast the die, although the dice box was in her hand. She was acting imprudently, no doubt, but Mabel was older than she was, and perhaps after all——

She stopped thinking and looked at Tom, who had followed the train of her thoughts. "People who dream pleasant dreams on the edge of a precipice generally fall over." The momentary hope died away in Lady O'Hara's mind.

"Oh, Mr. Dunscombe, what is to be done?"

"You must save her," said Tom emphatically.

"I!" earnestly exclaimed her ladyship. "How?"

"By executing on this foreign gentleman what military men call a flank movement. Play the part I have cast you. Insist on constantly rehearsing with D'Artenare all the scenes you play together. And even when you are not rehearsing keep him by your side"—her ladyship gasped—"then gradually pretend to fall a victim to those fascinations which have exercised so baneful an effect on others. In a word, never leave your sister and this man together, and practise on him alone those charms which Sir Patrick foolishly wishes you to exercise on mankind generally." Silence.

"Oh, Mr. Dunscombe," broke in the little woman.

"You would not only please, and probably cure, your husband, but save your sister," went on Tom, with such an air of resolute conviction that his companion could only gaze at him in speechless amazement. After a most convincing speech Tom paused, and Lady O'Hara reflected. It was a dreadful thing to deceive one's husband, still it would only serve him right to punish him for daring to ask her to become what he called a fashionable wife. But to be obliged to tolerate the attentions of the Vicomte!

"Think," murmured the artful Tom, "your sister's honour; the cause is a good one."

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That decided Lady O'Hara, and she promised to do her best. Mrs. Thornhill and the Vicomte were, of course, considerably surprised when they found that Lady O'Hara had withdrawn her objections to the Vicomte playing her lover.

Whatever Mrs. Thornhill's feelings may have been, she was compelled to remain silent. She knew the construction which would be placed on anything she might say. The Vicomte was secretly pleased with the arrangement. He would now have an opportunity of conciliating an enemy. His position was critical, and he could not afford to make or even defy enemies.

Acting under the advice of Tom, Lady O'Hara at first proceeded with great caution. She had hitherto treated the Vicomte with scant courtesy, but she now led him to believe that she had been wrong, and that she was becoming gradually impressed with his numerous good qualities. She had one great advantage in the game she had set herself. The Vicomte's knowledge of woman was extensive but not general. The women he had known thought too much in one way. Of English ladies he knew next to nothing, and consequently had but little belief in woman's purity. So he nodded approvingly when Lady O'Hara informed him that since her marriage she had been dying for a little freedom.

The hot blood surged into her cheeks as she said this. She realised now how loathsome was the task she had set herself, but she had a purpose to achieve and would not go back. So the Vicomte got to know that a few months of married life had convinced her that the matrimonial tie was a great hindrance to perfect enjoyment, that her object in lavishing on Sir Patrick those attentions in public—attentions which the Vicomte must have noticed—was to make him weary of her and insist on her doing that which all the while her soul secretly yearned for.

She listened to his pretty speeches and appeared to acquiesce in the plans he began to sketch, faintly at first, of a bright and happy future. Still it is doubtful whether she would have succeeded in supplanting her sister but for the tact of the Vienna diplomatist.

Tom had the healthy Briton's face, simple, manly, honest and ingenuous, not a genius, but with ten times the brain power of the Vicomte. He allowed his enemy to pump him, and noted with secret glee the greed which stole into the adventurer's eyes when he learnt that on the Admiral's death Sir Patrick had settled £3,000 a year on his wife for her exclusive use and benefit but that Mrs. Thornhill was dependent on her husband, who, he had every reason to believe, had lost heavily in the Calcutta markets.

This greatly simplified matters, and the adventurer now began to treat his hostess with marked coldness. Pale and haggard, with no suspicion of the truth, Mrs. Thornhill saw with suppressed passion her sister gradually supplanting her with the man for whom she had been ready to face anything. To quarrel openly she dared not. She made a stout fight at first to retain the Vicomte, but the £3,000 a yearsa dly handicapped her.

At first Sir Patrick exhibited the greatest satisfaction at the change in his wife's manner, but as the weeks rolled on he thought she was reforming too thoroughly. Of course, it was delightful when his wife explained that as she was in the springtide of her youth no enjoyment ought to be denied her in that or the summer period, for was there not an autumn and a winter in store for poor woman, and in the winter would not the sweetness of life fade, producing wrinkles, dull eyes grey hairs and neglect?

Now all this was very nice and very artless, and Sir Patrick professed to be greatly delighted, and was profuse in his acknowledgment to Tom, to whom he ascribed the change. But as the day of performance neared he was not nearly so pleased as he pretended to be. It was all very well for Lady O'Hara to tell him that he must be mad to think a woman's heart was a sanctuary in which only one image was enshrined; probably his wife was right, but there were ways of saying things, and, candidly, he didn't like hers.

And then there was that foreign cad, D'Artenare. As a sensible man he could see that it was necessary for people who seldom acted to constantly rehearse, but there was no reason why Lady O'Hara should spend the entire day with him; why, even her sister was disgusted with her lenity and treated her with marked coldness. He was quite aware that he had begged his wife to imbue some fellow with an incurable platonic passion, but he didn't think this looked like a platonic passion.

So Sir Patrick grew as miserable as Mrs. Thornhill.

About a week before the performance Mrs. Thornhill gave a ball, and issued a prodigious number of invitations. With a crowd of people in the house it would be very strange if she did not find some opportunity of demanding an explanation from the Vicomte. But Tom was on the alert, and Lady O'Hara insisted on dancing with the Frenchman the whole evening, to the surprise of the guests and the disgust of Sir Patrick, who, drawing Tom into the billiard-room, gave vent to his feelings.

"Now this is all your doing, Mr. Dunscombe, and although I gave you my word of honour not to interfere till you gave me permission, I'm hanged if I can stand it."

"Why, what's the matter, Sir Patrick?" asked Tom soothingly.

"That foreign devil and my wife."

"Why, didn't you say," said Tom, "that the happiest day of your life——"

"Why do you always throw that unlucky speech in my face?" roared the Baronet. "I wanted an army of lovers, not one sly sneak like that D'Artenare. I'll break his neck before the night's over."

"What has he done?" asked Tom.

"I'll tell you. I had occasion to remark to my wife yesterday that I had seen them in the park yesterday through my field-glasses, and that from the look on the gentleman's face I judged him to be making love. Now what do you think my wife replied. 'Oh, dear, you cannot think how delightful to a woman who has all the brightness and freshness of unsullied youth is the love-making of an accomplished Frenchman. The ingredients of love-making, Patrick, are of course known to all, but it is the mixing which imparts the flavour. Oh, the French are the only people who know how to mix.'"

Tom nearly went into convulsions.

"But that isn't the worst of it. I came upon them in the conservatory just now, and I heard my wife say: 'Oh, dear! Eleven o'clock to-night? How could I find my way to Belper Lane in the dark? If my husband——' and then that frog-eating brute interrupted her, saying: 'Your husband, my dear lady, is of no consequence. Keep his plate full at meal times and he is happy.'"

"What did you do then?" said Tom, biting his lips and making desperate efforts to preserve his gravity.

"What did I do?" cried the infuriated Irishman, breathing heavily. "What *could* I do with the promise

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I made you staring me in the face? Nothing. I simply offered to dance with her. Would you believe it she told me to trot away and join the old fogies in the smoking room, and not to wait up for her, but to go to bed when I felt tired. Likely thing, go to bed. No. Relieve me, Tom Dunscombe, from that promise, and let me unbosom my soul in Belper Lane at eleven o'clock to-night."

At that moment a servant entered the room. Mrs. Thornhill wished to see him in the library. He found her greatly excited. Her husband would be home in an hour.

"Spare me, Mr. Dunscombe," she cried, "the scales have fallen from my eyes. Fanny has told me everything. How good you have been. But my husband! With that man here I dare not face him."

"Leave everything to me," said Tom. "I'll play his part next week. He shall leave here before your husband arrives."

Tom then had a conference with Lady O'Hara, and another with Sir Patrick, the result of which was that just as Mrs. Thornhill, half fainting, found herself in her husband's arms, Sir Patrick was administering a sound drubbing to the Vicomte D'Artenare in Belper Lane. A few months later Mrs. Thornhill accompanied her husband to India. Lady O'Hara goes out a good deal now, but never without Sir Patrick.

ARTHUR GOODRICH.

FOR A THOUSAND POUNDS.

"IF one of us only died what a good thing it would be for the other!"

So spake Felix Hynde a few minutes previously, as, preparatory to departing for a stroll to get rid of a fit of the "blues," he had stood carefully buttoning his overcoat.

Leaning back in his chair, Christopher Hewitt, with measured puff, had blown blue rings of fragrant smoke about his head, while enjoying dreams of a future that could never be his. His friend's remark, delivered so earnestly in a tone of great bitterness, had shattered his vision, and he had sat up to scrutinise the speaker's features through the uncertain twilight, and to think that he had never seen so weary a face before.

Hynde had gone—left in a miserable, melancholy mood—but his morbid utterance remained, and fitting itself to the rhythmical ringing of the bells of St. Dane's dinned itself into Christopher's ears, and presently put into his brain thoughts which appalled him.

"If one of us only died!"

Only he and Hynde could comprehend the awful significance of the speech and see the vista of terrible possibilities it opened out to them. Why, if one of them but died, the other one would be richer by £1,000. And in their present condition such a sum would be a fortune. Each was insured for that amount in a large life office. They had insured their lives together, years ago, when affluence was theirs, afterwards making wills, each leaving to the other his life policy in case of death before marriage.

In those days, these friendless orphans were young and careless. Both possessed good positions; each had a little money left him by his parents, and while their existence then was sunshine, both loved "the sweetest girl on earth"—the horizon on all sides was roseate, apparently prognosticating a life beyond, which they in their dreams oft enjoyed. They were fast friends—Hewitt had not a single relative in the world, and the only representative of the house of Hynde was an ancient aunt, whose means were so limited that but for her nephew, Felix, she must surely have starved—lived together, made no other friends, and admitted no outsiders to their confidences.

But the times altered. Clouds lowered o'er their house. Chris lost his position altogether, and Felix had his salary considerably reduced. Under the strain of this double drain, their resources soon diminished, and, Chris obtaining no employment, things went from bad to worse, until now the premiums of their insurance policies were within a day of being due, and they knew not how to meet them. Thus Chris reviewed the situation and sighed: "If one of us only died!"

He turned to his cigarette and endeavoured to float away again into the land of pleasant shadows, but the church bells rang out louder the parting words of Felix and gave him no rest. So he abandoned dreams, watched the glowing fire, and thought.

Yes, if one of them only died the other would be—well, not wealthy, but he would have sufficient to tide him and straighten the crookedness of the future. That was if one of them died.

"Well, why should not one die?"

The thought flashed through Hewitt's mind as he leant forward gazing into the fire. It seemed to have been born of a bright forked flame which lit the darkening room for a second. Outside, the bells caught it up—rang it out with a glee that was perfectly devilish—and seemingly to Chris announced his thoughts aloud to all the world, thoughts that were fearful, thoughts that frightened him, so that he stuffed his ears with his fingers, as though to shut them out; then there came a period of silence.

"Well, better for one to die," he thought presently. "Better for the other, better of course for both," and he laughed, then started back in his chair, for he fancied that Felix laughed out from the fire with him. He caught a momentary glance of Felix's face, wreathed in a malignant smile, ere it disappeared in the falling coals.

"Yes, one of us ought to die! Better one than both. Now which one—Felix or I?" So ran Hewitt's thoughts. Ah! that was the question—which? He was contented with life. He had grumbled occasionally, of course, and who does not when Fate presses unnaturally hard? Certainly he would not object to improving the conditions under which he lived it. Who would? Then, again, he was in love. A pretty face,

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crowned with a head of golden hair, and set with the bluest of blue eyes, which seemed to be the home of everlasting sunshine, floated across Chris's vision. Yes, he must live, and he must have money.

As for Felix—well, he was a bundle of complaints. A miserable cynic, he was never satisfied with anybody or anything, never on good terms with himself, and since he had been jilted, love to him was sour grapes. Even Diogenes was surely never worse than he. And had he not said: "If one of us only died"?

Of course, Felix was thinking then of himself, and the benefit Chris would derive from his death. Was he thinking that way? Was he going to commit suicide—the fool; or—and Hewitt grew clammy with a strange dread—was Felix going to murder him?

Murder him! How his skin seemed to undulate and quiver at the thought. Yet, perhaps, that was what Felix meant to do. He remembered now how taciturn Felix had become of late. But Hewitt determined that he would be one better, he would score the first point—he would kill Felix, and in such a way that no suspicion of murder, or even suicide, should attach itself to the death; it should appear purely accidental.

But he must be careful. Felix might strike the first blow, and then—Hewitt smiled as he thought how to score another point—how to prevent Felix, should he successfully attempt such a design, enjoying the anticipating reward—he would destroy the will he had made in Hynde's favour.

The idea amused him. What irony that would be to Felix; what a bitter disappointment. What irony to himself was the knowledge that, as a handsome living specimen of the Creator's omnipotence he was worth about £200 a year, when in full working order, and if sold right out on his physical merits would not command enough to provide them with drinks and smokes for a month.

Yet, as a dead man, as a useless, hideous corpse, he was worth £1,000. And the irony of the situation reflected the smallest of his own personality, showed him how utterly powerless he was to cope with the intangible sometimes that as nothing, nothing that he could feel, that he could take vengeance upon, and roused within him a wrath for which he could find no outlet.

Until Felix had spoken the fatal words, Hewitt had never thought how easily one could kill the other and enjoy the proceeds of the crime. That was probably because until now they had never been in such desperate straits. Had Felix kept his own idea secret, never uttering his reflections, he might with ease have carried it into action, for Hewitt was too much of a dreamer, much too contented with whatever position he found himself in to endeavour to rise above it.

But now he recognised the possibility, the practicability of the idea, though to ensure success he knew that great skill was needed, that great care would have to be taken so that there should remain no clue, which afterwards might prove his downfall. Then the death must not wear the appearance of murder or suicide. To all intents and purposes it must be accidental! Could he accomplish this? Could he kill Felix and make his death appear an accident? If he could, he saw £1,000 and happiness within his grasp! If he could not, then he himself would be the victim.

In such a contingency the pistol and the dagger were useless; the agent employed must possess an independent action and must defy discovery. Hewitt thought of poison, but of poisons he knew little beyond their names; he knew not which was the most efficient, the most difficult to trace. There was strychnine, nicotine, arsenic—arsenic! That seemed familiar to him. Of course, why had he not thought of it before! Felix was an arsenic victim; he took it regularly. If quite by accident he took an overdose it would kill him.

And there was no necessity for Hewitt to purchase the arsenic—that would have exposed him to considerable risk—for Hynde always kept a quantity in his desk. He bought the poison himself from a chemist in the Strand, to which fact this man would, later on, have to testify.

Now to administer it. Felix and Hewitt each had a liking for whisky—too much of a liking, perhaps—and the bottle was never allowed to become empty. A small quantity of arsenic in the spirit, of which Felix would undoubtedly partake when he returned, would settle the matter and he would be no more.

How easily the plot had smoothed itself into tangible, practical shape, and there was not the slightest chance of discovery.

"Felix must die!"

Chris spoke the words aloud, and the sound of his voice frightened him. He started up with a dazed brain—a mind clouded with a horrible phantasm. Had he been asleep and dreaming? No, everything had been too real, too practical. Gazing round the room he noticed that evening had given way to night, that the fire had burnt itself out, and he shivered. His lips were parched, his eyes tingled, and his brow was cold and wet with perspiration. He lighted the lamp with trembling hands and drew down the blinds.

He went to the cupboard and brought forth the whisky jar. He poured out a glass of the amber spirit, spilt some in raising it to his mouth, for his nerves were like slack wires in a wind, then, as the liquor burnt his lips, threw it beneath the grate and sank into a chair.

Perhaps it was poisoned already! Perhaps the very death he had so cunningly planned for Felix had been set for him. He sat silent for a while and his brain cooled. He realised that the thinking was past and that the time for action had arrived. He wiped his hands and face upon his handkerchief and went towards Felix's desk. As usual it was unlocked and he had no trouble in finding the small box labelled: "Arsenic. Poison." Taking it in his hand he emptied half its contents into the whisky and shook the bottle violently. Then he swept from sight the broken pieces of the tumbler, and procuring another, placed it beside the bottle on the table.

Then followed a hurried, frantic search for the will which he had given over to the care of Felix, but he failed to discover it. He turned out drawers, ransacked shelves, ran through books, and cursed at his non-success. But what folly this! He was safe now, of course, and he had Felix's will safe also.

Suddenly he heard Felix mounting the stairs. His step was light, and he was whistling as though he never had a care in the world. Hewitt hurried into his overcoat and hat, and opened the door of the room as Felix reached it.

"Hullo, Chris!" Felix said gaily. "Off for a stroll?"

Chris nodded, and noticed that Felix had indulged not wisely.

"You've left your morbid devil outside?" he asked with a forced laugh, without raising his eyes.

"Drowned him," was the laconic reply; "and I struck luck, too, my boy."

Chris hesitated on the threshold. He was fearful lest

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Felix should drink the whisky whilst he stood there, and fall dead at his feet.

"Yes. Met old Barlow," Felix ran on lightly, "and borrowed a tenner. Have a cigar?" offering Chris a handful.

Hewitt's hand shook as he took one and lighted it.

"Your hand shakes, Chris," said Felix as he disrobed. Then his eyes fell on the whisky. "Artful dog. Had a quiet liquor, eh? Well, you've saved me some."

Hewitt strode to the door.

"Here, Chris. I've a little present for you." And as Chris turned back, "I couldn't afford it, but I knew your passion for rubies, so I bought it."

Hynde held out a ring of dull gold—a ring of old-fashioned and clumsy make—set with a spendid ruby. Chris flashed the stone in the light and admired it, but he felt as though his legs would give way every minute, for with one hand on the fatal bottle, Felix watched him with a gaze that seemed to penetrate his brain and read his thoughts.

"Want a sovereign, old man?" asked Felix.

Hewitt shook his head, and put the ring into his pocket.

"Stop and play chess?" said Hynde, drawing a chair to the table. "It's cold out; and, as I'm alive, you've let the fire out. Well, you're a good sort."

"Back at twelve," said Chris as he closed the door.

He almost fell down the stairs and nearly upset the postman outside.

"Anything for me?" he inquired hastily.

"Hewitt?"

"Yes," and he snatched the proffered letter from the astonished postman's hand, and rushed away, cramming it into his pocket as he ran.

Felix had said it was cold, but Christopher Hewitt was uncomfortably hot. He sped away from the busy street, and at last, out of breath, reached the Embankment and dropped into his seat.

When he returned, he knew he would find a dead man in his room. He wondered if Felix were dead yet.

* * * * *

Felix listened to Hewitt's clatter down the stairs and heard the door close with a bang. Then he sat down in the chair and pulled from his pocket an official-looking document—the last will and testament of Christopher Hewitt—which he perused with evident delight. A tap at the door startled him, and he rose as the servant came in and handed him a letter.

He tore open the envelope, and while he read the contents his eyes almost burst from his head. He reeled back with a cry—a cry of joy and despair.

He was wealthy beyond his most ambitious dreams. The letter was from Bell and Bell, solicitors, and informed him that his old aunt—apparently so poor—had just died, leaving him a fortune of £50,000.

Good Heavens! £50,000, and he a murderer! For ere now the ring which he had given to Chris—a poisoned bauble which, pressed upon the finger, injected into the blood a most virulent poison secreted in its centre—must have done its work.

But there might be time yet to save him. His friend's favourite walk he knew was the Embankment, and he hurried into his hat and coat. How his brain reeled. He grasped the bottle, poured out a glass of spirits and drank it at a gulp; it would calm his nerves! It calmed his nerves for ever. He fell with a gasp to the floor in the agonies of death.

* * * * *

Chris felt in his pockets for a match to light his cigarette, his hand came in contact with the letter and the ring, and he pulled them out. Who could the letter be from! He had not a relative in the world. He ripped it open, read it beneath the light of a lamp, and strangled a cry of horror in his heart.

Heir to £8,000, and a murderer! Good Heavens, what a fool! What a fate! The letter was from Bell and Bell, and told him that Mrs. Janet Crawley had left him £8,000!

Crawley? Where had he heard that name? Then he remembered she was Felix's aunt, and how, when once she called upon them, Felix being absent, he made tea for her and entertained her.

But he was a murderer! No, perhaps it was not too late to save Felix, and he turned and raced in the direction of his lodgings. He pushed the letter back into his pocket and thrust the ring upon his finger. He felt a slight scratch, ran a few steps farther, then crashed to the earth a corpse!

REGINALD BAIRD.

Result of Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 19.

THE first prize of £5 this week goes to Mr. H. P. Wright, of 72, Evelina Road, Nunhead.

Prizes of £1 each have been sent to Mr. H. Staton, 14, Amherst Street, Withington, Manchester; Mr. J. N. Crowle, R.N., 43, Portland Road, Devonport; and Miss Florence Piper, 9, Ethelbert Crescent, Cliftonville, Margate.

The sum of £2 has been sent to Miss Sullivan, Hill House, Bandon, co. Cork, Ireland, who tied with the winner of the first prize.

The title of the story was "A RIDE, A WITCH, AND A WIFE."

Jumbled Story Competition.—22.

ON page 697 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *November 30th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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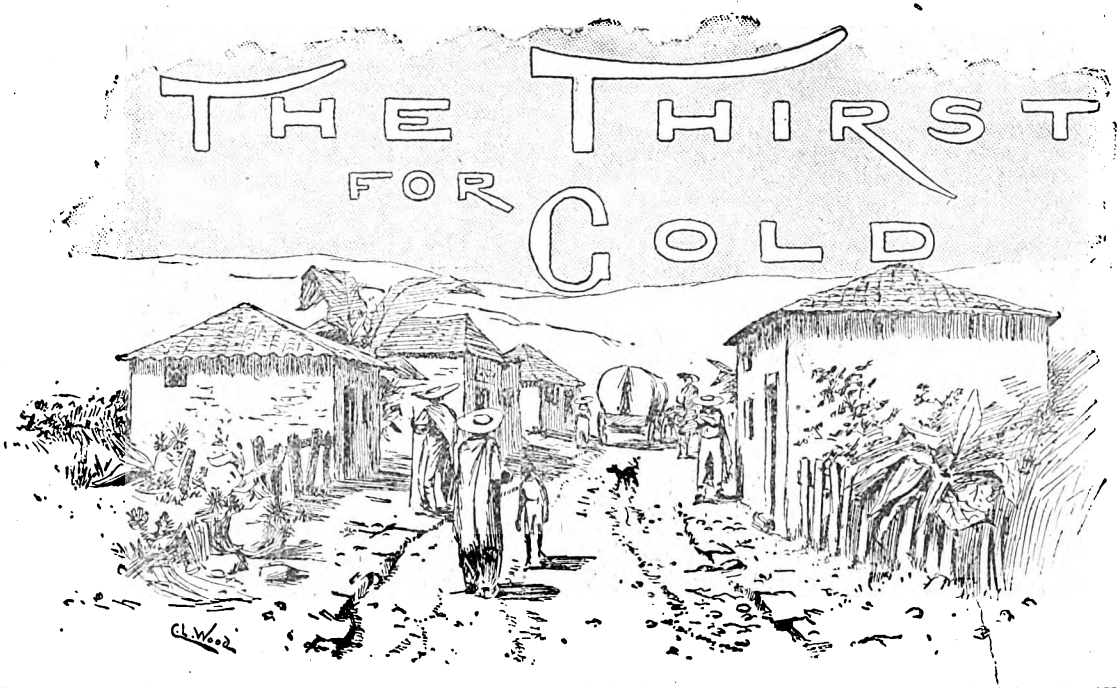
THE THIRST FOR GOLD



LAST July, when the days were long, and the sun blazed down into the valleys, until even the lizards hunted the shadows of the rocks, I was driving down to the railway with a party from Ballena. The dust was suffocating, and our journey was by no means one of pleasure. The sun was near the meridian when it was suggested that we should stop to water the team, and take a bite of lunch. A halt was made beneath a grove of live oaks, and we were about to discuss the contents of our hamper when a pedestrian came in sight.

She—for it was a woman—came trudging along the road, half hid in the cloud of dust raised by her feet. As she drew near we saw that she was poorly clad. Her face was reddened by the sun where the perspiration had washed away the grey dust with which she was otherwise covered. She was by no means old, and, despite the dust and sunburn, showed traces of beauty. Her evident weariness could not hide her grace.

On reaching our halting-place she laid down the little bundle she was carrying, and inquired if she was on the Campo Road. On being told that she was not, and that she was increasing her distance from that settlement, her eyes filled with tears and she sank down upon the withered grass by the road-side, sobbing bitterly. Of course every effort was made to console her. At length she regained control of her emotions, and told us her story and the object of her lonely tramp.

She and her husband had lived, content and happy, in a little mining town in the north; but the bad times came, and he was thrown out of organisation. Then the council of two planned for the future; but, alas! the planning was in vain, and the little hoard for the rainy day rapidly waned. The rain was not a passing summer shower, but a pouring season. There were dark misgivings for the twins, but they had the light of youth and hope to help them.

One day they read in a city paper a wild, fabulous tale of the lost Peg-Leg Mine of the Colorado Desert. To be sure, it told of drought and death, but the pockets of the dead men were always found filled with gold. Then came a lusting for the treasure at the end of the rainbow and the self-assertion which told the young man that he could do that in which others had failed. The resolution was taken, followed by a parting, with bright hope shining through the tears and kisses.

Thus the young husband left the bonnie wife and started on his mad errand. She had heard from him once from the little village on the edge of the sandy waste. Since then days had come and gone, months had followed each other, nearly a year had passed, and now, weary of waiting, the woman sought for him. "He is out there," she said, "and living. I dream of him. I can see him waiting for me. My heart even tells me how he looks."

Here her face was illuminated with her confidence. We dared not tell her what our knowledge and experience taught; that his bleached bones were lying where a blessed death had relieved his direful agony. What was the use? She was evidently half-mad. We did what we thought best—told her "if he were alive he would soon come to her. That to attempt to find him without a guide was certain death." At last we persuaded her to return with us to the coast, but only after promising that we would aid her in her search. On our return to the city, she was placed with a charitable employment, under mild restraint.

The summer had passed away, the autumn rains had come, and with them the presumption that the desert was as endurable as it ever becomes, when one of my clients came to me with a story of a wonderful mine lying out in the arid waste. He had a sketch-map showing bearings by which it could be found. The map, with some marvellously rich specimens of quartz, had been found by an Indian upon the body of a dead man out upon the desert.

I laughed at the story and ridiculed my friend for entertaining it; but he insisted that every fact pointed to riches, and that the lost Peg-Leg only waited for us

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to locate it. Well, I am somewhat of a fool myself at times, so I allowed him to persuade me to undertake the journey. The consideration is not material: but it was to be satisfactory to me in any event.

Our point of departure was Campo, a small settlement near the western edge of the dread and dismal sands. Our party consisted of my client, an Indian guide, and myself. We were well equipped for our search, being provided with a good waggon and team, provisions, bedding, tools, and instruments, and a cask of water.

Soon we were out upon the trackless waste, where we found much to interest us, but nothing to inspire a desire to visit such a region again. Great dunes of sand rose before us like gigantic billows of grey; now and again these gave place to bare rocks. Far away there seemed to be lakes, from which the sun's rays glinted as from a mirror. These, when we reached them, proved to be beds of gypsum or of salt. At times the horses dragged their weary way through deep, white sand, and we alighted and walked to ease their load.

Again we rolled over bare rock, or hard clay, where great crevices gaped open and seemed to have no bottom.

The only animals were the snakes, lizards, and horned toads, which lay in the shadows of the rocks. High up in the clear sky now and then a buzzard or a hawk could be seen—the latter intent upon small prey, the former listlessly hovering as though anticipating the death of something larger.

The air was thick with the heat, and hot currents were plainly discernible as they rushed to the cooler strata above. There were breezes, but they felt as if the furnace gates of Hades had been opened for a moment to take in a lost soul.

The plan of our journey was to reach the first night a water-hole a score of miles from the edge of the desert. In view of the possibility of its being dry, the cask of water had been provided. From this point we were to drive on the morrow to another well five miles distant, where water was known to be unfailing. This was to be our camp and base of operations; in fact, it was a station laid down in the sketch-map in my client's possession.

At last the first day's destination was reached. The team was worn and jaded with the hot, hard work, the men in not much better condition. We all hurried to the little basin to draw some water for the horses. The bucket struck the hard, dry bottom with a hollow thud—there was no water there. The disappointment was sickening, even though we had provided against it. The only thing to be done, however, was to pitch a camp, deal out the water sparingly from the cask, and to push on in the cool of the dawn to the well beyond.

We were going about our preparations, when a loud exclamation from one of my companions drew us all three to the waggon to stare in dismay at the empty cask. By some dire mischance the bung had worked loose, and the precious fluid had been wasted on the thirsty sands. There had been less than half of it left when we had last quenched our thirsts and given our poor beasts a bucketful between them.

The accident was demoralising and foreshadowed hardship for the night, if not actual danger for the morrow. However, we made the best of it, and with dry throats and parched lips we finally dropped off to sleep, despite the whinneying of our thirsty animals. At the first glimpse of dawn we were up and away—one driving, the others walking—in the direction of the other well.

Under the conditions it was a question of hours—not miles. It seemed as if flesh and blood could never bear it. With faces burnt and blistered, feet galled, legs weary, throats drawn, lips cracked, and tongues swollen, we dragged ourselves along. The poor, panting horses, with drooping ears, would stop every few minutes to rest until they were goaded on. What reproaches can be read in a dumb brute's eye—reproaches that can never be answered!

At last, with the sun high up and blazing upon us we saw a few withered plants in the distance. As we approached, we could see that they were but dead stalks—ominous indications of drought. We drew nearer, and at last reached the hole from which we were to draw water—stale, flat, and hot, but water after all. Alas! No! The well was dry. Good God! Bereft of reason we threw ourselves down upon the rocks. How long the stupor of despair lasted I do not know.

I remember looking up to the sky—perhaps to pray—again I do not know—and there I saw a hovering buzzard. This, then, was to be the end! The awful suggestiveness of the presence of the carrion bird frightened me back from the apathy which had taken possession of my soul. I looked about me. My companions sat with their heads sunk upon their knees; the poor horses had lain down in their harness, still attached to the waggon.

The thought: "May not instinct be stronger than

There was no water there.

reason?" came to me like an inspiration. I walked over to the beasts, loosened the traces, took off the neck-yoke, and tied the lines to their collars. Instantly they both rose, and started slowly off towards a reef of rocks a couple of miles away. I looked at my crouching comrades; I spoke to them, but they did not reply. I snatched up a bucket and a canteen from the waggon, and started after the horses.

My recollection fails me here. I only know what I did from the result. I indistinctly remember seeing the horses disappear behind the rocks, and wishing that I could reach their shade, there to lie down and die. With this object in view I must have staggered on. Then came oblivion. My recollection of my return to conciousness begins with an impression of great comfort and of water—pure, clear water, and plenty of it, my face and hair dripping with it, my clothing drenched with it. What luxury! what delight! I remember opening my eyes and looking about.

The first object I saw was a goblin, a vile and horrid figure—a semblance of a man, with long, tangled, white hair and beard, a brown and wrinkled visage, and frightful eyes, the nails of feet and hands grown into long claws. Scattered about him were the skeletons of

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rats and snakes. This creature gesticulated and gibbered hideously at me.

"What delirium is this?" I thought. Then, glancing skyward, I saw the buzzard still hovering overhead. I remembered him, and then, as I grew more into myself again, I saw the horses standing near by; my bucket filled with water stood beside me. It was no dream; it was a verity; my life was saved.

I sprang to my feet. As I did so my hideous companion also rose and began a wild dance of joy about me.

"She sent you! She sent you!" he screamed. "Where is she?"

"Yes," I answered, for I now saw that I was dealing with a madman; "she sent me; we will go to her."

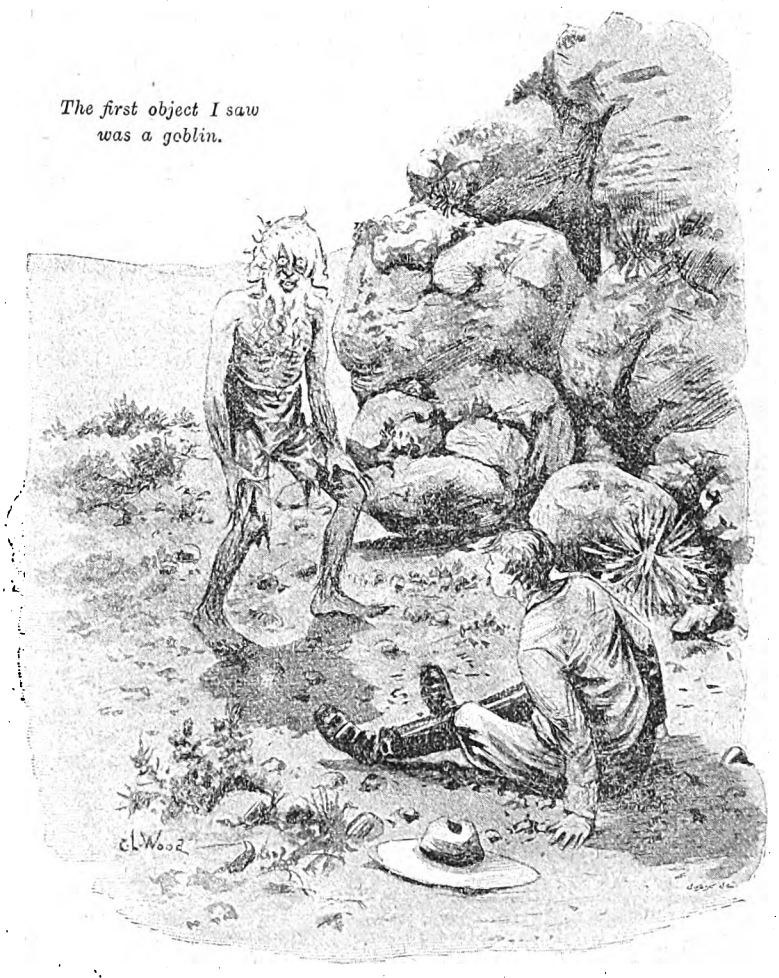
I went over to the horses, which were standing by a pool in the rock; it was evident that they had drunk their fill. I replenished the canteen which had been slung over my shoulder, jumped upon the back of one of the horses, and bade my stranger companion mount the other.

"Let us hurry," said I.

"To her?" he inquired.

"Yes," I answered. "Come, hurry."

We started on the back trail as rapidly as the heavy sand would permit. Fortunately, there had been no wind to obliterate the tracks, for had there been I should have had great difficulty in retracing my steps.



The first object I saw was a goblin.

After travelling, perhaps, a mile, the waggon could be seen in the distance. What was the fate of my companions? Were they still alive? Were they still where I had left them? Or had they wandered off as men do in that awful place when urged by the craze of thirst?

It was not long before I could see them. Their bodies lay prone upon the rocks. We reached them. Thank Heaven! they were still alive, but unconscious. A little water was poured between the swollen lips, their faces bathed with the precious liquid, and back, back they came from their years of purgatory.

It was not until the horses were once more hitched to the waggon, and we were about to start off in the direction of the water, that I found time to think of the mad stranger, who now began to clamour with the greatest violence, and pointed to the west with his skinny claws.

"To her! To her!" he shrieked.

It was then the memory of the dusty wayfarer of the past summer came to me.

"Yes, she is waiting for you," said I: "but first we must have water—and gold," I added cynically, half aloud.

His face lighted up with intelligence for a moment.

"Of course—the gold. I had forgotten the gold!" he exclaimed; "the beautiful red gold—and the diamonds—aye, the glorious stones. Yes, we will take them to her." He paused, then frantically screamed: "But they are not yours, they are mine—hers and mine!"

Here was a new phase in the situation—were we to fulfil our wild mission after all?

We had kept a chart of our journey so far, by prismatic compass and odometer. Our latitudes and departures were quickly calculated. Sure enough, we were in the vicinity of the point noted in the rough map. It was two miles further east—about the position of the water-hole.

The horses were jaded, but they knew that water was ahead, and they responded to a stronger urging than perhaps they would have received had not the allurement of fortune lain ahead.

We reached the water. We all threw ourselves upon the ground and drank, the horses pushing their muzzles beside us into the pool; and then we washed, drenching ourselves, clothes and all. After all, there was no thought of anything but drinking and eating and sleeping that night.

While we were opening some tins of food, the poor idiot darted from us; before we knew what

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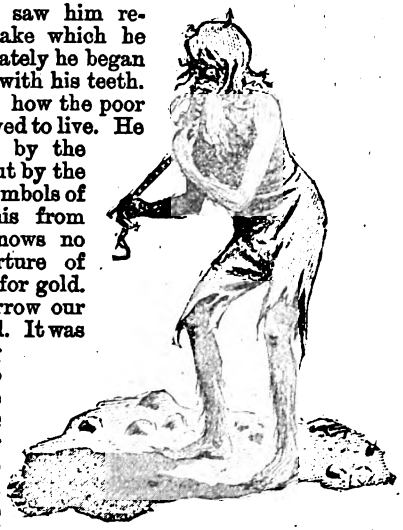
he was about, we saw him returning with a snake which he had killed. Immediately he began tearing off the skin with his teeth. It was too evident how the poor creature had contrived to live. He had not been fed by the manna of heaven, but by the creeping things—symbols of the lost. And this from the thirst that knows no assuaging, the torture of lifetimes, the thirst for gold.



Early on the morrow our position was verified. It was as close as anything could be from so primitive a source as the dead man's sketch. Here—or near here—was the lost Peg-Leg Mine. "Now for the glittering gold," said we all. There was no indication of the likelihood of it. We were upon a little granitic island—a deep depression in which formed the life-giving reservoir—in the midst of a sea of sand.

"Where is the gold?" was eagerly demanded of our goblin host.

"Gold? Where? Are you blind?" he answered. "See!" And he gathered up the sand, letting it trickle through his fingers. "Gold for her; gold to buy the world; she will be a queen!" Darting back to the granite, he detached some crystals of tourmaline with his distorted claws. "See the gems!" he continued. "I will make her a crown from her own gold and her own gems," and thus he gibbered of wealth and the bonnie wife.

The horses were hitched up again, the cask filled and carefully stopped. To quiet our mad companion, a small sack was filled with sand, another with tourmaline, and we started slowly upon our homeward progress. It was a tedious, weary journey, and the sun pelted down upon us. But we knew that the next night would see us safe in the foothills, and we were thankful.

Our weird companion chattered ceaselessly. "Where is she? When shall I see her?" were his reiterated questions. "She is waiting over there," he said, once or twice, pointing out over the sand. To humour him we followed his direction, which did not take us from our path; for path there was none. Any straight line is a road from the desert; any destination out of it a haven of delight.

Late in the afternoon of the second day the madman exclaimed: "There she is!" and, before we could stop him, he had rushed frantically ahead of us, with a speed too great for us to follow. We saw in the distance a black object, which, as he approached it, rose high in the air, and hovered over him. It was the buzzard.

As we drew up to the spot from which it had flown, we found a skeleton partly covered by the sand; and there were bits of a woman's raiment.

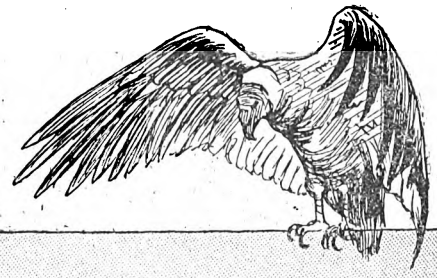
The crazy man clasped the ghastly fragments in his arms.

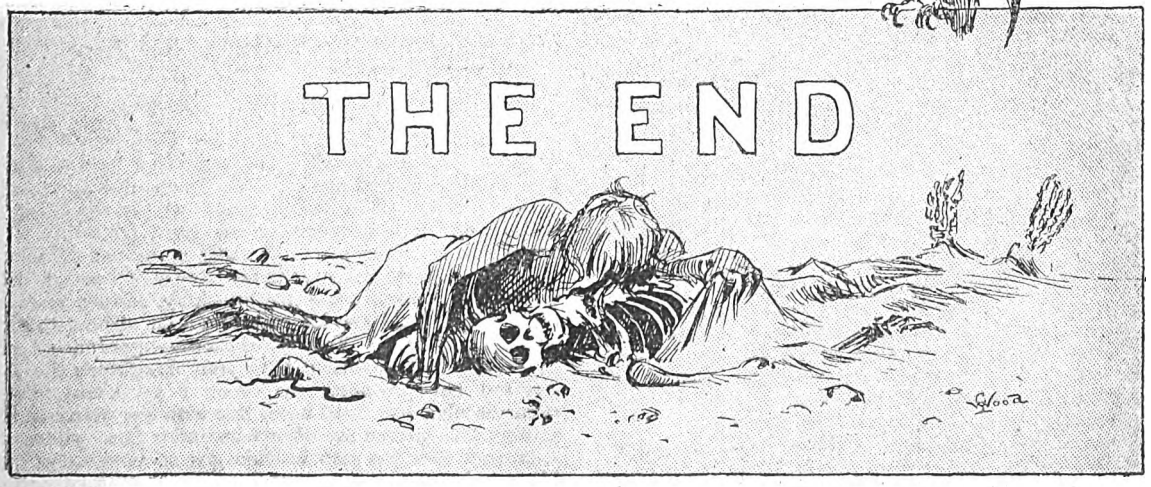
"It is she!" he exclaimed. "She waited for me."

We tried to disengage him from the skeleton. He struggled for a moment, then ceased, but the fierce embrace was unrelaxed. We looked at him—he was dead. We glanced up involuntarily—the buzzard still hovered overhead.

A deep grave was dug in the sand; the two bodies were lowered into it, still locked together, and the bags of sand and tourmaline dropped beside them. We bade them a few sad words of farewell and shovelled back the sand.

ALLEN GOODMAN.





The Christmas Double Numbers of PEARSON'S MAGAZINE and of MELODY will be ready on December 1st. One Shilling each.

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From the HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY *to his elder brother, the* HON. FRANCIS GALLOWAY.

Grand Pacific Hotel, Chicago,
April 12th, 1888.

DEAR FRANK,—It is ages since I have heard from you, but I suppose everything goes on as usual and that you can find nothing to write about. When I wrote last I told you of my engagement to Miss Josie Fairfield, only daughter and heiress of Jeremiah Fairfield; and I think I gave you a fair description of your future sister-in-law. Old Jeremiah is behaving very handsomely, and is going to plank down a fair share of his dollars in hard cash. I am in excellent condition, and, to use a favourite expression of my *fiancée's*, "am just having a lovely time."

Everybody here makes an awful fuss over me, and will insist on calling me "Lord Galloway." Titles here are held in the highest veneration; but the majority of the people I have met don't seem to know the difference between an Honourable and a Marquis. My future father-in-law took me over his pig-sticking establishment yesterday, and each time we came to a group of butchers at work he would stop them for an instant and say: "This is Lord Galloway, my future son-in-law."

There is one curious mistake that everyone has made here, and that is, that they have all taken it for granted that I am the eldest son, and heir to the title, although I have never done or said anything to cause them to believe so. As old Fairfield has already told all his friends that I shall be Viscount Decateur, and consequently his daughter a Viscountess, I hardly dare now to undeceive him, in case he should want to break off the match. My fair *fiancée* also has told all her girl friends that on the death of my father she will be Viscountess Decateur; so that I really see nothing for it but to leave them in ignorance of the true state of the case until after the wedding, which has been fixed for this day week. Consequently, when you receive this, my proverbial ill-luck will have deserted me, and I shall be the happy possessor of a millionaire bride.

I am sincerely attached to Miss Fairfield; but as I told you in my last letter, my father-in-law elect, as they say over here, is the worst specimen of a low-bred Yankee that I have ever set eyes on.—Your affectionate brother,

FRED.

From the HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY *to the* HON. FRANCIS GALLOWAY.

New York,
May 12th, 1888.

DEAR FRANK,—The affair went off splendidly, and without a hitch. All the Chicago papers teemed with accounts of the brilliant ceremony, and the magnificent presents made to the bride. Unfortunately, they all accepted it as a fact that I am the future Lord Decateur, and I have not yet had the courage to undeceive my bride. As we sail for England next week, I shall not say anything about the mistake, but will leave it until she meets you, and finds out that you are the heir, and not myself. One paper in Chicago asserted that I should soon be a Duke, as my father, the Duke of Decateur, was in a very precarious state of health. That was a good stretch of imagination for a Chicago journalist. Good-bye, old fellow.—Your affectionate brother,

FRED.

From MRS. FREDERICK GALLOWAY *to her father,* JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD.

Grand Hotel, London,
June 10th, 1888.

DEAR PA,—I am writing to you with a broken heart. I have been the victim of a most shameful imposture, and I am the miserable, unhappy wife of the vilest of scoundrels. My husband is not Lord Galloway. He will never be a Viscount! He will never own Decateur Castle! He will never sit in the House of Lords! But he will always be a miserable, sneaking, pauper younger son! How could you let me marry him without finding out all about him! Your carelessness—ignorance, I may in charity call it—has ruined your daughter's life and wrecked her prospects for ever. I am coming home immediately; for I will never live with the wretched impostor who gained my affections under false pretences. I dare not face the girls in Chicago; so meet me in New York and advise me what to do.—I sail on the *Umbria* next Saturday. Your broken-hearted daughter,

JOSIE.

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Cablegram from JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD TO MRS. FREDERICK GALLOWAY.

"Right. Come home. Will meet *Umbria* at dock.
FAIRFIELD."

From MESSRS. RUDGE, FUDGE, STUDGE, TWENTYPEST AND RUDGE, *Solicitors, to the* HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY.

300, Lincoln's Inn Fields, July 30th, 1888.

DEAR SIR,—We have received the copy of the *Chicago Tribune* forwarded to us by you, and have made inquiries as to whether the advertisement to which you directed our attention is, in America, a legal service of notice of suit for divorce. We find as follows:

That in the State of Illinois, in which State Chicago is situated, in cases of non-residence, uncertainty of respondent's whereabouts, or living out of the jurisdiction of the United States, publication of notice of suit in a county newspaper for a period of four weeks is sufficient and good legal service. We have also ascertained that in the event of no notice of defence being put in, judgment would go by default.

In regard to your other questions, we are not sufficiently acquainted with the divorce laws of America to advise, but we have always heard that divorces would be obtained in Chicago on almost any plea. We would recommend you to write at once to a resident lawyer in the town where the suit has been instituted, or to go there yourself at once.—Yours faithfully,

RUDGE, FUDGE, AND CO.

From the HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY *to his brother, the* HON. FRANCIS GALLOWAY.

Grand Pacific Hotel, Chicago,
Sept. 20th, 1888.

DEAR FRANK,—The agony is over. Yesterday the court, in response to the demand of my late bride, annulled the marriage which had taken place between us. The annulment was granted on the ground that the petitioner's consent to the marriage had been obtained by fraud and false representation on my part. Numerous witnesses swore that I had called myself "Lord" Galloway and had stated that I was heir to Viscount Decateur. Of course, my word was no good against all this. Old Fairfield, who gave evidence, described me as "damaged goods," and the judge paid no attention to me.

Indeed, I was told beforehand that the judge was sure to grant the plaintiff's petition. The fact is, this worthy is a candidate for a vacant judgeship in the Court of Appeal, and did not dare to run the risk of losing old Fairfield's influence. Judges over here are elected by popular vote; and old Fairfield, besides having the influence which is always attendant on great wealth, employs thousands of men in his pig-sticking establishment, and of course controls their voices. Thus it is said that no judge who aspires to a higher office or even to re-election, ever dares to say him nay. Moreover, I am told that this old hog-butcher's political influence is so great that he controls half the State Legislature, and can get any bills he likes passed by it; and that if the judge had refused to annul my marriage with his daughter, he would have had a special Act declaring it null and void put through the Legislature.

Although unquestionably it was very wrong to allow these toadies and title-worshippers to continue in their self-created delusion that I was the eldest son, yet I certainly had nothing to do with originating that belief. That was simply the offspring of a combination of ignorance and sycophancy.

I am going to remain here for a few weeks, as I have gone into a little wheat speculation which I hope may prove remunerative. If it fails, I shall be, as they say here, "dead broke."—Your affectionate brother,

FRED.

Cablegram from RUDGE, FUDGE, AND CO. *to the* HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY.

London, Oct. 10th, 1888.

"Your father and elder brother were both drowned yesterday off Cowes while out yachting. Yacht capsized. We await instructions from you.
RUDGE, FUDGE, AND CO."

From JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD TO LORD DECATEUR.

400, Drexel Boulevard, Chicago,
Oct. 12th, 1888.

MY LORD,—I red with the deapest regret of the terible calamity which has overtook you, and I hurry to offer you my condolations. My daughter is real sick with grief, and says as she just longs to be by your side in your trubble. Now, my lord, I am willing to say, "Let bigones be bigones," and let us patch up this little matter. No one is to blame but I, for it was I as forced Josie to throw you up. I seperatted two loving harts, and am real sorry. Shall Josie come to you? there is nothing like simpathy in trubble. If you and Josie will make it up, I will come down handsome. The ceremony could be performed quiet in my house or at your hotel; although so far as ceremony is consarned, I think marriages are made in heaven, and no earthly jedge has a right to unmake them. My daughter sends her love, and says as she and I will come round to see you this evening. I trust your lordshipp will receive us with the same forgivvin spirit with wich we come. I remain, my lord, yours for ever.

JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD.

Letter from the VISCOUNT DECATEUR *to* JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD.

Grand Pacific Hotel, Chicago,
Oct. 12th, 1888.

SIR,—I have just waded through your imbecile epistle, and am now thanking God that your daughter's ignorance and narrow-minded ambition has saved me from being cursed with a father-in-law who is capable of producing such a document. I regret that it is not convenient to me to agree with you in your newly-formed opinion that marriages are made in heaven. I would also advise you that as your daughter will henceforth be branded in the English matrimonial market as—using an expression which you once applied to me as well as to the pork with which you feed the public—"damaged goods," you will be wise to try to dispose of her elsewhere.

In conclusion I notify you that I am wearing a pair of heavy shooting-boots, and that I think it would be as well for you not to come to see me. I leave for England to-night.—Yours,

DECATEUR.

RANDOLPH MAYNES.

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LASCA.

IT was not in the Quartier Latin, but next door to it, and everyone knows just where it is, too. *Quarante-cinq*, Rue La Grande—why "La Grande," nobody did know. The street was narrow, the houses high. One higher than the rest frowned down upon them. This was the one that had Jean Boullé's bake-shop. Perhaps because Jean's buns were good and two for *cinq sous*, perhaps because the top of the house had a skylight, M'sieur lived there.

Who was M'sieur? *Ciel!* how do I know?

He was a painter named Heywood, but everybody called him "M'sieur," that's all I know.

Who am I? I might say I don't know that either. One changes every seven years, and I am seven times seven. I'm another painter, and I was—but this story is not about me, but M'sieur and Mademoiselle Fetherston and—Lasca.

I had half of M'sieur's studio and painted every day. We had often the same models.

M'sieur was tall, and strong, and dark; English, very English.

Most Englishmen have no atmosphere. They cannot paint; they have nothing dainty. But M'sieur could paint. He had travelled much; Europe, Africa, America, all he painted. I have travelled, too, when I saw M'sieur's pictures. They made one feel the places. One day I came to the studio and found M'sieur painting at a strange picture.

Miss Fetherston—*Dieu!* the names these Americans have—sat near, modelling. She was a pupil of M'sieur's learning to sculp. How? You say not "to sculp"? What then? "Sculpture." *Ah; peste!* on the first Englishman. French is civilised, why cannot all speak it?

But M'sieur's picture? It was a large canvas, a stretch of dull brown prairie with long wavering grass. A herd of fierce cattle was in the distance, their leader tossing his horns madly. A dark black cloud overhung the blue sky. In the foreground was a pony, what you call him, mustard? No, mustang. A man was in the saddle, and a woman's form was dimly outlined as if she were about to spring behind the man. That was all. It was only roughly sketched in, but there was something odd about the picture. There was power in every hurried stroke of the brush, a subtle undercurrent that filled you with a fierce, wild longing for freedom.

Just as I entered the room that June day, M'sieur flung down his brush.

"I'll never do it!" he said impatiently.

"What makes you?" I asked, laying my hand on his shoulder. M'sieur and I were good friends—then.

"Ah! you!" he said, turning his head. He had been too absorbed to see me when I entered. He continued: "I can never paint this picture; I cannot find a model for Lasca."

"What is it?" I asked. "There is a story to it?"

"Yes," he answered, "a Texas story, of the Great Norther, a wind storm they have over there. The cattle flee from it and any one caught before them is trampled to death. The only chance for life is to shoot your horse, get under his body, and let the herd dash over you. The story is of a Texan ranger and his sweetheart; how they fled before the storm and cattle, how the mustang fell, and the girl flung herself on her lover's breast, dying to save him." M'sieur's eyes had kindled as he spoke, and his face flushed. "There's a poem about it," he added, "and my picture is where it says:

> "Was that thunder? I grasped the cord
> Of my swift mustang without a word;
> I sprang to the saddle, she swung behind—
> Away! for a hot chase down the wind."

"*Bon!*" I cried. M'sieur had a way with him, *un attrait;* what you say? "Charm." He interested everyone.

"But! why cannot you paint it?" I asked.

He flung back a lock of curly hair which always tumbled into his eyes, and frowned.

"I cannot get a model for the girl. 'Lasca,' her name is, and she's an ideal. All love and self-sacrifice for the man she loved, and no 'patient Griselda' business either; plenty of fire and temper."

"*Ma foi!* M'sieur, one would think you could find 'fire and temper' enough in the Latin quarter." I laughed. M'sieur frowned deeper, and shook his head.

"I don't want that kind of fire. It burns out. This woman loved *à la mort.* If I could find her"—he stopped abruptly, as a voice said:

"Perhaps M'sieur would try me?"

Both of us turned quickly, and saw such a tiny little figure. Slight she was, yet somehow not thin—the curves were too beautiful rounded to give any impression of bones. A cloud of hair, real *cendré*, that shade between chestnut and golden which we French admire more than your taffy English locks; dark, straight brows; a pair of grey-blue eyes, fringed with black; a pale skin; full red lips, which drooped at the corner; all this we saw as she stood before us.

"Who are you?" demanded M'sieur.

"Lasca, if M'sieur will," she said demurely.

"Child," he said impatiently, "you can't pose for Lasca. She was dark and wild and fierce almost. No blonde women have any 'go' in them."

"Have they not, M'sieur?" There was a mocking ring in her voice. Her eyes had a strange little expression. "M'sieur knows, *sans doute*," she added, "but perhaps M'sieur would show me the pose he wants."

He pulled down an old Mexican bridle, fastened it to a post, and said:

"The man is mounted. Grab the bridle, put one foot on his toe, and start to swing to the saddle. Jove!" he exclaimed, "that's it exactly."

The child—she seemed scarcely more than that—flung her lithe body into the very position. There was something startling in her *tense pose.* Then: "Will I do, M'sieur?" she asked inquiringly.

"Do? I should think you would," he said. "What's your name?" he asked again.

"Lasca," she answered coolly.

With a shrug he began to paint.

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That commenced it. Every day she came and posed, an old woman waiting for her in the corner like a dragon. Heywood painted fast and steadily.

"I'm afraid she'll disappear in a flash as she came," he said.

Miss Fetherston also came each day for lessons. It seemed to me she taught as well as learnt.

M'sieur often asked her questions, and she gave advice freely. She was tall and dark. I thought her cold and like her own statues. But M'sieur—well, M'sieur had a theory that dark women were worth winning and blondes were cold. A man with a theory has no eyes.

The winter passed, and the new model came and stayed. I painted hard, too, for the Salon came soon, and I was ambitious—then.

One day Miss Fetherston had a red rose in her gown, and M'sieur said 'twas like those in her cheeks. She looked at him in her slow, sleepy way and smiled. I glanced at Lasca, and saw—but I dared not think what I saw, for, in an instant, she too smiled, a strange little smile.

The studio was full of trash. Old armour, draperies, Oriental stuffs, half-finished pictures, sketches, bits of furniture, all were crowded together into a *mélange*.

Miss Fetherston sat in a high-backed chair, resting. Lasca—we knew no other name for her—was curled on a divan, her strange little face in curious contrast to the brilliant hues in which she was draped. I was smoking—that goes without saying. Heywood was talking his theory—that also goes without saying.

"There never was a blonde woman with any 'go' in her," he repeated for the hundredth time.

Miss Fetherston smiled well pleased; Lasca sat up.

"That depends upon where one is to go and with whom," she said.

"Does it, *petite?*" M'sieur always treated the little waif like a child.

"What would you do for the man you loved?" he asked.

"Die," she said laconically.

"That wouldn't do him a great amount of good," said Miss Fetherston.

Lasca's eyes flashed and she bit her lip.

"It might," was all she said.

Then M'sieur spoke.

"Lasca, could you be jealous?" he said.

"Perhaps, M'sieur," she replied. "Why?"

"There's another picture I'd like you to pose for: the Texan said he made her 'jealous for fun,' and in a flash she drew her dagger on him. Can you try it?"

M'sieur always said no model could pose really well unless she felt the meaning of the picture. That was another of his theories.

Lasca sprang up, saying: "I can try, M'sieur," as she draped the Mexican serape round her, tied a brilliant sash about her waist, and thrust a jewelled dagger in her girdle.

As she started to pose, Miss Fetherston came near her.

"You have it not right," she said, as she gave the serape a pull. Just then, M'sieur, too, arranged the drapery. His hand touched hers. A look passed between them.

Lasca saw. Like a flash she drew the dagger, her eyes black with anger, her expression fierce; then she caught herself up quickly.

"Lasca! What acting!" cried M'sieur. "Your pose, your expression was perfect!"

"Thank you, M'sieur," she said in a subdued voice. She was very pale. She caught my eye.

"I do not like women," she said in apology. "I like them not to touch me."

Miss Fetherston shrugged her shoulders and looked amused.

M'sieur painted. Artists may have an eye for colour but they see not other things.

* * * * *

The winter was gone and the spring came. It was beautiful in Paris. Everything seemed new again after all the cold and the dark of the winter.

My Salon picture was accepted and well hung. And M'sieur? His picture of Lasca was a "*Médaille*," and everybody talked of it. Such atmosphere, such masterly handling of a difficult subject! Such a wonderful model, a pose so natural and spirited! These were the favourable criticisms, and M'sieur was the envy of us all.

We were young then. It's a wonderful thing to be young. It means so much: life and light and—Lasca.

One day M'sieur said to Lasca:

"You've made me famous, *petite*."

She smiled radiantly.

"Will you pose again?" he asked.

"When M'sieur wishes," she said, her eyelids down.

"Thank you, *bonne petite*," and he laid his hand carelessly on her hair.

The little proud head drooped.

"For whom else do you pose?" he asked suddenly.

"M'sieur, for no one," she said quickly.

"*Non?*" He was surprised. "Have you plenty of money, child?" abruptly.

"M'sieur!" the one word said a volume of indignation.

"I beg your pardon," he said, and Lasca went swiftly away. I had noticed the old hag who came with her always pocketed the daily fee that Heywood gave to Lasca.

"She doesn't seem like a *grisette*. I wonder who she is?" said M'sieur. It was his first remark about her. She was "only a model" to him. As for me, I was not always old; I could see beyond my palette, and I had no theories.

The next day Miss Fetherston took a holiday. She was gone two weeks. *Dieu!* what a fortnight. Lasca was a different creature. Even M'sieur looked surprised. He never again said "blonde women are tiresome."

Lasca was happy. She expanded before our very eyes, as a rose yields to the sun, till its pure heart lies wide open to the bold fellow's gaze. Ah! Lasca! little pure heart, little Southern rose, where are you now?

One day, it was June, a bright, glorious, sunny June, such as we had when I was young—Junes seem old and cold now. She was especially gay, and her merry sallies kept us both in shouts of laughter. It was better laughter than one hears always near the Quartier Latin. Finally, painting at an end, she flung her tiny form down on the big couch in which she seemed lost. One little foot tapped the floor, such a dainty foot with its high-arched instep. Her hair was pushed loosely back, her sweet eyes were dark, her cheeks flushed and brilliant. She was laughing at M'sieur for some awkward move he had made with his maul-stick, when the door opened.

"A letter for M'sieur," a voice said.

Heywood's face changed. He took the letter, and opening it, read eagerly.

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Lasca watched him, and I—I watched Lasca. Her face changed, too. As the sunset glow passes from the sky when night comes, all the pretty colour faded from her cheeks. Then M'sieur spoke like a big schoolboy planning a holiday. These English are *canaille*, I think.

"No more painting to-day! Old man, congratulate me. Lasca, I must tell you something. Miss Fetherston has promised to marry me. She is coming back to-morrow."

I glanced at Lasca. She was white to the lips, but struggling bravely for self-command. I spoke hastily.

"I congratulate you, *vraiment!* M'sieur, and Mademoiselle as well," talking on as best I could.

Then Lasca spoke: "And, M'sieur, I wish you joy—and Mademoiselle." There was a catch in her voice but she coughed and hid it. "M'sieur will not need me to-day? *Au revoir*," and she glided out of the room.

The next day she came not. Miss Fetherston was there, calm, stately and looking beautiful. She took as a matter of course M'sieur's homage which, like all Englishmen when in love, he lavished freely.

Les Américaines are strange women!

Again, the next day Lasca came not. M'sieur chafed. He wished to paint. Love is sweet but Art is Master. The third day she came, so white, so fragile, the cruel, black shadows under the great grey eyes.

"M'sieur will pardon, I was ill," she said deprecatingly to Heywood's somewhat surly greeting. An artist when he is crossed is truly a spoiled child. Lasca posed again and Mademoiselle Fetherston criticised rather freely.

"You have not wished me joy yet," she said to Lasca one day.

Lasca's eyes flashed peculiarly.

"I wished it to M'sieur," she said; "if you love him you prefer he should have it."

"You are a strange child," said Mademoiselle.

Two weeks more, and then came the wedding. The bride and groom were to go to Normandy for a month's holiday.

"After that, I want you to pose again, Lasca," said M'sieur, the day before the wedding.

"Yes, M'sieur?" Lasca's voice had the pretty inflection of a question.

"Yes, *petite*," he said, "you're the best model I ever had. Good-bye," and he held out his hand.

She raised her poor little white face, and looked at him once, a long, long look.

"Good-bye," she said, and stooping swiftly she kissed his hand—once—twice—thrice—then, skimming like a bird on the wing, was gone from the room.

M'sieur rubbed his hand on his velvet jacket and looked foolish.

"Jove! What a tempest," he said.

"Blonde women have no 'go,'" I said drily.

The next day was the wedding. At Notre Dame the Mass was, and I went. The church was crowded, though few noticed the quiet ceremony. M'sieur and Miss Fetherston were too taken up with themselves to see the wee white face I saw in the crowd.

The Mass was over, and M'sieur and his bride turned to leave the church.

What was that noise? A roar as if from wild beasts, and in an instant all was confusion.

"Socialists," was the cry. "Vallinski and his Twelve!" Women screamed and fainted. Men fought their way to the door. Blows resounded. Oaths were heard.

I looked for Lasca, and caught a glimpse of her close to M'sieur. I pushed to his tall form as he struggled to the great door. He was supporting his wife, and was pale with anger, she with fright.

"Down with priests and their worshippers!" cried the Socialists. One remembered the Commune, and the twenty-second of May.

Then came the police, and the fight became fiercer. I saw Heywood strike a man a heavy blow, exclaiming: "Keep off the lady, can't you?"

The wretch uttered a frightful oath, and cried: "*Sacré bleu!* I can, but I will not!"

An instant, there was a gleam of steel, a flash, a woman's fearful shriek of agony, and I could see no more. I forced my way to them and reached M'sieur just as he stepped through the portico. He was carrying something in his arms. His wife was hurt, then? He kneeled in the porch supporting on his knees—*Mon Dieu!*—Lasca!

The tumult was stilled, and the police had control. Madame Heywood knelt beside her husband. Lasca, cold and still, lay in his arms.

"Is she dead?" I asked faintly.

She opened her eyes and saw nothing but the face bending over her. She smiled a smile of perfect bliss.

"How did it happen?" I whispered.

In choked tones, Madame Heywood answered: "A man drew his dagger and tried to kill me. She flung herself between. He stabbed her."

Then Lasca spoke feebly, for the blood came in great gushes from the wound in her breast.

"I saved her for you," she gasped. "I told you I could die for *him!* I always loved you. Will you kiss me just once?"

M'sieur bent his head and pressed his lips to hers, Lasca raised a tiny white hand and patted his cheek feebly.

"It is very sweet—to—die—for—you," she murmured, and, with that perfect smile upon her lips, she died.

* * * * *

The journal next day had a small notice.

"A number of Socialists, headed by Vallinski, a Pole, broke into the church of Notre Dame yesterday and came to blows with the worshippers. Doubiuska Vallinski, the young daughter of the ring-leader, was fatally stabbed."

[MARY F. M. NIXON.

Key to Jumbled Story.—No. 19. *See Page 679.*

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Or, THE ROMANCE OF A LOST CONTINENT.

By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BATTLE OF THE SHIPS.

ON the even following the morn when the fleet was ready to set sail—for I deferred the start until next day, that we might have less distance to traverse and so be fresher to meet the oncoming foe—I lingered in that fair garden long after the rosy sunset had died away, listlessly pacing amongst its bowers and tree-arched avenues, hoping against hope that Briseis would meet me there before I went away to do battle for her and her crown. The moon rose, though obscured at intervals by light, drifting clouds, and her pale beams cast weird, fantastic shadows on the mossy slopes and pebbly paths which I perambulated aimlessly. A cooling zephyr, scent-laden, came rustling through the drooping leaves of the tall trees, playing on my brow with the most delicious chilliness, and sighing away amid the shrubs and flowers on its course to the city with a soft, subdued, and soothing monody. Calmed somewhat by its pleasing gentleness I turned my steps towards the rustic seat in the old familiar grove, and sat there, lulled by the stilly sounds into a thoughtful reverie.

Not long had I sat there, when a different noise struck on my ear, and my heart leaped in expectation as I peered down that ghostly arcade of bending boughs and shifting shadows, seeing presently a form in white stepping softly on the darkened path. It came nearer, first haltingly, as though afraid, and then, when I sprang forward into the light of a lunar ray, more quickly and confidentially. It was Briseis, my Queen, my love! With fevered haste I stretched out my arms to take her to my embrace, but gently, yet firmly, she motioned me aside, and bidding me sit where she could see my face, took seat in a shadow, though not an arm's length from me. Fearing, I was silent, nonplussed by her sudden coldness, and she was the first to break the stillness with her silvery speech.

"I am here, Arnon, as I hinted to thee in the palace, wishing to see thee before thou goest away to do battle for me."

"Now thou has come, I am indeed repaid, my Queen, for the hours of watching and waiting that I have done for thee," I said, striving once more to seize her hands.

"It may not be, Arnon," said she, repulsing me, still with gentleness; "it may not be until thou hast explained to me some things that I will ask."

"Ask on," I answered, my self-assurance oozing fast.

"Thou wilt know what I desire thee to tell," said the Queen, "when I say that many rumours have reached me that thou art one and the same with that adventurer who named himself Macis, who lived at the palace of the Princess of Aidè, the wanton Listra, and was her paramour for more than a year."

"Who has set this tale afloat?" I asked angrily, immediately suspecting my two comrades, and forgetting how easily it might have reached Kronos otherwise.

"Nay, think not to deny it, Arnon; 'tis no lying report, but a true story, for there are those in the city now who lived at Thinæ when thou wast under the syren's spell, who came here when I sent to raise an army in that province. Seeing thee here, these nobles and soldiers have not scrupled to noise abroad thy former doings, and, also, thy followers have been recognised."

I groaned aloud, seeing that the black truth was out and there was now no escape from it.

"Groan not yet, Arnon," went on Briseis, "I have more to say. I might forgive thee even such a great apostacy as this, knowing the deepness of Listra's wiles and the power of her wicked charms, and also that it is said she was thy willing leman, even beseeching thee to love her, but she is not the only fair one thou hast had since I bade thee farewell so long ago. Who was she who was 'so dear to thee,' who sailed with thee on the eastern seas, now nigh three years agone?"

"What! knowest of Vesta, too?"

"I knew not her name, but only of her," continued my interrogator, with pain in her voice now, "through a troublesome pirate called Thaska, who was captured by a warship soon after he had spoken your vessel. They brought him to me—for, seeking news of thee, I questioned every sea-robber who fell into my sailors' clutches—and he told how he had chased in vain a full-rigged pleasure ship far out on the eastern waters, and that from her deck thou defied him to a trial of speed, fearing to give him battle because of one on board 'who was dear to thee.' Say, was she a wanton, like Listra?"

"Far from it," I said. "One more like thy own pure self than that; one who now sleeps in the Shadows beyond, at peace. But tell me, what didst do with Thaska?"

"I let him go again, because he brought me tidings that thou wert still living," said Briseis, beginning, I thought, to relent. "And now, my Arnon, tell me, as briefly as may be, the story of thy wanderings, hiding nothing for fear or shame."

So I told her how the world had used me in those fourteen years; how I came nigh to death in the trackless Nubian forests; how I fared in the Land of Khem, saving Vesta from the leopard, seeing the shape of Isis, discovering the plot against the life of King Menophres and coming into possession of my famous sword, and, through thinking my listener false, through Sothi's words, I had married Vesta and lived in peace for twice five years and then fled from the land through Itaska's jealousy; how we were wrecked in the *Seamew* and how Vesta perished of thirst on the open sea, leaving me alone to be cast up by the fickle waves near the secret treasure-hoard. And as I talked, growing grave or gay as memory responded to my call,

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Briseis drew nearer to me, till our hands met, just as they had done when we twain nestled there before—it seemed but yesterday—and ever she kept her gaze upon my face with breathless interest. When I told of Vesta's death, I felt her hand clasp mine in a shudder of sorrow and sympathy, and the solitary ray of moonlight that now shone upon us both showed glistening tear-drops trembling in her swimming eyes.

"Pray tell me further, Arnon," she said, "for I forgive thee fully so far. Had been more than mortal to have done otherwise in a far and foreign land."

Then I went on to relate my meeting with one-eared Vichri and the lying tale he told me, showing how, through believing it, I had fallen an easy prey to the captivating graces of unscrupulous Listra. "Though now," I said, "that I have been fooled, I hate her more than my worst foe."

"Then I must forgive thee all, my weak-heart, it seems to me," said the Queen, "for surely thou hadst good cause for all thy misdeeds, and ill deserve that I turn cold at last! Yet 'tis hard to know thee sullied by an impure love, and 'tis hard to quench the fire of jealousy that hath burned within me since these things came to my knowledge."

"And 'twas hard for me to think thee false," I said, "to toss in sleeplessness at nights, and rack my brain for answer to the puzzle in the day, and ever to carry the load of that thought of pain with me, in good luck or ill. 'Twas hard indeed; but amply I am repaid now that the cloud is lifted.

"But tell me," I continued, "how Sothi came to know my real character, and so impose that dreadful tale on me?"

"Would that I had learned the truth before my cousin—base ingratiate—could have used the King as his instrument, or Sothi could have put his project into execution," said Briseis. "Every hand but mine was against thee, then, who art now so honoured and favoured."

"'Tis wealth and fame that alone are honoured," I said bitterly, "in the world's eyes. But did this one-eared cousin lie to me in that particular also? Was't he who helped me into exile?"

"'Twas he, indeed," murmured the Queen; "but I will tell thee the foul story as I discovered it some years ago. My cousin Vichri came home from Ulmeca when you had gone on your treasure-hunt some weeks, and knowing that I should most likely be chosen to ascend the throne at the death of the old King, who was without issue, offered wedlock to me—though it may be that he loved me for myself as far as he can love anything. I need not give my answer to thee, Arnon. Then, raging inwardly, and outwardly morose, he came by chance into the society of Sothi, whom you had defeated so pitilessly at his favourite art of swordplay, and unknown to me they went to the King, obtaining his seal for thy outlawry. How the vanquished swordsman brought that about thou knowest, but not how they gained news of thy name. Dost remember that twice as we sat here and our love was told, there was a gentle rustling sound behind the shrubs?"

Like a sudden flash of light through the mist of a murky day, the remembrance of that sound came back to me. I had not heeded it then.

"Yes, I recall it well, now thou hast spoken, my Queen," I answered moodily, looking into the darkness.

"It was a slave, Arnon, a black slave whom I had punished the day before for eavesdropping, and who thus revenged himself on me by dogging my steps and overhearing our secret. This he cherished in his evil heart till Vichri came, when, seeing his chagrin and guessing the reason, he told the news to him. This, together with the knowledge that you dared to love me, and was more fortunate than himself, was the last provocation that Vichri needed. Being my cousin I could not punish him openly when I was made queen, nor Sothi, for reasons I have said, and also, until the death of this slave, who confessed his guilt to me at the bidding of the priest of Life, I did not know the whole story."

"And what of that slave?" I asked.

"I let him die in peace," said Briseis, ever merciful, "seeing that the spirits will so soon pass their verdict upon him. But when Vichri re-urged his suit when I was queen, I told him what I knew, sending him from my presence with scorn and sharp-stinging words, bidding him not to show his face again in Kronos. From that moment he has hated me, and for that reason has now gone to

Our lips met in the kiss that sealed the sacred compact.

Ulmeca, there to assist the recreant Quitzaal, and doubtless this will explain why Sothi gave up Miropis to the enemy. And as the last drop in the cupful of his wickedness, Vichri must tell thee lying tales of me and send thee to the arms of a wanton, one whose charms were not strange to him, and only discarded because the novelty had worn off his passion."

"By Neith, Mant, and Nepthys!" I cried in Egyptian, the hot blood rushing to my face with fiery indignation, "by all the evil spirits of Amenti and the Shadow-Land" (relapsing into Atlantian again), "I knew not that till now. Gods and Spirits! but 'tis more than a man may bear! Have pity on me, Briseis, who art so pure and far above me that I scarce dare touch thee with these polluted hands!"

"When have I not had pity on thee; when not in all these years yearned to look on thee and tell thee that through all I have been true?" breathed Briseis, all gentleness and compassion now, from her sweet heart outwards. "Say that, through all, my Arnon, thou, too, hast thought of me."

"Ever, my pure love," I replied, "saving when the thought that thou wert lost to me for ever dimmed my reason and unhinged my mind. Saving then I have been true to thee, and from now will be so ever, cherishing and

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loving thee, and whether thou will it or no, watching over thee through joy or sorrow, to life's far end."

"Dearest, most deserving of men!" cried Briseis, yielding herself to my long-delayed and passionate embrace with a sigh of content, "I cannot deny thee longer, who hast waited such a weary time for our re-union. I cannot resist thee, steel my heart against thee as I may. Our souls were only meant each for the other, so take me, Arnon my love, both body and spirit, to be thy own from now henceforth!"

"My own sweet one!" I murmured gently, almost overcome by the sudden weight of gladness and the thrill of love's supremest joy. And when our lips met in the kiss that sealed the sacred compact, the kiss so long deferred, so sweetly given by my lovely dear whose form was Beauty's self, all count of time and sense of space fled from me, the darkness and the straggling moonlight was as though it were not. We were no longer sovereign and subject, but made equal by love's all-levelling forgetfulness, and in the overpowering blissfulness of that enraptured moment, one thought, one feeling alone, was tangible within my mind, and that was—Briseis, my love, my queen.

Presently, when the first flush of our joy was past, and we were able to talk, as rational beings, of other things, Briseis asked if I sailed on the morrow.

"Yes," I said, "unless, dear heart, you desire it otherwise."

"Nay, my Iron-fingers—as once before I called thee—I desire that you go as soon as can be, that you be the sooner back," said she, "for it is not seemly for a queen to wed a mere adventurer, who is known to be fresh from the arms of a careless woman; whereas, if you come back to Kronos as a great and victorious general, the saviour of your country, and wealthy, too, it will seem a fit and proper thing. For myself, thou knowest I care not for these quibbles, but a queen is not as other women."

"Art grave beyond thy years, my love," I answered; "but your advice is sound, and it shall be as you say. I will not return till every foe to Atlantis has fought his last."

"And then, my Arnon," said Briseis, "come to me and claim me for thy own, and thou shalt be my lord and King."

A little longer we stayed in that leafy avenue, and then, at the dictates of prudence, parted for the night, though I remained awhile, watching the flutter of her white robe adown the flower-bordered path, and the gleams of light upon her snowy coif, as far as my gaze could follow. Then I sought my couch to snatch an hour of needed sleep before the morrow's sun should rise and the morrow's task be entered on.

* * * * *

When the first streaks of red appeared in the east, I was afoot, and, rousing my comrades, proceeded to the bay, and soon stood on the deck of the doughty *Ravager*, which, with new-painted hull, taut sails, and fresh timbers where the old planks had rotted, warped out bravely to the middle of the harbour, and carried me on a visit of inspection round the huge fleet, now waking into active life. Canvas was unfurled, spars swung out, helms unbraced, and all was ready, when, at the mast of our low-hulled craft, now under her full spread of snow-white wings, I ran up the signal to weigh anchors and stand out to sea, tacking to the westward near the shore in two divisions.

By now the sun had fairly risen, and the great quays and wharves of Kronos were alive with the cheering populace, calling adieu to their friends on board and invoking the help of the Spirits for our task; and as the vast fleet swept out of the bay, rounding the beacon point, I saw the light and graceful cariole of the Queen, drawn by a pair of jet black steeds, dash round the harbour curve and out upon the promontory rock that guards the entrance, and of which all the ships, excepting my own, were by this time clear. As the *Ravager*, keeping in the rear to mark the stragglers, if any, shot grandly past the point, her prow cutting through the surf with a hissing music that was sweet in my ears, the royal cariole drew up at the very verge of the stone sea-wall, and Briseis herself, standing proudly erect in the light conveyance, waved her hand to me over the rapidly widening gulf of sea and spray.

I spun "Sunderer" high in the air in answering signal, catching it by the hilt as it fell, the newly-ground and polished blade gleaming white in the sun-rays, and at the sight of their lovely Queen a mighty cheer arose from that giant armament in one vast roaring wave of sound. Then, under the rising gale, we drew away, and presently all objects near the city were indistinguishable from our decks.

Now, giving the *Ravager* her full press of canvas, I flew forward, heading the labouring squadrons in splendid style, and pursued my way about a cable's length in front of the foremost line, in keen look-out for the expected foe.

Till evening the sea ahead was unbroken by a single sail, and all through the day we coasted along the shore with a favouring breeze, having full view, as we went, of the little fishing hamlets and littoral towns, half hidden in the dense copses of cedar, sycamore, olive, myrtle, and acacia trees, which, occurring in pleasing alternation, extended their territory into the ocean, whose salt waves lapped their outmost trunks with ominous familiarity. So close sometimes we sailed to the shore that we caught glimpses of the women water-carriers of the villages, bearing the earthen jars upon their heads with native grace, and walking with that upright carriage that their humble lot alone can give, their bare arms swinging as they went. Later on we sheered off into deeper water for safety as the darkness drew on, and the land then sunk to a low black ridge to northward.

I despaired of meeting the enemy that day, and was thinking, as I watched the red ball of the sun sinking into the west, and throwing his beams in a dazzling path of sparkling gold from the horizon to the *Ravager's* prow, that I would hoist the signal to drop anchors for the night, when a joyful shout rang out from the mast-tops of a dozen vessels: "The fleet in sight! Sails low down on the westward bow!" Straining my eyes I waited, and presently a black dot and then another, and then a score in quick succession, passed before the half-hidden disc of the sun flaring fiery as he hovered 'twixt day and night, and then as we swept on, scores upon scores of other sails and spars, and lastly hulls, crowding together and tacking towards us, coming up against us out of the portals of the sunset, six hundred strong.

"Put on full sail and stir up the rowers to their hardest," I cried, "and signal to grapple with the foe without delay!"

"But 'tis eve, and the sun has set now!" gasped Orlanis, the mate; "wilt not put off the action till dawn?"

"Who is captain here?" I asked shortly. "We shall attack them *now!* 'Twill be a moonlight night, and before long there will be plenty of lamps in yonder fleet. Also, the wind is now for us and against them. Forward! I command!"

Orlanis, obeying, said no more, and deploying into two great squadrons, stretching crescent shape, with the horns of the curve towards the foe, we stood onward, the *Ravager* leading by a cable's length. It was a grand spectacle, as we drew nearer, was that hostile fleet, coming on through the deepening twilight in a long, unbroken line athwart our course, the sails bellying as the whole mighty armament tacked to and fro to make headway, the thousands of oars beating the water to the song of the rowers with rhythmic strokes, the spray curling from the pointed prows in showers of foam, the decks crowded with warriors already calling their defiance, and behind the lines of warships, the long, low pirate craft creeping on with their lateen sails. Quite forty of these vessels, which gave me more concern than a hundred of the other ships, now hove into view, the

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notes of the Ina-Ana floating to us faintly over the churned up waves.

My instructions to my fleet were short and simple, though strange to every seaman in it. I ordered that, contrary to our usual naval tactics, our ships were each to run alongside and board the first foe they met—never approaching more than one at once—and that the boarding parties were to make no effort to capture the hostile vessel, as was customary, but only to remain on her deck long enough to set fire to her timbers or to bore leak-holes in her bows beneath the water-line. For these purposes I had placed on every ship a number of men, some armed with huge earthen jars of highly inflammable oil, and others with sharp piercing-tools, and when their task was successfully accomplished the vessel was to draw off the doomed craft and proceed to serve another in like manner.

I had experienced some difficulty in inculcating and enforcing these injunctions, but had at length succeeded, by dint of making strong use of the queen's authority. Now, when I flew the signal for instant action, also for a squadron of fifty vessels to stay in the rear as a reserve, I saw with satisfaction these new tactics put into operation with unqualified success, to the utter astonishment and consternation of the rebel captains.

The wind was blowing from the east still, and thus assisted, we soon bore down upon them, and our first lines met in the battle-shock. Then there was crashing and bumping of prows against bows, rattling of anchor chains, and snapping of grapnels as they caught in the enemy's sides; clashing of weapons, shouts of defiance, orders loudly thundered above the din, cries of rage and pain from the wounded and dying, and yells of amaze from the foes as the ships parted again by scores, and out of the darkness that had now fallen leapt a hundred tongues of flame from a hundred burning ships, and fifty shouts of despair from as many vessels swiftly sinking into the black waters. Then the battle-line closed again, and again my ships drew back, and again uprose from a hundred rebel hulls a hundred sheets of wreathing, roaring fire, twisting the timbers and flaring up the masts, and reducing the sails and cords to blackened shreds and ashen strands, and causing the rowers to let fall their oars, rushing screaming on deck, and such of them and the crew who could not get away in the boats to leap into the sea.

Again and again my proud and curving line of war-ships dashed upon the hopelessly confused and panic-stricken foe, but not so recklessly now, nor so effectively, for the hundreds of burning and sinking ships drifting hither and thither, and ever bearing down amongst the rebel squadrons, were dangerous neighbours to sail with, and while driving Vichri's array westward before their red advance, kept us from following too closely in their wake. Well was it for us, indeed, that the wind still kept at our backs, and that the unexpected darkness of the night added to the terrors of the scene.

Fearful was the sight that these hundreds of blazing hulks presented to us, glaring vividly against the black canopy of sea and cloud-covered sky, horrible were the cries of despair, the yells and the cursings, that rose on all sides, even deadening the roaring of the flames, the snapping and crackling of the scorched wet planks, and the gurgling sound of the great ships sinking into the red-gleaming water, sucked down in a vortex of swirling foam.

All night the fight raged, ever drifting to the west and south, and woe to every straggler in the enemy's fleet who got entangled in that long line of burning craft, or coming scatheless through, fell in with our foremost ships. No mercy, no quarter was asked or given in that struggle, and when day broke we saw that the proud array that had met us so gaily and confidently in the sunset glow, was now but a sorry collection of battered argosies, running still to escape the remaining fire-ships; an armament barely numbering half its former strength, while my fleet was still sweeping on in orderly pursuit, in the same curving line, with the *Ravager* still ahead, and the fifty reserve ships still in the rear.

Yet the fight, I well knew, was not yet over. In the strengthening light the fire-ships looked less fearsome and were easily avoided; moreover, the rebels knew our tactics now, and would be on their guard, and retaliate in like manner also. The forty pirate vessels had so far taken no part in the struggle and were fast coming to the front, quite fresh. Still I sent my curving array at them again, and in the *Ravager* prepared to take a more active part in the conflict. Standing up in the prow, behind the hideous tiger-head that yawned menacingly at all who neared us, with Valdo and Atris close to my side, I waited, sword in hand, for the onset of the foremost pirate ship. Whose it was I could not tell, for like the other vessels, she flew the rebel flag alone; the red cross, outlined with white, upon a field of blue, the same that I had seen on the warship of the Prince of Aidè, when he landed on that desolate northern shore of his province.

As the long, evil-looking craft, iron-beaked like my own, drew nearer, a man stood up in the prow and hailed us. I knew him well. So had he stood and roared his challenge when I fled before him in the *Seamew*. 'Twas Strong-arm Thaska, and no other!

"Ha! traitor and braggart!" I cried in answer, "I am come, thou see'st, to take up thy challenge, and on the *Ravager's* deck to pay you with usury for treachery to your Queen!"

"Art bold now, courtier, slave, and cherisher of fair ones," roared Thaska back again; "but think not I shall run from thee as you turned tail last time we met! Come hither with thy ship, Arnon, that I may pick a water-hole in her side!"

"First see to your own ungainly craft," I answered, my temper rising at his chaffering. "Orlanis, there, shorten sail and let us stove his starboard bows into his larboard! Valdo, be ready to board with me; and, Atris, guard the stern from yonder creeping coward," for another pirate was beating up to windward with design to take us at a disadvantage.

Swiftly, then, the old *Ravager*, true to her guiding hand, slewed round and sheered off, just as the keen iron ram of Thaska's ship tore past our bow, missing our quickly-indrawn oars by an arrow's length, and swiftly too, as he raged helplessly past, our sharp beak was turned against his bows and with a mighty shock and a rending crash tore its rough way through planking and stanchions, and rib-rafters, making both ships rock on the shaky sea as though smitten with a palsy.

Then, as we steadily strove in vain to back out, hearing the inrush of water into the leak, and before all my crew had recovered from the knock-down blow, Thaska and his men had leapt on board in revengeful rage, led by the bulky form of Strong-Arm himself, and driven us, with their sudden charge, to the stern-end of our deck, some of their latter boarders making the ships fast together with grapnels and cables. Now, if we could not overpower our foes and cut those fastenings before the doomed vessel sank, dragging ours with it, all was lost, and fiercely we turned on our opponents, no less frenzied than themselves, and commenced to cut our way back through the compact body of the pirate crew. Then it was that my "Sunderer" stood me in good stead, and I thanked Mitres in my heart a score of times that day for having given it to me in the banquet-hall of King Menophres' palace at Thebes. Clearing a way in front with its shining blade, and followed hard by Valdo, calm and practical even in that wild turmoil, I pressed forward, the keen razor-edge of the white-flashing sword smiting invincibly through helm and breast-plate and tunic, snapping spears and shivering opposing blades, nay, even piercing clean through more than one rough pirate who encountered me in my ravaging career.

In the waist of the ship I met Thaska sword to sword, and men stood off to give us room and watch us strive like

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giants in our wrath. First he broke my defence, and drew a line of red across my cheek, then I seized a chance of bursting through his guard, and traced a scar of fire down his sword arm from shoulder to wrist, and next, showering blows upon me in his pain and madness so thickly that I was beaten back, he fleshed his blade in my right thigh. But ere he could withdraw it to defend himself from my next stroke, "Sunderer" had leapt up and buried itself in his side, and over he rolled in the death

He rolled in the death agony.

agony. A mighty shout rose from my men at this, and I had scarce time to pull the rankling weapon from my leg and cast it away, when, with a rush and a wild cheer, my crew swept the pirates before them over our prow and their gangway on to their own vessel. With them I was carried, striking at and severing two of the fastening cables as I went; then back we surged, for the ship were getting low in the water now, and heedless of my pain and the showers of missiles that the foe poured around me, I sprang down upon our ram and hacked fiercely at the chains that still bound the vessels together. Would "Sunderer's" edge and temper stand the strain put on it? I feared, but the good steel blade, true to its reputation, answered nobly to my call upon its power, and clove the iron links and twisted bars of bronze as neatly as a pliant elder sapling.

One is cut—now another—and now, though my arm begins to fail and an ugly dent appears in the great sword's edge, the third is broken, the ships part, and Thaska's vessel sinks in a whirling eddy, while the tough old *Ravager*, under the frantic impulse of her oars, sheers off in triumph, rasping roughly as she does so against the side of another pirate craft.

But Atris is true to his post, and watchful; and flushed with success my men are aboard the new enemy in the passing of a thought, and before ever I have time to join them, have fired her, have scrambled back again, and left her to her fate. Into the thick of the fight we dash again, signalling the fifty reserve vessels to advance to the front, and with their help the battle-tide turns for good, and the scattered rebel squadrons, beaten, veer round and fly before us to the westward with all the speed that sails and oars can give them.

All through the rest of that day we pursued them doggedly, hanging on their rear and picking off all loiterers in that mad race, and all through the running fight, enabled so to do by the *Ravager's* superior swiftness, I searched for the ship which Sothi or Vichri, or both, might be aboard; but 'twas not fated that I should find them there, and after a weary chase we gave up the pursuit at nightfall, the seventy and odd vessels that alone remained of the rebel fleet of six hundred sail making good their escape under cover of the darkness. Till dawn we rode at anchor, then turned our prows to the eastward and to home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

To the Western Land.

It was said of old by the priests of the Spirit of Life, that "success re-gilds a villain's character and maketh an ignorant fool sought after by many wiser men," and surely it is a true saying, for whatever sins and follies I, Arnon, had committed, they were all forgotten in the wild and tumultuous acclamations of praise and admiration that rose from a hundred thousand throats as, with two hundred battered and weakly-manned ships, I entered the wide-curving bay of the stately city, flying the flag of conquest.

My deeds, the success of my new naval tactics, and the heroism of the *Ravager's* crew, were in all mouths that day, and many days after, and it was with renewed enthusiasm that the soldiery, sailors, and populace heard that Marenso and myself were made the queen's chief ministers and generals over both land and sea forces, equal in rank and power. As for Valdo and Atris, they desired nothing better than to be known as my first and ablest lieutenants, and in such position came in for full share of the honour and glory of the victory.

Soon after my return the Sleeper came back from Aidè with his triumphant army, receiving a welcome scarcely less enraptured than my own, reporting that the rebels who had not thrown down their arms had been driven from shelter to shelter, and at last compelled to take flight across the sea, a dispirited remnant in a solitary ship, and that now not an enemy remained under arms throughout the length and breadth of Atlantis.

Marenso I found greatly changed. He had aged slightly, had worn off the strangeness of his feelings, and proved a stout-hearted warrior, fond of everything that smacked of conflict, eschewing women as rankest poison—suiting Valdo in that!—and much addicted, when not on the battlefield, to the excellent fishing and poor hunting that our country afforded. Fast friends grew he and I in the years of life that remained to him, who had wasted so many in a dreamless sleep!

I did not allow this martial ardour and popular applause to subside before I re-embarked my crews, and also a force of fifty thousand men, on board the two hundred vessels, and set forth for Ulmeca, to stamp out the revolt in its last hold. Nubia was lost by vacillation, divided councils, and apathy, when King Dulo sat on the throne, and I determined that Ulmeca should not be lost for like reasons if Marenso and I could avert such a disaster. Alas! Strong is human will, and high are human hopes, but frail is human power and foresight, and vain is human effort when the fiat of Fate has gone forth and the doom is decided. So have I always found it through my life.

Before the start I sought speech with Briseis alone, but she would grant me only a short time, saying that I had not yet fulfilled my vow of leaving no foes alive within her dominions.

"For 'tis a safe seat beside me on the silver throne that I would give thee," she said.

"Safe or unsafe," I answered, "'tis all as one to me, who would love nothing better than to live fighting your battles."

"To live so, indeed," said she softly, "but not all who go to the fight come back living, and thou mightest well be one of those, through no desire of thine, my Arnon, my Iron-fingers."

"That is true," I musingly returned, "though till I have

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been to the Sacred Grotto a third time, I fear not death, for so Unim has told me—and so I go, as you wish, my queen, the idol of my heart."

"Yes, go, Arnon, and may the spirits prosper thee and waft thee safely over the seas and back again to these arms that have waited thee so long and wearily; and should need be, give over Ulmeca to her native tribes, the fierce Red Barbarians, when thou hast conquered the rebels, sooner than keep a province ever in revolt."

"That advice, my queen, I shall only act upon if forced and as a last resort, but conquer Quitzaal I shall, and bring him, a prisoner, to your feet. And now, for the fleet is waiting my presence, I will say farewell."

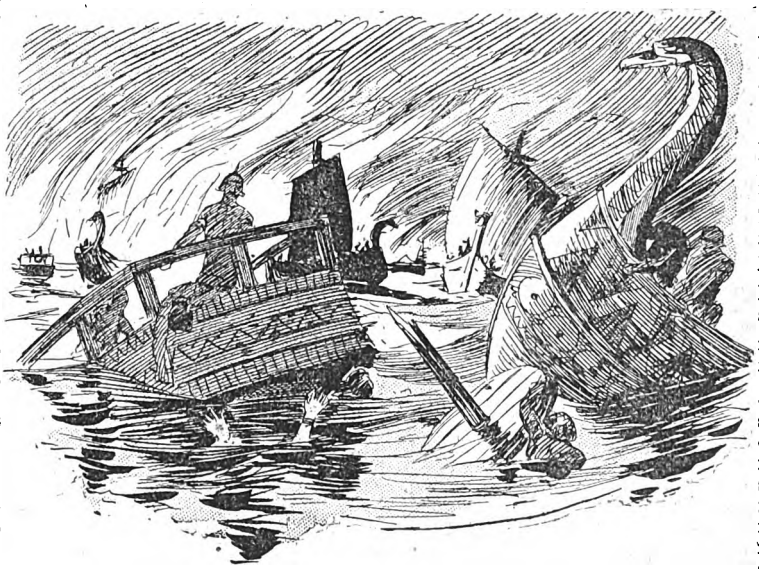
With a long impassioned kiss we parted then, she to her own especial apartment, sacred to herself and her maid Izitla; I to the harbour and the *Ravager's* deck once more, her sweet words ringing musically in my ears as I went: "Go, Arnon, and may the Spirits prosper thee and waft thee safely over the seas and back again to the arms that have waited thee so long and wearily." Loved words, full of heart's-ease for me in the many dreary months that followed.

I need not tell of our voyage, as the ocean gave us no trouble, and we met none of the foe's ships till we sighted the shore of that lovely western land just where the coast-line trends to the south-west in that vast island-studded, isle-starred inlet, round whose lengthy shores sweeps the wide warm current of the Summer River,* carrying its welcome heat to the ice-bound regions of the north.

There, as our fleet was crossing the yellow-weeded stream, we caught first glimpse of the rebel ships, some eighty of them, moored close inshore, and crowded from gangway to rigging with soldiers. Seeing us, they made no effort to warp out, but waited us as they were, supported, we could see, by a land force little inferior to our own.

"Not one of these vessels must escape," I said to my comrades of the *Ravager*; "every wooden ship of them must be burnt, sunk, or captured before ever we land a man. Do you, Atris, go aboard the *Wave-cutter*, take nineteen other craft, and creep down on them, shore-coasting fashion, from the north. You, Valdo, take the *Ocean Wolf* and do likewise from the south; you, Marenso, take forty of the heaviest-laden ships to the rear, and hold aloof till I show the red signal at my mast; and I, with the remaining vessels, will pounce upon these rebels without delay all along their line. What must be done must be done quickly ere they change their minds."

The three leaders sprang into boats and off to their duties at once, and without waiting for them I bore down with my hundred keels upon the expectant foe. This time, however, the fight was more equal, for their ships were crowded with soldiers, and over gangway planks sloping from their decks to the shore they poured fresh men as fast as we hewed them down in front. In the end we must perforce give back, one ship only being fired, and that cut loose and floating out with the ebbing tide, caused us more trouble than a little to give it free sea-room. Then I thought a moment, watching the defiant craft rising and falling slowly on the ground swell, and as I watched a brilliant idea took me. The *Ravager* was the only ship in either fleet now with a sharp iron ram—why not crush these stubborn foes with it in rotation as they tossed thus at my mercy? Atris and Valdo, with their two divisions, were now posted on either flank, behind me was Marenso and his forty sail, as well as the first line. There was no escape for Quitzaal's ships.



There was no escape for Quitzaal's ships.

"Furl sails and out oars!" I cried, and then as that was done: "Orlanis, go below, and make the arms of those rowers ache with pulling harder than they ever pulled before. I take the rudder, and stand clear, all of you, while I pick some peep-holes in these wooden walls! Stand clear! Easy there! Away!" and on shot the *Ravager* shoreward like an arrow from a bow, almost lifted out of the water by the sudden strong impetus of the hundred and fifty oars, and heading straight towards the flagship of the enemy's fleet. I held the rudder rigid when I got her pointed true, and presently, with a thunderous shock and a rasping, tearing, splintering roar, the iron beak cut its way into the side of the stricken, hopelessly injured vessel.

"Back all!" I cried soon as I saw the iron enter. "Back all, and archers and slingers forward!"

The oars eased, wavered a moment, and then seaward we shot again, leaving our enemy a crippled wreck. A score of her crew had leapt on board, but these we soon cut down, and as swiftly as could be I brought the *Ravager* to a standstill and charged at the neighbouring vessel without giving time for any precautionary measures on the rebels' part. Again we held our breath as the good ship gathered way, rushing headlong on her opponent, and again, successfully, we drew back, leaving a shattered hulk behind. A round dozen ships I destroyed in this fashion, and then the rest, disinclined to court a similar fate by their inactivity, cut cables and came out to meet us.

Then we closed on them from all sides, the good old *Ravager* ramming not a few even in motion, and the end of it was that not one of those eighty vessels, the sole remnant of Quitzaal's maritime power, escaped our hands. Those we did not burn we sank, those we did not burn or sink we captured, and having thus removed all hindrance to our movements, we steered a southerly course for a few days, anchoring near a sheltered reach of coast between two sloping, forest-clad hills, on the verge of a fertile country. Here, unmolested, I disembarked my fifty thousand men at arms, with food and war stores, and began my march across this new, strange land.

For awhile we encountered no opposition, either from the

*The Gulf Stream, doubtless, where it emerges from the Gulf of Mexico.

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rebels or the Red Barbarians, which made me uneasy rather than glad, remembering the tactics of Ethiop in the wilds of Nubia, and it was with growing concern that I saw how the foes we ought to have met vanished before us into the inmost inland depths of the thick forest. Deserted barbarian villages we found in plenty as we went, and once the crumbling ruins of an Atlantian town of considerable size, but of friend or foe, whether white or copper-coloured, not a glimpse, not a sign.

I was troubled more than I cared to show to the soldiers, and so was Marenso, who, saying that in his day our sailors had not discovered this western land, lamented that their keels had ever touched its shores.

"When I fell asleep," said he, "Atlantis was united, and strong in her insular security, and peace reigned supreme in all her provinces. With the growth of foreign colonies has come discord, rebellion, and war, when of all things war is the worst that could befall our country. Her people have succumbed to the luxuries brought from distant lands, and are not so hardy now as when I first marshalled their hosts on the upland plains; and now that Nubia is lost to them they feel the absence of the dangerously delectable foods they obtained from thence. If this land of Ulmeca must be lost, too, it were well that it should be lost quickly, so that the generation now upspringing may grow used to the ample if humbler fare of their own fatherland."

To all of which I must needs mournfully assent, adding that of the two evils it were better to leave Ulmeca in the hands of its native savages than in possession of our hostile kindred, who would ever prove a thorn in our side.

For days we marched wearily through the hot region that lies nearest the coast, now crossing parched, sandy plains, now fertile stretches of aromatic shrubs thick-clustered with beautiful wild flowers, now cutting our way through dense copses of high trees, and anon passing a tract of mingled sterility and abundance, showing here a flat, treeless plain and there a patch of the richest bloom and most glossy tropical vegetation, growing in rank profusion. Pressing inland, we next passed large fruitful groves of indigo and vanilla, intermingled with the homely banana, flourishing its shining leaves in the overpowering heat of the vertical solar rays, and higher still, as we advanced, ever ascending a gradual slope, clumps of liquid-amber trees, and through them we gained a glimpse ahead of a range of snow-clad mountain summits towering to the sky.

Towards these, as yet having seen no foe and equally certain that there were none between us and the sea-board, we kept on, and, reaching them, climbed their rough slopes, passing now and then on our upward journey deep and precipitous ravines, whose depths glowed with life and vegetation like that we had left behind, in strange contrast to the table-land we soon reached, thick-grown with oak and pine, larch and cypress, sycamore and cedar. Once on the table-land we struck directly west, in search for the valley where the chief settlement of our countrymen was fixed, and midway across the great level, at the end of a day's tired tramping, coming round the shadow of a spur of limestone rock, the lovely spot burst on our view.

The oval valley,* near seventy leagues in circuit, bound in by huge, looming walls and ramparts of pophyritic rock —an imposing but ineffectual barrier to outside foes—was an idyllic retreat in which to live, and I did not wonder when I saw it that the Governor Quitzaal should have wished to keep it for himself and those with him rather than be overcrowded with extra colonists from Atlantis. At the verge of the valley we encamped for the night, casting many longing glances before we fell asleep at its waving fields of maze and other grain, its cotton plantations, its fruit-hung aloe groves, and its five lakes, shimmering like burnished silver shields in the fading light.

At earliest dawn we were afoot again and marching down the hillside into the great hollow, scaring thousands of bright-plumaged birds from their haunts as we went, no enemy appearing to bar our progress, till we emerged, a week later, upon a level plain at the further side of which our foremost scouts descried a group of buildings of Atlantian character clustered round a pyramidal cone, built after the fashion of our own and the Egyptian tombs of royalty.

Here, suddenly, without any warning, we were attacked by a vast horde of the barbarians—Huacans, as they called themselves—outnumbering our army, now thinned by various causes, by more than two to one, and keeping us in check for the most of a day. But these savages, for all their frightful ugliness, with their reddish cinnamon complexions, straight black hair, slanting eyes, beardless chins, protruding cheek bones, prominent noses and narrow foreheads, were no match for my men's superior weapons and discipline, and were compelled to beat a hasty retreat, leaving thousands of dead on the field of conflict. Yet they fought well, those dusky warriors, and many of my soldiers, I think, who had regarded them lightly before, held a different opinion after that battle!

With all possible speed I pressed onward, feeling sorely the need of horses—of which there were none in Ulmeca, and to which none could well be brought, on account of the difficulty and expense of transport—and by noon we reached the town, the headquarters of the colony where Quitzaal lived, or *had lived;* for we entered only a collection of deserted buildings and empty streets, answering and echoing weirdly to the sound of our footsteps and voices. The wolf had left his lair; the eagle had forsaken his nest!

I ascended the brick-built pyramid, towering upward for the height of thirty full-grown men, and from its summit surveyed the surrounding country. It was a magnificent prospect that met my gaze, revealing the curling blue smoke of several distant savage villages, many little winding streams and tiny lakes, a barren ridge of snow-topped hills to the south, as well as a conical cloud-piercing mountain, and to the north two great burning cones belching fire and fine ash from their flaming throats; but no sign was there of the rebels I had come so far to seek. I came down at last, cursing my luck as I came, and sought counsel with my officers and Marenso as to our wisest course.

"For my part," said Atris, "I say, let us rest here awhile and see if they attack us, finding we do not continue to seek them."

"Yes, and perchance wait here till we grow old, or be surprised by a night attack, or find our retreat cut off and the ships destroyed or gone if we ever get sight of the sea again!" cried Cuzcon, a veteran who had served under Dulo the Ninth. "Art unused to campaigning, my worthy comrade, to advise thusly?"

"So think I," struck in Valdo, "and my way would be to keep forward in the open whenever possible, and make the circuit of the valley."

"And not knowing its passes and defiles, get delayed in its tangled forests, have our men picked off by constant harassing skirmishes, and find ourselves here again, in worse plight than we are now? Good advice, forsooth!" This from Atris hotly.

"I must own that I agree with the last remarks," said another and younger officer, "but I like not the prospect of waiting here to be hemmed in and cut off."

"The more so," I observed, "when, as several of our Huacan prisoners say, the Governor has made league against us with these people, and the Ulmecs too, who were formerly hostile to him. 'Tis my belief that we have only come so far unmolested so that the three allies may gather their forces together to destroy us with one fell stroke while we are too far from the coast to make a safe retreat. But they are counting without knowledge, I

* NOTE.—The Valley of Mexico without a doubt. Arnon's early description, it will be seen, is almost identical with that of the first Spanish conquerors.

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imagine. However, as the oldest of us here by a thousand years, the advice of Marenso would be weighty and welcome. What thinkest thou of this matter, Sleeper?"

"I think with Cuzcon," Marenso answered, "that to wait here were folly; and with Atris that to go further into the interior were equal foolishness. What I advise is to move out upon the open plain outside this empty city and encamp, then liberate some of our Huacan prisoners, first letting them purposely overhear some of our officers say that we are only an advance guard and that within a short time a force as large again will be marching to our relief; and last of all, sternly command the barbarians not to divulge any information they may have learned in our camp. I will wager a dozen gold pieces of the heaviest weight that not many days will pass before the whole rebel army, renegade and savage, will be throwing itself to death upon our spears."

"It shall be done and without delay!" I cried, captivated with the cunning scheme. "Atris, bring in our prisoners, and we will lay the trap forthwith."

All dissension being thus happily averted by Marenso's tact, we waited till the red-faced men were brought in, maturing our plans meantime. There were some half-score of them, fierce, stubborn-looking men, garmented in all their native ruggedness, most of them able, by long familiarity with our settlers, to speak and understand our tongue, yet all obstinately refusing to utter a word, remaining mute as wooden idols 'mid all the jeers that our men made use of in futile effort to cause them to open their lips. A strange race, those Huacans!

"Now what is thy wish, General, concerning these captives?" asked Cuzcon, hustling them forward. "What is thy intent as to these beings who smear themselves with vermilion?"

"Nay; first tell me what you would with such encumbrances," I asked, keeping a straight face in spite of the old war-dog's queer smile.

"What would I do with them?" he re-echoed. "Why, just hang them up by their own bow-strings to the nearest tree."

"How long would such fruit be in coming to a full ripeness?" asked Valdo solemnly.

"Should not wait to discover," said Cuzcon, with a grim gesture, "but should lop them off by the neck as soon as hung, for they have the tint of ripeness upon their cheeks already. But before I twisted the cord to tie them up I should make them shave, for surely men never grew to this age without, in any other land than this!" And even Marenso's solemn face wrinkled into a broad smile at the pointed taunt.

During this colloquy, intended solely to embitter the savages against us, so that they might be trusted to carry any information that we might let fall, not a muscle of their dark visages moved, not an eye flashed, not a sign escaped them.

"'Twill be time to jest," said Marenso, "when the war is done and we are away for home. What is now your will concerning these prisoners? Shall we slay them or let them go?"

"Spirit tongues carry no tidings," muttered Cuzcon, fingering his sword-hilt.

"Silence!" I said, in mock severity, "I am no butcher and this place is not yet a shambles! You know full well that in a week or two we shall be joined by another army from Atlantis and shall then be able to defy these savages and their rebel allies to do their worst. Let them go; before a week is past we can laugh at all their stratagems. Let them go."

As I said this I kept a keen glance, cornerwise, upon the prisoners, and saw a gleam of savage joy flash from eye to eye, lighting their dark faces with a sudden glow of interest, yet so quickly come and gone as to be well-nigh imperceptible.

A chorus of disapproval burst upon my ears when I finished speaking; a cry of loud and angry discontent at my leniency.

"Hang them, or slit their throats!" growled old Cuzcon impatiently.

"Bind them to a tree for sling and arrow practise," said Valdo, with well-assumed coolness.

"Spear them through, nor waste further time," cried Atris bloodthirstily.

"Silence!" I again commanded. "I have given my orders. Let them go free; they are too small game for revenge. And, hark ye!" I said to the savages, as the soldiers cut their thongs, a fresh thought arising, "bear this message from Arnon the Iron-fingered to the white chief you serve, Quitzaal, and Vichri his friend—that I esteem them cowardly poltroons, and that I will search every hill and valley, every cave, every mine, every little town or hamlet, and fire every forest in all this land, before I leave its shores without them, dead or alive. Tell this to the chiefs, who are unfit to lead an army of suckling babes! Now, go with all speed, lest some of my men do you a hurt."

No further telling they needed, but rushed to the portal, out across the silent street, and dashing into the nearest copse swiftly as bullets from a sling, disappeared without so much as a word of gratitude. When they were fairly gone we looked at each other, smiling grimly at our success.

"We shall have all their available force upon us before many days have gone," I chuckled, "and we had better be preparing to greet them right royally. Out upon the plain yonder we shall fare better than cooped mid these deserted houses."

The others, agreeing, laughed, and went out to spread the news.

At sunrise our little force of 45,000, all told, was camped in eager excitement outside the forsaken town, our sentinels being posted on all the rude tracks that converged from the forest. Five days passed without sign of the hidden foe, but on the sixth morning we knew that our plot had succeeded by hearing the long shrill whistle of danger from the outermost sentries placed towards the hills. Soon these sentries were driven in before the advancing lines of the rebel and barbarian host, and by the time our men were set in waiting array, longing to come to closer quarters, the foe had got within reach of our most expert slingers, and a contest of skill between the marksmen raged furiously for over an hour. Then they fell back, waiting, I surmised, for their full number to come up before engaging us in the death-grip, giving us breathing time for further preparation.

Looking back, it seems that I have written much of war and blood and the play of men's fiercer passions, overmuch it may be, to please your sight, O, Unknown Reader! and yet I promise you that above the sound of the shock of spears, the whistle of arrows in darkening clouds, the hissing of bullets, the cries of rage and defiance, of hatred and pain, the tread of flying feet, and the shouts of exultant victory, you shall hear the note of a satisfied vengeance, and the mad despairing shriek of a woman's baffled jealousy. Ah! it seems now as though I wrought once more in that wide, forest-bounded, hill-circled plain, 'mid the surging masses of white men and red, true men and traitors, royalists, renegades, and barbarians, cutting my way through them with that right good sword as through the twisted tangled undergrowth and creepers of a dense, dark wood. Such scenes, such moments, come to few of the sons of earth, and to them but seldom in our scanty span of years, and 'tis no marvel that the recollection of them should remain a clear image on the ruffled pool of memory, when many other things are blurred or altogether missing from the picture.

Yet vivid as that image is, I hover, hesitate, and dally round the recording of it as a bashful youth delays the telling of his love to a wilful maid. Away, ye meditative thoughts, ye nervous tremors, that I may to my story.

Thus went the Battle of Ulmeca.

(To be continued.)

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JUMBLED STORY No. 22.] [See Page 679.

NOVEL SAGO.

The sun sank down in the sky, and twilight came round, until the morning sun rose up in the sky.

He leant back in his chair, and threw his black crown to the soles of her white feet. A girdle of comfort stole over him. He opened them again.

"Oh, that's good," he cried. "Ha, ha! Why, dare you speak so. Who are you?"

"The fierce beasts of the forest shall hear the song.

"I will write a Song of Love," cried the Poet, and all nations, and all kindreds shall take up the Song of Love, and turn from the trail.

The Poet sank down on the lounge. He looked sharply, as though he would strike the other.

He closed his eyes. A delightful sense of sound of the clashing of steel, and the neighing of long watches of the night, and worked the hours searched for Love. He looked in the palaces of kings, gazed at the beautiful queen. Days went by and, he looked in the hovels of paupers.

The Poet shut down the window and walked out of the house, he cared not whither.

One morning, there came into the gallery a little throne, clad all in sheening white, a smile on her card, and the name was the name on the picture.

And Love smiled from her eyes.

And as he gazed at the Queen of Love, the words float up into the air, and the great birds of prey leave the green grass untouched.

The Poet gazed at her for a moment, horror shall ring out on the silent air, and all men, and horses, and the shrieks of men, shall float the music of Love."

"The king shall hear it as he sits upon his throne of Love, and the soldiers shall drop their swords to happiness.

"And the gentle deer shall raise their heads, and old Faith shall be new.

But Love does not come when he is called. Some crossed before her, white, entrancing.

"The queen at his side shall hear the words of earth, and all shall be still, as the last sweet notes wrote again a new Song of Love. And Love guided over the earth, but still the Poet sat in his seat and stricken. His blood seemed to freeze in his veins. Well, she's fine, ain't she?"

"She seems about to knock you over—my Queen. "A Song of Love" in his hand, he read it through into the eyes of the queen. It seemed that Love days passed into weeks, and always the Poet was at a house near by. He pushed open a door.

"And outside in the courtyard the princes shall cease their rush for gold."

A queen stood before him on the steps of her couch, smoking, and drinking brandy. Her hair was the Song of Love.

And then—why then he saw Love smiling down on his hand, he wrote across the paper: "The Song for the last time. He laid it on the coals.

The little man laughed loudly.

And the flames licked it up.

"And all that is black shall be white. And the precious stones encircled her waist. Her arms were done up untidily on the top of her head. She leered "and all the world shall hear it."

"Is it possible," he groaned, "that *you* created hair away from his high, white forehead.

The artist did not mind.

He sat down at the table, and taking his pen in his hand, and inspiration flowed from his pen.

Then with a loud cry he rushed from the room.

Presently, weary, footsore, and hungry, he saw an garret window. The roar of the London traffic shall listen, and pause in their flight, and poise, from tree to tree, and remain very still.

"Above the din of the battlefield, above the room. A woman, painted, hideous, was lying on a open door before him. He entered, and passed *her?*"

The Poet's dream dissolved away.

"The great, new city of Babylon shall hear the man with untidy, flowing hair. He strode up to the ground."

"Don't speak to me," he cried. "Begone!"

Very beautiful were the words of the Poet, and come with me, I will show you my model."

So he laid down his pen, and went out into the words that I shall sing, and for a space men will listen, and their games shall be forgotten.

"And peace shall fall on the land, and joy, and sweet was his music. He wrote on through the bright, sunlit streets. Throughout the long day he had deserted them. He looked at the artist.

But the little man laughed more loudly than came up from the streets.

He took the Poet by the arm, and led him into wondering, over the earth.

The Poet rose from his chair, and threw open his lips, her glistening hair falling down from her golden first words of the song, gently, softly, and through a hall, and sank down on a velvet lounge.

"So come to me, Love," cried the Poet, "and guide him from the eyes of a beautiful woman.

That night, he made a fire in his room, and taking his post, adoring, worshipping.

"And the music of the song," he cried, "shall thou art."

"And men shall hold their breath.

"Yes, man," he said, "that's so. If you care to man that picture's mine. I painted it."

"What do you mean?" he said sharply. "How before. "Here's proof," he cried, and drew out a thing was lacking in the Poet's song.

"The little sparrows shall hear it as they flutter and rules his land.

"Then, from the silence, shall come again the then louder and louder, till the triumphant strain of the song shall die away.

The Poet, dazed and trembling, advanced into the the Poet, and stared at him insolently.

"Then a great quietness shall come over the at her visitor, showing her broken teeth.

The Poet rose to his feet, and drew his arm back my hand, that I may write of thee, and tell men what of his song framed themselves in his mind. He fiercely backwards and forwards across his room.

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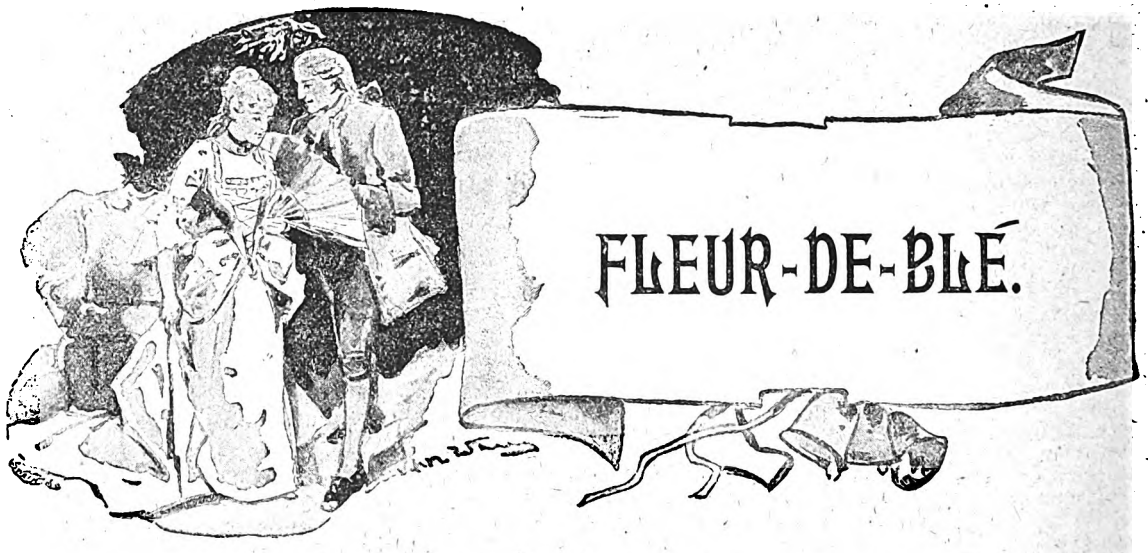

FLEUR-DE-BLÉ.

It was the eve of Saint Nicholas, and grand preparations were going on for the next day's celebration at a certain house in the market-place of the little village of Wavre, belonging to the baker, Hans Jans.

Upstairs, in the large room with the two windows, over the shop, the light of a great fire and a tiny night-lamp glistened on the polished oak of the handsome spare bed with its pink beflowered curtains, in which Jans' little daughter, Fleur-de-Blé, was lying.

Grandmamma Jans from time to time placed another log upon the fire, carefully turning over the blazing coals, and, pushing back her spectacles over the brown bands which she wore upon her white hair, she went softly to the bed.

"Fleur," she said gently, opening the curtains. And the red lamp threw its light upon Fleur-de-Blé, cuddled down under the bedclothes, with only her tiny little arms and face showing.

Twice since the great tall clock in the shop had struck seven, calling Fleur-de-Blé, and the child had not awakened.

She kept hearing the tinkling of the little bell at the shop door, which rang every time a customer came in; and a great many customers were coming in that evening, for everyone knew that Jans made the finest gingerbread men in the whole village.

And every time the bell rang, Grandmamma Jans would wonder if it were for a six-sous man, or one for a franc. Those that sold for a franc had white-sugared hair and pink-sugared cheeks, while the six-sous men were nothing but dough.

Hans ought to have made some two-franc men, too, for there will always be people willing to pay two francs when their neighbours pay only one. Madame Jans stood behind the counter, waiting on the customers and looking askance at the boys outside, who with noses red and hands in their pockets, were gathered about the shop window, admiring the gingerbread men; while Jans in the baking-room was saying:

"Come, boys! On with the dough! I'm going to make Fleur's man now."

And through the window of the little back room, Madame Jans could see Hans, with his bare arms, in his white blouse and white trousers, coming and going in the ruddy light among the baker boys bending over the kneading-trough.

He took the largest of the moulds, buttered it, poured the dough in slowly, and plunged it quickly into the oven. "Ah, Fleur," thought Madame Jans, "what a handsome gingerbread man your papa is making for you! There is not another man in all Wavre who can give such a shape to dough. I certainly couldn't have done better, being myself a baker's daughter, than marry Hans."

Jans at this very moment was drawing out from the burning coals a magnificent gingerbread man, smoking and light, which he detached from the pan with a sharp blow, and laid on a shelf sprinkled with flour. He was a portly gentleman in small clothes, with a mitred cap upon his head, a queue down his back, a cane with a bishop's cross in his hand, and pockets overflowing with toys. On his buckled shoes there was a scroll, and printed on it these words:

"Saint Nicholas."

Then he put pink icing on the cheeks and nose of the saint, sprinkled aniseed over his peruke, spread chocolate on his coat, and currant jelly on his waistcoat, powdered the cross and cap with gold-dust, and put a layer of white sugar on his hands and stockings; then he called his wife, and showed her his masterpiece, saying:

"See, Annette, the gingerbread is thick with citron, orange and raisins. I wouldn't sell this Saint Nicholas for five francs, for I might not be able to make another one so well for ten."

Fleur-de-Blé awoke suddenly, saying in her soft little voice:

"Grandmamma, I smell something good. Has Saint Nicholas been here yet?"

This little voice of Fleur's seemed like the last vibrations of sharply-struck crystal, when one hears nothing but a sound dying away.

"No, my child," replied Grandmamma Jans, putting the little arms under the bedclothes. "Saint Nicholas hasn't come yet, but he is going his rounds about town and that is what smells so good."

"Grandmamma, what makes it smell good when Saint Nicholas goes his rounds?"

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"Because Papa Jans is baking his gingerbread men in the oven. He has some six-sous men and some for a franc. Won't you have a little drink?"

"Grandmamma," replied the child, "I have had a dream. I dreamed that Saint Nicholas came for me in my bed. And he had a long beard like that picture of our Lord that Godmother Dictus gave me. And I said: 'Good-morning, Saint Nicholas, patron of good children.' And he said to me, grandmamma, just like this: 'Fleur-de-Blé, I am indeed your patron, for you are a good little girl, and I like good little children. Come with me.' And I said: 'Where, good Saint Nicholas?' and he said: 'Come.' Mamma gave me a pretty white dress, and said she would come later. And when I entered paradise there were little boys and girls there, all in white, playing. And they took me in their arms, and told me they were always at play, night and morning, and they had playthings that our Lord gave them, ever so much prettier than those papa gave me last New Year. And the little girls had dolls as large as they were, and that could courtesy and say: 'Thank you, madam.' Then Saint Nicholas kissed me, and said: 'Play, my child. I love you dearly. You shall have a doll, too, that will say: "Thank you, madam."' And then, grandmamma, I smelt something good and I woke up."

"Here is Dr. Trousseau coming to bid you good-morning, Fleur-de-Blé," said Grandmamma Jans suddenly.

The Doctor opened the door, and going straight to the bed, said:

"It is Papa Trousseau, come to see how you are, my dear. Let's feel that little pulse. Hum-hum-m; and now for the tongue. Your cheeks are flushed, little one. There has been some excitement going on. Ah, yes. I know now. Saint Nicholas' Eve. That's it."

He puts his hands to the child's heart and then his ear, and his eyes suddenly began to roll under his heavy grey eyebrows, like the ball the men play ninepins with at "The Headless Rooster."

Just then Jans and his wife came in like shadows, one behind the other, on tiptoe, and holding their breath, and Dr. Trousseau began to whistle softly to conceal his anxiety.

Then, taking his hat and umbrella, he dashed off to the vicarage to let the vicar know.

Now, the vicar was very fond of the Jans' and used to dine with them often on Sundays in the summer.

By-and-bye, the vicar, with his three-cornered cap on one side, opened the door of the little shop and said to Papa and Mamma Jans, who were counting up their day's sales, laying the sous and francs each in a little pile of their own:

"Here I am, as you see. How do you do, Madame Jans? I've come to see if Fleur-de-Blé has put her little wooden shoes in the chimney corner."

"Why, it is Monsieur le Vicaire," said Jans, taking his pipe from his mouth and leading him into the little back parlour. "Grandmother Jans will be very glad to see you."

Just then the door of the room above was opened, and Grandmamma Jans cried quickly:

"Hans! Hans!"

"Oh, yes, I know," said Jans. "Fleur-de-Blé keeps calling for me every minute to have me tell her about Saint Nicholas, the dear angel. Come upstairs, Monsieur le Vicaire."

"Dear, dear!" cried grandmamma, when she saw them. "Fleur-de-Blé has just got up, and she wants to go down in the market-place. Your blessing, Monsieur le Vicaire."

Fleur-de-Blé, with wide opened eyes, was gazing towards the windows with a vacant stare.

"Fleur!" cried Jans like a madman, and he laid the little child down in the warm blankets again.

Monsieur le Vicaire, turning towards Jans, saw that he was as white as the sheets on the bed, and that his hands were trembling.

Fleur-de-Blé gently closed her eyes and fell asleep, but her little hands, as transparent as a night-lamp in which a light is burning, moved idly in vague gesture on the counterpane.

"Courage, Jans," said the vicar, gently laying his hand on his shoulder. "Think of our Saviour Who suffered the Passion."

But Jans, with haggard eyes, was looking at his child and did not hear him.

Then Fleur began to move her lips softly, as if she were whispering to someone on the other side of the night, and at last she said:

"I am Fleur-de-Blé, the daughter of Jans, the baker, who lives in the market-place."

She was silent a moment, and then went on: "Good-morning. Always at play. Dolls. Thank you, madam."

Her voice was like the softest note of a violin, and while she spoke a wan little smile was on her lips, which seemed like a little light cloud melting away in the night. Jans saw her pretty little arm emerge from the sheets, and she waved her hand slowly, as she did for a bow when she used to say her little pieces.

Then, after half-an-hour, Fleur-de-Blé awoke again.

"Hasn't Saint Nicholas come yet?" she asked.

"No, Fleur," said Jans. "Saint Nicholas never comes before midnight."

"Oh, that is very long," said the little child. "But he comes from far away, and his reindeer are tired. Papa, you must get an armchair for Saint Nicholas, and a smaller one for the reindeer."

"Indeed, I will," said Jans. "I'll let Saint Nicholas have the handsome armchair that stands in the corner—the one Aunt Catherine has when she comes to see us at Christmas."

And at about eleven o'clock, Jans went downstairs to prepare the Saint Nicholas gifts for Fleur-de-Blé. He had bought a large doll, with eyes of mother-of-pearl, blonde hair, and a jointed body; and a cradle too, lined with blue satin, and hanging from a crescent moon. He had paid fifteen francs for it all.

He put the doll in the cradle and arranged the doll's clothes in a large box—the silk mantle, the barege dress, and the rose-coloured hat. And he laughed softly to himself, thinking of the joy of his Fleurette, for handling all these pretty things had brought back a little happiness into his heart.

He took off his shoes and went upstairs twice in his stocking-feet; the first time to carry the plates of bonbons, the second to carry the doll, the cradle, and the box of doll's clothes. And he put them all in the little room next to that in which Fleur-de-Blé was lying.

And Fleur slept on.

"I want to see her when she gets her Saint Nicholas presents," said the vicar to Grandmamma Jans. "That is what I'm staying for."

But that is not why the vicar stayed. He drew his breviary from his pocket, and his lips moving softly in an inaudible manner, he began to read near the little lamp. But from time to time the vicar looked at Fleur-de-Blé, and then he would say in a half whisper, closing the book with his finger in it to keep the place: "O Lord, have mercy on these poor people."

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When midnight came, Fleur-de-Blé heard a noise in the house, and, opening her eyes, she asked if it wasn't Saint Nicholas coming down the chimney. And Jans, who knew very well that it was the boys in the oven-room, said, as he raised his flour-besprinkled eyebrows, that he certainly thought he could hear the reindeers' hoofs. And he added:

"I'll go and see in a minute."

He put his ears to the door, with his head forward, as if he were listening attentively, and then went downstairs with long, slow strides, and an air of the greatest mystery.

And suddenly, from below, they could hear loud cries of joy.

It was Jans saying: "Fleur, my little Fleur, he has come! Open your little hands!" And when he returned, he was carrying the armchair, the one that Aunt Catherine used to sit in, and on it were the cradle, the doll, the box, the gingerbread man, and the plates of sweetmeats.

"Thank you, Saint Nicholas. Thank you, for Fleur," he called down the staircase.

And when the child saw the pretty doll and the cradle, her little lips broke into a smile, as a flower opens to the sun.

Then Jans showed her the dust on the armchair (he had put it there himself from his dusty shoes), and said, laughing with all his heart:

"See here are the footprints of Saint Nicholas' steeds!"

Soon after Fleur-de-Blé dropped her head like a stone bruised tree whose sap is oozing away, and, pale against the whiteness of the great pillow, with her pretty, sad smile still upon her lips, she fell asleep.

A heavy silence filled the house, the shop clock struck one, and a dog could be heard howling in a neighbouring yard.

"Monsieur le Vicaire," said Grandmamma Jans, clasping her hands, "I fear that there is a great sorrow coming down upon this house."

"Grandmamma Jans," replied the vicar, raising his hands towards Heaven, "we must think of God, with Whom all things are possible."

And as the minutes went by silence grew deeper and deeper about the great bed, where the darling of the household was asleep. Outside, the snow was falling against the panes with a soft rustling of a bird who wants to come in. And Jans, like a man in a fever, with his teeth chattering, repeated over and over to himself the name of his little Fleur.

While these things were going on at the Jans', a bright, cheerful glow was lighting up one of the rooms in Butcher Canu's house. Dolls and wooden horses covered the big table and everywhere were flags and pipes and drums.

Suddenly the good man, who was putting on his night-cap, said to his wife as he looked towards the Jans':

"Indeed it doesn't seem natural. I see shadows coming and going on the white curtain. If Fleur was as strong as our own little girls we wouldn't need to worry, but she is like a bit of down blown by the wind."

In all the houses everywhere, in town or country, the little children of the poor and of the rich were fast asleep, dreaming, with their heads on their arms, of the toys and sweetmeats they would find on awaking.

Grandmamma Jans had let her knitting fall on her lap, and was dozing by the fire, her spectacles on her nose. But neither Papa nor Mamma Jans thought of sleep, they stood in front of the bed, with clasped hands, not daring to look at each other for fear of letting their tears be seen. And the vicar, with hands clasped like them, said: "Fleur's breathing is like the sound of a church bell as the summer wind carries it far into the country when it is about to cease."

The little child slumbered on so quietly that nothing was heard in the room but the crackling of the oil in the lamp and the heavy breathing of Grandmamma Jans.

When the good old lady awoke she was astonished at first to find that the Vicar was still there, but as she saw Papa and Mamma Jans on their knees near Fleur, she drew out her large checked handkerchief, and began weeping in it with the sobs of a little child.

At that very moment Fleur-de-Blé awoke, and, very softly, so softly that Grandmamma Jans, who was slightly deaf, could not hear her, she murmured:

"Good-morning, St. Nicholas."

And then still more softly:

"Morning, papa, mamma, gran'm'ma."

She slept till dawn. And as the day came, her life, like a chilly bird returning to the sunny lands when the cold winds blow, returned to the great light.

Softly the light went out. And awesome sadness passed over the old furniture so often caressed by her little hands. The ivory Christ on the wall seemed to bend beneath the cross.

It was the hour when cocks crow. The children of Wavre awakened earlier than usual, went listening at the door to see if there were any noises in the house.

A cry rang out in the chamber.

"Ah, vicar!" cried Jans, throwing himself into the arms of the priest.

"Jans, Fleur has just entered Paradise!" replied the vicar.

And never from that day to this has poor Monsieur Jans ever made any more gingerbread men for St. Nicholas' Day.

CAMILLE LEMONNIER.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AFTER THE CHAIN WAS BROKEN.

"'WILL he die?' I hope so, my lady—when he's about eighty. God bless him! We can't spare such a man as he is. Now, please, my lady. The bottle, and you'll see a glass. Bring two, please, and that water jug."

Olive sprang to her feet, and easily found what was wanted, when Rancer, after a business-like glance at the label, removed the stopper, and poured two small portions of the clear liquid into glasses, added water, and offered one glass to Lady Braetoun, but she made an impatient gesture.

"Yes: drink it, my lady. You want it, too. Don't waste time. It's only what you would call *sal volatile*. And you must hold up."

She drank the contents of the glass without a word, and then, in obedience to another order, fetched a sofa cushion, which she placed beneath Murray's head as the man raised him up and lowered him down again, prior to beginning to trickle, a little at a time, the stimulant between his parted lips.

"Beg pardon, my lady," whispered Rancer meaningly; "wouldn't you like to wash your hands?"

Olive glanced down, and then shuddered, for they were terribly marked, and she hurriedly went to the little mahogany stand and began to remove the traces there.

"His blood—stained with his blood," she thought; and the horror of her position began to reassert itself, and the desire to escape from the place; but with it came a passionate feeling of anger against her husband which she could not restrain, and she walked firmly back to where Rancer knelt with the glass still in his hand, ready to look up and give her a nod, as much as to say:

"He's coming round."

A few minutes later there were hasty steps in the hall, then a slight, tall, and grey, elderly man entered and closed the door after him.

"Dr. Murray!" he said. "Good Heavens! how was this?"

He glanced first at Rancer and then at Olive, with a curious, inquisitive light in his searching eyes which made her shrink and the angry stubborn feeling increase.

"Patient, sir," said Rancer quickly. "Old patient, sir. Touch of D.T. again. Got away from home. Mad sort of fit, and shot at my master. Ball through the left scapula. Lung untouched. Another ball cut deep furrow in the inner part of left arm."

The surgeon darted another quick glance at Olive, one full of dislike, as he took in her beautiful, agitated features, and the hot, indignant blood began to mantle in her pale face.

"Humph! *Cherchez la femme*," he said to himself, as he went down on one knee and began to examine his patien carefully. "Poor fellow! How could he be such a fool I shouldn't have thought it of him."

Rancer placed a chair for Lady Braetoun, but she shook her head and stood looking on, and then shivered, for there was a slight trembling about the victim's eyelids, and a twitching of the lips.

"Plugged entrance and exit, Rancer?" said the surgeon, with a quick look.

"Yes, sir."

"How near to the articulation of the arm-bone?"

"Very close, sir."

"Shattered?"

"Can't say, sir. I only tried to stop the bleeding."

"Quite right. What's in that glass?"

"Ammonia, sir."

There was another examination, and Olive became aware now of the fact that Murray's eyes had opened wildly, that he was conscious of what was going on, and that there was a wistful, imploring look directed at her which made her tremble; but the eyes closed again, and she saw that he had relapsed into insensibility.

"I don't think I'll disturb these bandages for the present. The shock is bad enough, and the bleeding has stopped. You had better order a bed to be made up for him here at once, madam. Safer than moving him upstairs."

"Oh!" cried Olive wildly; "then you think his wounds dangerous?"

"H'm—no, not dangerous, but bad enough for so highly strung and nervous a man. You must have a nurse sent for, but I suppose you will wish to nurse him to some extent yourself?"

"I? Impossible."

"I beg pardon. I was under the impression that you were Mrs. Murray, though I was——"

"I am Lady Braetoun, sir," said Olive with dignity; and she darted a look of resentment at the speaker.

"And the insane patient——?"

"I cannot explain or say any more to you than you have already been told."

"No, no, madam, of course not," said the surgeon hurriedly. "I will send on a nurse, with your permission."

"I have no authority to give permission, sir," she said coldly. "Pray do what is necessary to save Dr. Murray's life. I came on here in dread lest anything should occur, my husband being in so excited a state, but I was too late."

"Pray do not trouble yourself to make these explanations, madam," said the doctor as coldly; and the air of half contempt, half dislike, intensified as he looked at her. "I will go now, and send in a nurse, and as soon as she comes I must ask you——as a friend of Dr. Murray?"

"Yes, sir: Dr. Murray is an old friend of my husband."

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"Exactly. I will ask you then to see that the arrangement I have ordered is made."

"If it is necessary—yes."

The surgeon shrugged his shoulders.

"I will stay, sir," she said, with another flash of resentment, and as she turned from him she caught Rancer's eyes, and saw that he was watching with a peculiar look as if the surgeon's manner had influenced him, and her father's nature within her roused a stubborn feeling approaching recklessness.

In her terribly excited state anger was now taking the place of fear, and she listened to what more the surgeon had to say without a word, watching his various acts, as it were, in a stubborn silence, till he bowed coldly, and left her with Rancer, whose manner now seemed quite changed.

No: she determined she would not—she could not—go now, and leave Murray dying, let them—let the whole world, think what it would; she could bear it.

For a brief time a creeping sensation of pain came over her as she thought of Braetoun and the pistol he had taken with him; but it passed off, for she felt that he would not use it against himself. His true nature seemed to be unveiling itself more and more before her. His past infidelities she had been ready to forgive, and had forgiven; but this last threat to return to the only woman who had ever loved him, and the cruel insults which had accompanied it, in the presence of Murray, seemed to break the last tie between them.

"He has cast me off. I cannot go back now."

In spite of herself she turned to look at him who lay there pale and motionless, and mingled with the horror with which she regarded the cause of her anguish, there was a curious feeling of pity—for what had been his sin?

She turned from him, though, frightened, but only for the anger to return.

Rancer was looking at her furtively, and, feeling that she divined his thoughts, she forced herself to try and think of her plan of action. But again her ideas were diverted back to the present, for Rancer spoke.

"I don't think you need be quite so much alarmed, my lady," he said; "and I should be very grateful if you would give me orders what to do, for I feel too much upset to plan. I oughtn't to send for the police, ought I?"

"The police? No!" she said in an excited whisper.

"Thank you, my lady. Then we've settled that: it's one thing off my mind. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me what you think about sending for someone else to come."

Ah, yes; send for someone else. Why had she not thought of this before—her father?

She was about to request the man to send at once, but a strange feeling of dread assailed her.

Send for him to come and find her there? She felt that she could not. A few hours earlier it would have appeared to her as the most natural thing for her to do; but all that was changed. She had been charged with being one of the most guilty of creatures; doctor and servant had evidently looked upon her as the mainspring of the tragedy, and, if she sent for her father, what guarantee had she that he would not think the same?

Impossible? No, he would find her there, learn that Braetoun had followed and found her.

Roderick had attacked and nearly killed Murray.

No, she dared not send for her father to come there; he might doubt her. Why not, when in her despair she was almost beginning to doubt herself, and feel that Murray's passionate declaration of his love had in some way made her a partner of his guilt?

Turning to Rancer, she asked what friends there were of Murray's near.

"None, my lady," said the man, as he still seemed to look at her curiously. "Master has so few friends. There are his two cousins—two maiden ladies."

"Yes? Then they must be fetched at once."

"But they went to Florence about a month since, my lady. I posted a letter for them from my master only about three days ago."

Olive clasped her hands in anguish. What should she do? She must not stay, though the feeling was upon her that if she went and left Murray to the care of some paid nurse, and he died, she would always feel that she was to blame.

Then a thought came. His old schoolfellow.

"Mr. Daines," she cried.

"Ah, yes. I did not think of him, my lady. Shall I fetch him?"

"Yes," cried Olive, on the impulse of the moment, and the man hurried out, while as the door closed she started toward it to arrest him, but it was too late.

She ran to the window to tap as Rancer went by, but he had gone in the other direction, and she turned, now, to stand trembling and watching the recumbent figure, looking so ghastly and strange in the gloomy room.

It was horrible! Alone with him like that. Every action on her part seemed to be compromising her more and more. But she felt that she could not stir. Once she went to the bell to ring for one of the maids, but her hand fell to her side, and at last she walked slowly to Murray to stand gazing down at him, finding him look so cold and still that the fancy came that he must be dead; and as if drawn to him, she sank down on one knee to listen for his breath.

But she could hear nothing, neither could she see the slightest movement; and, trembling more with horror, she at last stretched out a hand to touch his forehead.

It was cold and damp, and, wild now with fear, her hand glided to his wrist, and she felt for the pulse there, but felt in vain. Still it was warm, and she let her fingers glide to his hand; that felt moist and warm too.

The touch slightly roused Murray, who opened his eyes slowly, and looked at her vacantly. Then the light of recognition came into them, and as she loosened her grasp and shrank away, he smiled at her sadly and closed his eyes once more.

An hour passed slowly, during which Murray did not move but seemed to sleep, and then a cab stopped at the door, and she ran to the window in time to see Daines get out and come limping up to the door, Rancer following; then there was the rattle of the latchkey, steps in the hall, and Olive waited for her husband's old schoolfellow to enter.

"Thank Heaven you have come!" she cried, as she held out her hand.

He did not seem to see it, but bowed stiffly, and went by her to kneel down by his friend.

"How has he been?" Daines said sharply, but he had to repeat his question, and he looked up angrily.

"Dr. Murray has only opened his eyes once," said Olive, in a low, choking voice which she vainly tried to make steady.

"But where is the nurse? One was to have been here and a bed prepared."

She gave him a resentful look, but answered humbly enough:

"I could do nothing until Dr. Murray's servant returned."

"No, I suppose not," he said, bending lower over the motionless figure; "but something must be done at once. Will you go now, Lady Braetoun? I'll take charge of my poor friend. You cannot stay here."

"No," she said piteously, "I cannot stay here; but can I not help—can I not do something before I go?"

"You've done harm enough as it is," said Daines to himself, as he bent lower. Then without looking up—"No, I don't see that you can do anything, madam. Poor fellow! he seems pretty well at death's door, and it is our duty to keep that door shut if we can. If he comes to and sees you here it will only make matters worse."

"Mr. Daines," whispered Olive wildly; "you do not understand."

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"I understand all I want to," he replied bitterly. "Rancer, here, has told me that Braetoun came and surprised you together. There, it is of no use to mince matters now. It is very terrible, but I suppose it is quite in the fashion, and Braetoun has only himself to blame."

"Mr. Daines, I cannot explain to you," she cried, in a suffocating voice, "but you are misjudging me horribly, and some day you will bitterly regret all this."

"I hope I shall," he said coldly; "but, excuse me, it is my duty to do the best for the poor fellow, and the first thing is to obtain quiet."

"But Mr. Daines—" she whispered, with her lips quivering; but he broke out angrily.

"In Heaven's name, pray go, madam!" he cried. "I want to save his life if I can. I will stay with him and see that everything possible is done. You have no carriage, I saw; let Rancer get you a cab."

He went to the door and spoke to the man, who was waiting; and, too much stunned by the increase of suffering, Olive stood gazing after him till the door opened again.

"The cab I came in is waiting," he said. "Lady Braetoun ——oh, I have no right to speak," he cried sharply.

"You cannot wound me more deeply than you have done," she replied quietly. "What were you about to say?"

"I was going to implore you not to go back to your own home. There is enough of tragedy here as it is. You had better go straight to your father's house, at once; and for Heaven's sake, madam, make a clean breast of it, and ask his advice as to what had bet.er be done."

"Make a clean breast of it," said Olive, as she sank back in her cab; "I must be guilty then, indeed, if everyone judges me like this. Father will not judge me as others do. But when he knows all, what will he say?"

Nothing: for a new agony awaited her on reaching Eaton Place. Isaac Emsworth was quite insensible, and a month of careful nursing elapsed before he knew a portion of the truth, that which made him swear that at all hazards his child should stay in her old home. By which time Murray had nearly recovered his strength.

CHAPTER L.

Down at Sandiwell.

"It's a wonderful thing, that whitewashing, Baby. Fancy him being sold up and saving that house of his, and going on again just as if nothing had happened. Ah, it's a wonderful thing, is the law."

"Be quiet, Auntie. I don't like to hear you talk like that."

"I must talk a bit, my dear, about what's on my mind."

"But you don't understand anything about it."

"Oh, yes I do, my dear; a little bird tells me a deal, and I hear more than you think. I can't get over it, Baby. He never did beayve to you as he ought, and how you can go on as you do caps me. You ain't no more sperrit than a mouse."

"Be quiet, Auntie; but if you must talk, say something about going with me."

"No, my dear; you don't ketch me on the box of one of them nasty top-heavy gentlemen's stage coach things again. I might get my neck broke, and I suppose they couldn't mend that. And do you know, my dear, I think you'd better give it up. There's a gnawing in my broken arm, and I'm sure as sure we're going to have rain, and if we do it will last all the week."

"Oh Auntie, who wants you to go on a drag? And it's lovely."

"Course it is, my dearest, always is just when it's going to be as bad as bad. That's Nature's own nasty deceitful way, coaxing you into putting on your best frocks, and then down she comes upon 'em and turns your bonnet into a wisp."

"But you can't tell that the weather's going to be bad, Auntie, and I must go."

"Can't tell? Why, my arm kept me awake half the night. The shooting pains was horrible, just starting from the nubble you can feel in the bone, where it growed together again."

"Poor dear Auntie!"

"Ah, you may well say that, my dear. I suffer agonies with it sometimes. I'm sure the doctor left a splint of a bone in it, and never took it out, after it was getting better."

"Impossible, Auntie."

"Ah, you don't know, my dear. I heard 'em talking about the splints when it was set, and the bone wouldn't shoot like that if there hadn't been a sharp bit left in."

"But I must go, Auntie. I want to see the race. Do, do, say you'll come."

"I don't want to go out, Baby, till week after next, and then as things are so slack it'll be just the time for our bit o' ollerday. We'll have three weeks at Margate, and stay at the hotel, and then there'll be no worry about cooking or anything. I do hate those lodging-letting people and their nasty ways of sticking it into you for extries, and sampling your tea, coffee, and things till it's shameful. A dozen o' stout never means more'n ten bottles, if it don't nine. Never mind the race."

"Oh, I must see the race, Auntie. I've have heard all about it from Mr. Daines: he says that it's poor Rod's last chance, and that if the mare doesn't pull it off he is utterly ruined."

"And a good job too. Serve him precious well right, for the way he has behaved to you."

"Oh, Auntie—Auntie!"

"And Baby, Baby! And a precious baby you, for going on thinking about him after his cruel ways to you. Throwing you over again as he has."

"You don't know, Auntie. He has been so ill again."

"But I just do, my dear, for I've got it all out of Mr. Daines when he's been sitting chatting to me."

"Mr. Daines has been abusing Rod to you!" cried the girl, with her eyes flashing.

"No, nor he ain't been abusing my lord to me neither. Mr. Daines never told me anything but what I regularly dragged out of him, but I did find out about my lord being separated from his wife. Mr. Daines is a very good little man, though he has sometimes got a tongue like a razor that's been dipped in vitriol."

Lucy started; her lips parted, and she stared wildly at her aunt.

"But he can't help that. It's all on account of his being different to most people. But I like him, though he does laugh at me; and he loves you, my dear, and if you weren't such a little silly you'd say yes! to him, and be Mrs. Cyrus Daines, as you might be any day you liked."

"Yes, he has been setting you to worry me now," said Lucy disdainfully.

"Never a word. He bears it all like a lamb, and regular suffers to see you think of nothing but that good-for-nothing scamp of a lord, as has thrown you over disgraceful again and again."

Lucy turned her face away, fighting hard to keep down her resentment.

"I'm obliged to speak, for it is disgraceful. Fine dresses and diamonds one time, and let you starve in a gutter the next for all he'd care. Never a shilling sent to you now."

"I don't want his money," said Lucy bitterly.

"No more don't I, and if he'd sent anything we'd have sent it back in a jiffy. We can be quite independent of him, and so I tell my lord. You ain't got a bit o' pride in you, Baby."

"Oh, do leave off, Auntie."

"Shan't. It puts my back up. If he'd chucked you as he did to marry his pretty young wife and stick to her, hard it would have been on you, my precious—but being a lord and no money to keep it up unless he married some, as I s'pose a lord must, I wouldn't ha' said a word—though he might ha' done worse than marry you, for there's a heap of

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money in you, Baby, and you wouldn't ha' been too proud to go on the stage now and then when he run short, though you were his wife. I know you, my pet. You'd ha' worked your fingers to the bone for him, even if you had been my lady, as he ought to have made you."

The tears began to trickle down Lucy's cheeks now.

"But it wasn't to be, and I'm glad of it, for he's one o' that sort as thinks o' nothing but himself. He's behaved shameful to his young wife, same as he has to you, and from what I can hear she's just such a poor fondling kitten of a thing as you are. Don't think about him any more."

"But about Mr. Daines?" said the girl, with a flash of resentment in her eyes.

"No, nor about him neither. Think about your own dear pretty self, and a little bit about your poor old auntie, who'll do anything to make you happy. Now look here, Baby; if you'll only be a good girl, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll chuck up the business, and we'll go and live retired where you like. Paris in France, where it's nice and gay, and plenty of theaytres to remind us of the old days, or we'll have a trip to Switzerland if you like, so long as you don't want me to climb no mountings."

"No, no, Auntie, I only want to go and see this race. I want the mare to win, dear, and save him from ruin."

"Why?"

"Because I love him, Auntie, and always shall. You wouldn't like me to be a miserable, light thing without a bit of heart in me, now, would you?"

"Why, of course not, my precious," cried the old woman, as Lucy threw herself in her lap, and hid her face upon her shoulder, clasping her neck. "Why, of course not, my own darling. Oh, what a baby it is! You're quite a bit of a girl still."

"But if I did turn all that was bad, and never came near dear old Auntie, you'd love me all the same? I know you would."

"Why of course I should, my pet," sobbed the old woman; and she began to rock her to and fro, as if expecting her to cry herself to sleep. "There, I've done. It's all right, Baby; we'll go to the race, and I hope he'll win after all."

"Ah!" cried Lucy joyfully. "And of course! Why the very thing!"

"What's of course, and the very thing?"

"Sandiwell Bay, Auntie."

"What about it?"

"There's a nice hotel there, and a pier and band, and it's only four miles from the race, and we'll drive over on the day, and we'll stop a week at the seaside."

"Lor', what a clever one you are, Baby; and how you do get over me! We will. I do reg'lar long for a sniff of the briny, as they say. But Sandiwell—is it a good place for s'rimps?"

"Sure to be, dear. But we should have to go to-day."

"To-day? Who's to pack up and go to-day?"

"I'll pack up, Auntie, and you shan't have a bit of trouble."

"But I ain't anything fit to go in, my dear."

"Stuff and nonsense, Auntie! You have heaps of things. There, don't you worry yourself about clothes. I'll see that our boxes are ready; and, Auntie, dear, I will be so good. I know it's all over now," she whispered, with a curious pinched look about her lips. "I shall never go back to him, because—because I can feel that he never really loved me as I did him."

"Never, my pet."

"But I can't help it, Auntie; it's life to me to try and hear about him, and no matter what he does, I want to see him sometimes."

"Ah, yes," said the old woman; "and as soon as he holds up his finger and beckons like, or chucks his hankychy like the sultan in the burlesque——"

"No, Auntie, no," said Lucy sadly; "it's all over; all past and gone."

"And you'll be sensible and wise?"

"Yes, Auntie; as wise as such a poor, weak, silly girl can be."

"And marry Mr. Daines?"

Poor Lucy Lee! She turned her pretty, piquante face with a wistful light in the eyes, a smile that was full of sadness on her lip, and a look that, in spite of her past, was pure womanly in its love and faith in the great mistake of her little life.

"No, Auntie dear," she said softly, "never—never. I like Mr. Daines, and, poor fellow, I know he loves me very dearly, but it's all killed, dear—it's quite dead. I shall never love anyone again—only you."

"Lucy, my precious," cried the old woman, beginning to sob, as she drew the frail little figure to her breast; "but I'm nearly done for now, and it will soon be me who is quite dead. What then?"

"What then, Auntie?" said Lucy, with a strange dreamy look in her eyes. "Do you remember coming down to the farm, to where there was a little girl in black, sitting crying on a stool, all alone and desolate in the empty home?"

"Remember it, my precious? Oh, so well—so well."

"And you took her in your lap, and put your dear, soft motherly arms round her."

"No, no, my darling, not motherly," sobbed Aunt Duncan; "I never had a bairn."

"Yes, dear, soft, motherly arms around me, and kissed me and told me not to fret—not to cry any more, for I was not left quite desolate, because you had come to fetch me, to take me to a happier home, where you would try to be a new mother to the poor miserable little orphan girl. You said you were a poor, fat, red-faced, ugly old woman."

"Did I say so, dear, did I?"

"Yes, Auntie. I remember every word."

"Well, my pet, it was quite true."

"But you didn't tell me you had a heart of gold—so full of love and tenderness for me that I have often wondered that I could ever go away from you as I did."

"That was only natur', my dear; you weren't to blame for that, though I will say it did seem 'ard."

"Yes, Auntie, but I did not know it then, for I was mad about him."

"Ah yes, my dear, and we all go mad like that, whether we're queens and duchesses, or only poor people who keep a shop."

"Yes, Aunt dear, I suppose so; and it isn't our fault."

"But I did try to be a mother to you, my dear, even if I have said 'ard words now and then."

"It did not take any trying, Auntie: you said you'd come to take me to a happier place, and when the time comes that you are going away, keep fast hold of my hand, dear, and let's go together, for I've no one else to live for now."

(To be continued.)

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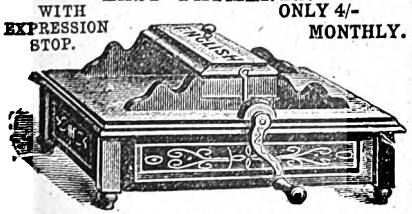

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

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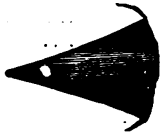

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Dec. 5, 1896.

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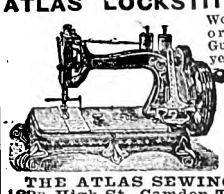

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SHORT STORIES

No. 414.] For the Week ending Dec. 5th, 1896. [1d.

The Last Drummer.

After the passage of the Beresina by Marshal Victor, who, on the evening of the 28th of November, 1812, had lost so heavily in attacking the bridges, the fragments of the French army, having twice dispersed the Russian bands, were resting for a little in the suburbs of Smorgoni.

Two officers on horseback, wrapped in their cloaks, with heads bent low, were passing along the road.

"You say, Colonel, that there are many French in the rear, in spite of the butchery at the bridges?"

"There are thousands! Stragglers of every corps, lying in the snow, unarmed!"

"You should have rallied them!"

"I could not have carried ten thousand men in my holsters!"

"True! But you should have sounded the alarm!"

"The alarm—for dead men!"

There was a moment of silence.

"You know that *he* will review the Third to-morrow. Ney charged me to inform you. You will head the column."

The Colonel uttered a formidable laugh.

"A review of the Third Corps!"

He turned towards the General, who appeared impassive—and his gaiety at once subsided.

"You are jesting."

"Colonel Champeaux!"

EDITED BY C. Arthur Pearson

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"By the sword of Jehovah!" cried the Colonel; "there is but one Emperor who can review those men!"

He lifted his arm in the darkness, with a vague gesture, towards Heaven.

"A review!" he went on; "but it will be a battalion review! The Third Corps numbered thirty-five thousand infantrymen and two thousand four hundred cavalrymen at the opening of the campaign; it had ten thousand, all told, on quitting Moscow. Do you know how many yet remain?"

He did not wait for the response.

"There remain one hundred and thirty. I say nothing of the horses. They have been digested! I—Colonel Champeaux—do you know how many men I myself have?"

"How many?"

"Seven; the remnant of a fine regiment of grenadiers."

The General shuddered, and his horse made a movement.

"How many wounded?"

"Six."

"Officers?"

"One, and the sole effective. I am he."

And the Colonel burst out laughing. It seemed a "good one."

"Very well," said the General. "This is the fourth. To-morrow, at nine o'clock, the Third Corps must be assembled. You must find these survivors."

The Colonel interrupted violently:

"Look out for an army corps—in this desert!"

"Bah!" said the General. "The Emperor wishes it. Understand, Champeaux, the *Emperor!*"

And he plunged into the darkness.

* * * * *

Champeaux, erect amidst the snow, reflected a moment, snapped his jaws together, and turned back towards the plain.

"The Emperor——"

This luminous word he passed again and again mechanically before his imagination.

"The Emperor—if it's the Emperor—all the same. If it be he——"

The French army was encamped in the midst of an immense circle of waggons and tethered horses, that is to say, in disorder. Bands of stragglers and wounded—the straying of the former and the creeping pace of the latter directed by chance—had assembled round thousand of fires, which they fed with rotted planks, tops of caissons, saddle-pads, and broken wheels. Everywhere was a shoreless sea of phantoms, with here and there, looming in the midst of it, a miserable shelter.

From time to time, the heavy, immense, indefinable breadth of the storm swept by; and again a terrific detonation was heard—a caisson of shells exploded!

Champeaux, savage and irresolute, made his way through the groups of shadows, cursed by those whose despondent reveries he disturbed.

"A review—an Imperial review! To-morrow! These carrion have no longer any uniform! How are corps of regiments to be recognised? Their only raiment is wounds, saddle-cloths, horse-blankets. Find the different battalions if you can!"

He grasped a shoulder at hazard.

"What regiment?"

The man was stretched out in sleep. He opened one eye; then closed it heavily.

Champeaux drew his sabre a little way from its scabbard, entered the edge of the fire, the flame licking his tall boots, and turned towards the men, whose blackened hands and arms were extended towards the coals, dripping as they thawed. They did not so much as look at him. But Champeaux was already roaring out the order of the Emperor. Immediately, when this name was pronounced, a few heads were lifted—the oldest—and twelve cavalry men of the Third Corps came and ranged themselves behind the Colonel.

"Have you your horses?"

The soldiers began to laugh softly, in the manner of young girls.

"Well, we will do without them," said the Colonel. "March!"

He went on. He and his men boldly entered the fire circles. Champeaux delivered the Emperor's orders, which, in proportion as the difficulties increased, he magnified by dint of vociferation, until it became a sort of proclamation to the troops. This reminder of Napoleon drew thirty men from the bivouac fires, of whom eight were grenadiers.

"Fall in!" said the Colonel.

As he moved forward, he stumbled upon the encumbent forms of men embedded in the ice. Then all would bend down and would loosen their stiffened forms, wrenching them from the ground as if they were so many sticks of timber. They planted them upright, and Champeaux, with a sort of congestive exaltation, bawled out his chant:

"Blockheads! It's for the Emperor!"

These words straightened them up as if Murat himself had grabbed them by the scruff of the neck, and they set forth, laughing. After four hours, the effective strength of the Third Corps reached eighty men.

Towards midnight recruiting became difficult. A black, bitter cold that would have frozen Vesuvius or the four ideas of a fever-ridden brain laid the men in heaps by the bivouac fires, even among the glowing embers, rolled, massed together, curled up like balls, heads and limbs confounded. To get them on their feet Champeaux, who now seemed transfigured, promised them the Cross! Twenty-nine arose. They were young; they were of the last conscription.

"*Vive l'Autre!*" (Long live the Other!) cried Champeaux. "Forward!"

But his horse would not budge. Prophetic, shuddering, steaming, its neck extended, its hoofs as if glued to the soil, it stood over the body of a sleeper, snorting and nibbling at the leather trappings.

"Who goes there?" growled Champeaux, bending so low that he seemed to be hanging from the saddle.

"No one *goes*," said one of the grenadiers of his following. "It's the skeleton of an artillery-man."

The man who lay there did not budge. The Colonel drew his sabre. Then a rugged head emerged from a mask of snow, and two clear eyes surveyed Champeaux's pelisse.

"What do you want with me?"

"Get up!"

The man grew angry. He believed they were joking.

"You there, take care—one step more and I will run you through the gullet, Colonel though you be!"

He said this at a single breath. Then, panting like a dumb brute, he fell back, exposing his body to view, from which a leg had been severed close to the trunk.

Champeaux made the round of two other bivouacs,

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and towards three o'clock, the troop numbering one hundred and twenty-five men, he despaired of finding the five others.

"We will return," he said.

They set out; but on the way the Colonel found a light infantryman beating his feet together between the shafts of a waggon, and scraping the ice from a piece of horse's leg.

"Follow us!" shouted the troop.

"I am not to be dist ırbed; I am dining," answered the spectre.

Champeaux raised one of his pistols, and the soldier sprang aside.

"Anyhow, let me get my drum!"

Champeaux did not stop him. He was struck by an idea which struck him to the very soul; he laid hold of the man.

"You are a drummer?"

"Yes."

He was a little fellow, without beard, slender, with hair like a child's.

"And you have kept your drum?"

"Here it is," said the conscript. "Why not? Since I am a drummer—I have my drum. If I hadn't my drum——"

Champeaux seized him, put him in the saddle, kissed him on both cheeks, as he would a woman. Alone in the midst of that agonised army which had abandoned its arms and insignia this child, who had guarded his drum, appeared to him a prodigy.

"Forward!"

They returned to the plain and sheltered themselves under the waggons.

Champeaux watched until morning.

* * * * *

Towards eight o'clock Napoleon appeared. He had just inspected certain corps, and had dictated the Twenty-ninth bulletin, by which France was startled and dumfoundered. Ney was at his side, Ledru des Essarts came in search of Champeaux.

"Come," said he.

The Emperor was on a slight eminence. The Third Corps, erect, drawn up four files deep, was posted a hundred yards away.

Champeaux, who was mounted, drew his sabre.

"Attention, my fine fellows," he said, in a subdued voice. "*L'Autre vous regarde*" (the Other is gazing at you). "Forward! Limber your legs! Tramp, I say. Make believe you are an army. Mar-r- r-r -rche!"

At once, more impetuous than a hunter's pack in full cry, with greater impulse, more ringing, more sonorous than the vanished bugles of the entire corps, there burst forth a terrible rann-plann-plann!—and those one hundred and twenty-five men, relics of the superb thirty-eight thousand of Elkingen, defiled before the cold gaze of the Emperor.

"Pann-rrrann! plann-plann!" chanted the drumsticks.

Four files front, accurate of step, elbows touching, heads thrown back, those human remnants crossed a corner of the plain, to the consecrated roll of the drum! Champeaux, with his sabre aloft as at the Carrousel, rode behind the little drummer.

This tragic parade, amidst the snow, amidst unequalled suffering, before a stupefied army, so shocked the stern old Marshal that—beside the impassive Napoleon—his knees trembled under him. They were without uniforms, those one hundred and twenty-five, but they had the noble mien of martyrs. Even the drummer was known as such only by the tragic fury of his rataplan!

"Pann! pann!" sounded the drum. "Plann! plann!"

At the head, as directed by the regulations, there were eight Grenadiers of the Guard, with chimerical faces, some topped with soiled caps, stained with the smoke of the battle and bivouac; others, a six-months' beard on their cheeks, with their heads thrust into tall cylinders of fur. And all were old, their bodies barred with solemn cicatrices.

"Prrann! pann! pann! rrrann—rrann—pan! pan! pan!"

The drummer wrought himself into a rage. sounding, beating, smiting his drum at the head of the column..

Next came sixty-eight light infantrymen, old, like the Grenadiers, one third of them in black gaiters and the others shod with strips of leather.

"Beware the Emperor!" cried Champeaux.

"Rrrann! plann! plann!—pataplann! plann! plann!"

Following, bareheaded, were two soldiers of the engineer corps, with neither sabres nor cartridge pouches frightfully slashed by the Cossacks, but still carrying their spades.

"Rrra-rra-rra-pataplann! paum! paum!" clamoured the tireless drummer.

Then appeared a disordered cavalry without horses, hobbling, limping along. but so proudly courageous that they would have retraced their steps on the instant and have reconquered the Russians; eight cuirassiers, without cuirasses, lifting towards the Emperor their seamed faces, the fur bands of the helmets tightened about their necks, the most of them clad in Russian pelisses, which they had won by dint of sword-play. One, an enormous fellow, had no trousers, and had tied a blue saddle-cloth about his thighs. He marched with bare ankles through the snow. Beside him trailed a dismounted dragoon, with a cap that had been shorn by musket-balls, hairless, plaqueless, without cordon or plume.

Bravely, drumsticks, rattle away! and you, drummer, roll, roll, for the tattered pandours of love!

"Rrrann! rrrann!—pataplann!"

Last, approached in four close lines, the artillerymen, fifteen in number, cannoniers of Piedmont, with neither white-looped cordons nor drumsticks; twelve dragoons, riddled with grape-shot, in bloody coats that once were green, striped like a tiger-skin with powder and rent with lance-thrusts, their silver dolmans flapping in formles tatters.

"Rrrann! rrrataplann!" Beat with your might; beat again, spare not, O drummer of Tabor! O death's drummer! "Pataplann; rrrataplann! plaum! plaum!"

"Don't look like sausages!" said Champeaux. "Yonder is the Emperor!"

Napoleon, in fact, erect upon his steed, unmoved and fatal as destiny, was awaiting them.

This knot of heroes, one of the few that remained of that great *epic*, defiled past him, their eyes turned towards his face. The drummer continued through the plain to beat his drum; the pitiful battalion followed him; and as if muffled in funereal crape, the rolling of the drum reverberated against the rigid walls of that imperial soul; already distant, becoming vaguer and vaguer, dying upon the ear, it seemed to the Emperor like the tolling of brazen tongues, announcing a foregone conclusion, the supreme alarm, the irremediable knell o his puissant armies.

GEORGE D'ESPARBES.

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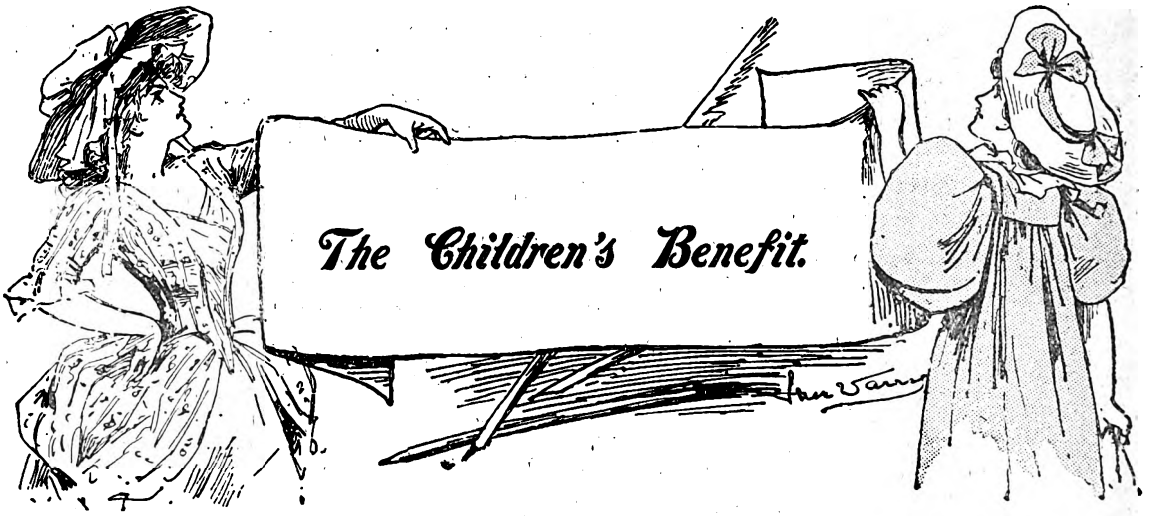

The Children's Benefit.

In the crude, half-formed world in which we live happiness must, to a great extent, be comparative, and the same rule holds good in regard to our creature comforts. We are never so comfortable, never so impregnated with cosiness as when the elements are waging their noisy warfare without, and when we may imagine how miserable we would be were we forced to brave the storm and endure the biting cold.

This was the case with the semicircle of men gathered round the fire roaring in the great chimney. Every snowcloud driving against the rattling windows increased their appreciation of the warmth and comforts of the room and caused them to turn with keener relish to the cheerful blaze. Every shrieking gust of wind lent to their minds a more delicate perception of the jests that fell from the lips of the celebrated comedian, Henry Leonard, who amused them, in varying degrees, by the reception of scraps of dialogue culled from the many comedies he had played in during his recent tour.

Leonard's personality contained, in a marked degree, that indescribable magnetic charm which enables every natural actor to control both the thoughts and emotions of his audience.

And with this charm was blended in happy proportion a fascinating versatility. Tragedy and comedy are near of kin all the world over; in Leonard they dwelt in amicable union. Grave or gay, he was a king among players, and could call forth either tears or laughter, according to his will.

In the midst of the hilarious burst of applause which greeted one of the actor's sallies, the door was timidly pushed open and a pair of ragged, half-frozen children stole into the room. With uncertain steps and eyes sharpened by cautious fear, they slowly made their way behind the laughing group, and presently stood by Leonard's side, rolling their frightened eyes about the room.

"Won't somebody give us some money? We have nothing to buy food with!" The little lad's teeth chattered with cold, and his blue lips were so stiff he could hardly frame his words; but he stood there before the men and, grasping his sister's hand tightly in his own, made his appeal with wistful eagerness.

"We don't want it for ourselves—we can starve—but father died last week and mother——" A sob cut his speech short; but bravely fighting back the tears that sprang to his eyes, he continued, huskily: "Mother will die, too, if we can get her no food; she is starving."

Nervously fingering his cap, he glanced from face to face with eyes full of pathetic entreaty. Then his lips began to tremble and hot tears rose to his eyes, as he saw nothing but coldness in the faces about him. Turning drearily away, he drew his sister towards the door, attempting to console her grief with brave words, although his own heart was almost breaking at the thought of the sweet face, all seamed with care, and hollow with hunger, so patiently awaiting their return.

"Won't you give us something, sir?" he asked, in a choked voice, extending his hands appealingly towards Leonard. "Mother is dying, sir; dying for want of food. Oh, do give us something!" The little fellow half-turned away and fell to sobbing as though his heart would break.

Tenderly the actor caught the ragged figure in his arms and put it in a chair. Then he turned and gazed fixedly on the silent men around him.

"Twenty years ago," he began abruptly, "my father lost his fortune, and we sank, almost in a day, from wealth to abject poverty. We scarcely had the necessaries of life, and were forced to see two delicately nurtured women who had been brought up in every luxury within the reach of wealth—two women who had been shielded by jealous love from every sorrow and guarded from every care—living out their lives in a foul and noisome tenement house. We were forced to drag them down with us to an existence more miserable than that of a beast. And these two women were my mother and my sister."

Leonard paused: his face looked pinched and drawn, his eyes glistened with unshed tears, and his voice shook with suppressed emotion.

"I was fifteen," he continued drearily, "old enough to appreciate their suffering, old enough to perceive that death, for my mother, at least, must follow in the footsteps of poverty.

"Ah! how brave they were! In their attempts to force upon my father and myself the belief that their lives were not the martyrdoms we knew them to be, they

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resorted to subterfuges that would have been pitiful had they not been beautiful—glorified by unselfish love. How often mother has met us at the door as we returned from our work and told us with loving words that she had chanced on some old-time friends and had dined elsewhere. She would smile as she told us that loving falsehood, and, although she had not tasted food in God knows how long, she would strive to force her portion of the scanty meal upon us."

Leonard's voice broke and he turned his face, twitching with pain, from his staring auditors. None were apathetic now, and tears of pity were hanging in many of the eyes fastened on the figure before the fire.

"One day my father was brought home crippled for life," Leonard continued dully. "I, a boy of fifteen, was the only one left to earn bread to fill those three mouths. I worked both night and day, I worked as a man never worked before; but what could my earnings avail among so many? Day by day I saw my mother growing paler: great blue hollows appeared beneath her eyes, and each hour left her thinner and weaker than the last.

"My God! she was starving to death before my eyes and I was powerless to save her!"

Leonard sprang up and paced the floor with feverish, uneven strides.

"Hell can hold no torture to equal what I suffered then, heaven no joy to compensate it. Both father and mother died when a crumb from a rich man's pocket, a crumb too small to be noticed by him, would have saved them."

He buried his face in his hands, and dry, hard sobs shook him from head to foot.

When he turned again to his auditors, his appearance had undergone a complete change. His figure, as he crouched before the fire, looked pinched and small, his clothes seemed to hang in folds from his shoulders, his cheeks were hollow, and his whole figure shivered with cold.

"And now, my sister, all that is left to me in the world is dying, starving before my eyes!" he cried shrilly, his glittering eyes full of wild appeal. "I have sought work in every quarter; I have gone into the streets and begged alms in the name of the God above us, and I have failed to get anything. Do you hear? Failed! O, can there be a merciful God above us, when I am forced to see her die like this?

"For the love of that God! For the love of all you hold dearest, give me something!" he pleaded wildly stretching hands that shook with emotion appealingly towards the silent group.

"You are rich; you would not miss so small a sum, and you can save her—save my sweet sister! For God's sake do not leave her to starve to death!" His face aflame with passionate entreaty, Leonard sprang up and moved among the spectators, holding a hat in his hand.

All, stirred to the depths of their hearts, strove to give vent to their emotions in the magnitude of their offerings, and Leonard returned to his seat by the fire, his hat overflowing with bank-notes.

"Thanks, gentlemen," he said quietly.

He turned to look for the children, and, to his surprise, found the little pair at his elbow with tears shining in their eyes.

"What is the matter?" he asked softly.

"We're so sorry for you, sir," the boy answered huskily; "and we want to give you this for your sister. 'Tain't much, but it's all we have, and we want you to take it, 'cause, I guess, you want it more'n we do; and, besides, we can get a couple more before we get home." The boy eagerly pushed two pennies into the actor's hand, his face bright with pleasure at giving.

"This, gentlemen, is *charity*," Leonard said gravely. Then, turning to the boy, he placed the money in his hand and told him to hasten home to his mother.

"But it's for your sister," the little lad said stoutly, although his eyes glistened at sight of the collection.

"I have no sister," the actor answered, smiling.

"And you ain't poor?" asked the puzzled urchin.

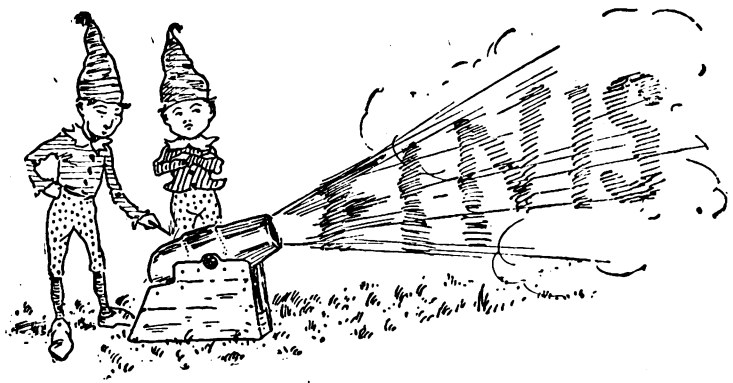
"No." The actor rose, and walking to the door, sent the children on their way rejoicing.

"That was very fair," he said, as he reseated himself.

"Your story was not true, I gather from what you told the boy," a spectator said.

"No," answered Leonard, lazily lighting a cigarette, "merely a bit of original tragedy for the sake of the children."

HOWARD L. THOMAS.



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My Fellow Voyager

An Amateur Aeronaut's Adventure.

"Yes, Ned, it's the only way to save me. It's my bread, the balloon is, and they'll make no more of ripping the *Defiance* to ribbons than I should of chipping the shell of an egg at breakfast, those peppery Marseillais!"

The situation was, to say the least of it, exceedingly awkward. It was the evening of a fête day, in brilliant, sultry autumn weather, such as may be looked for in the south of France; and the Ducasse, or local festival of St. Maure, a village lying on the coast some two leagues eastward of Marseilles, had drawn thither a swarm of the population of the old Phocæan city.

There was dancing in progress—the merry sound of the fiddles floating upward through the vine tendrils that hung across the open window reached my ears as I stood beside the bed—but the great attraction of the evening's entertainment was to be a balloon ascent, in the midst of fireworks, on the part of an English aeronaut, who, in the glowing language of the hand-bills and posters that had for ten days past advertised the trip, was described as "The Famous, the Intrepid Oliver Killick, the King of the Air."

As for myself, I was simply a young artist, Edward Holmes by name, not long since returned from a protracted course of art study in Rome, and who found it hard enough, by touching up photographs, "finishing" the sketches of amateurs, and taking, at the lowest rate of remuneration, the portrait of whoever favoured me with a sitting, to procure the wherewithal to live.

I had been accidentally thrown a good deal in the company of Killick, who had for some time been exhibiting his balloon in various towns of the South, and who had shown me some kindness, as a fellow-countryman; while I, on my part, had a regard for the old man, whose quaint anecdotes of his experience as a travelling balloonist were often amusing.

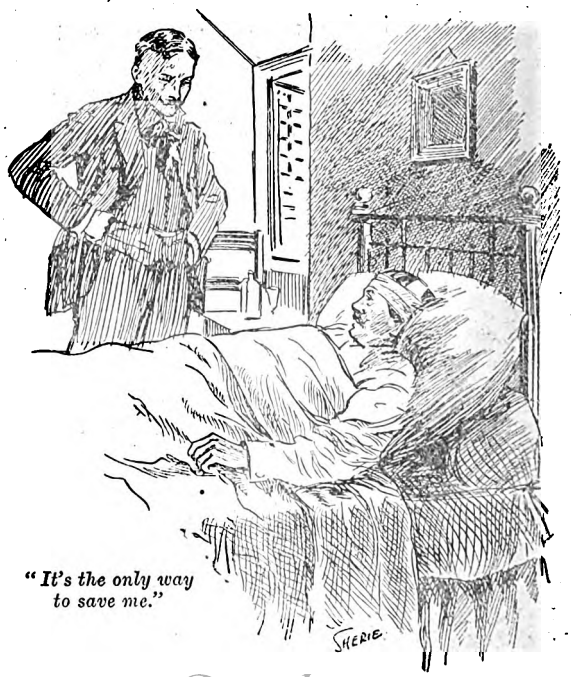
And now a serious difficulty had, at the last moment, arisen. There, in the garden of the village inn, fenced off by ropes and stakes from the pressure of the crowd that surged around, was the *Defiance*, fully inflated, straining at the cords that fastened it to the earth, and ready for use, while on his bed lay the unlucky "King of the Air," groaning and disabled.

He had sent for me to visit in his room shortly after the occurrence of the accident—a stumble over a loose plank and a fall downstairs—and though I sympathised with him sincerely, I had been quite at a loss for an expedient. Killick was a heavy, elderly man, and in his fall had severely sprained his right wrist and injured his thumb, besides receiving a cut on the left temple.

"That's nothing," he said half querulously, as I examined the hurt; "I've had worse in touching the ground many's the day. It's the thumb that's the matter—the thumb and the wrist. I can't handle the valve-ropes with this crippled arm any more than a school-girl could do it. And what's to happen now?"

My first idea was that the accident, and all the consequent inability of the balloonist to give the promised exhibition, should be announced, and an apology made to the public; but the veteran decidedly negatived this apparently obvious proceeding.

He reminded me of the irascible character of a mob everywhere, and above all of a southern French mob, and assured me of what I could readily believe, that no excuse would be accepted by the fiery Marseillais, baulked of the long-looked-for treat of an ascent; they would



"It's the only way to save me."

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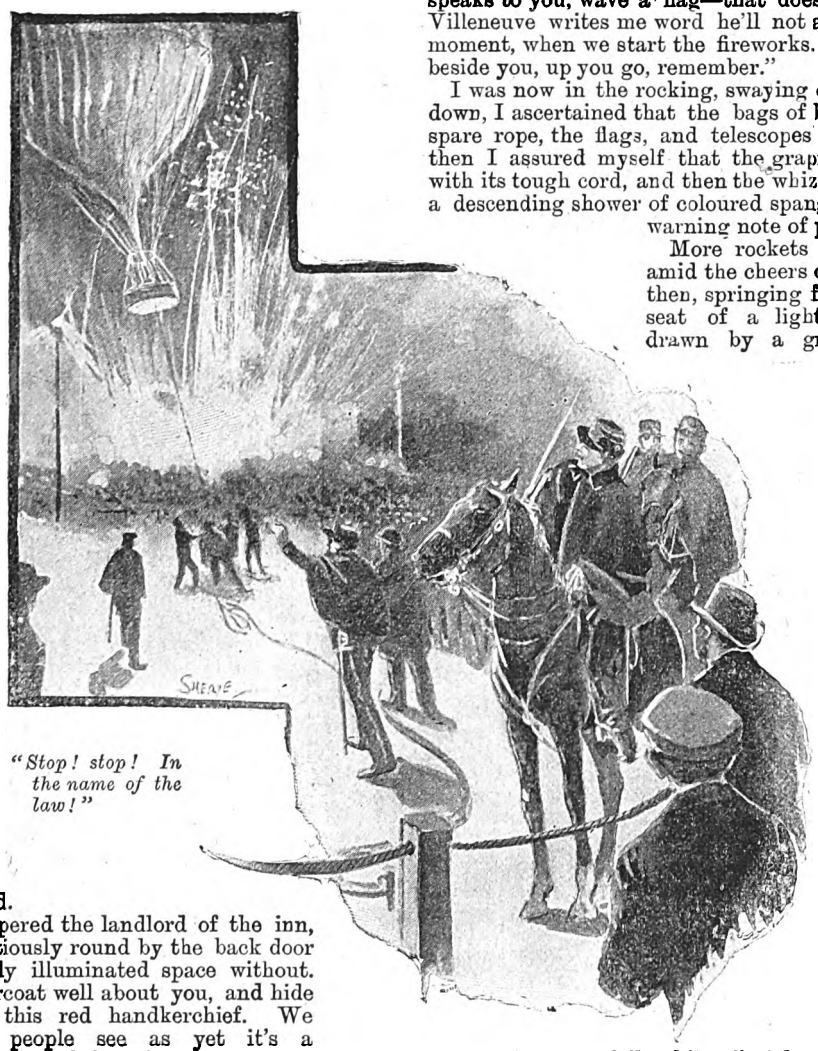
certainly destroy the balloon, and not improbably offer violence to the aeronaut.

The very loss of the *Defiance* would be a serious disaster to its owner. Then, too, a rich landed proprietor of the neighbourhood—a vain young man, with a taste for notoriety—had offered fifteen louis d'or to be taken up as a passenger; and to disappoint M. Victor de Villeneuve, and lose three hundred francs, was also an unwelcome contingency.

To my surprise, Killick proposed that I should go up in his stead, and undertake for the occasion the office of aeronaut. I had indeed accompanied him, while we were both at Nice, in two short ascents, and had learnt from him how to manage the valves and ballast—the rudiments of the art of ballooning.

I was young, active, had a steady head, and the owner of the *Defiance* was quite willing to intrust her to me, if I would but so far oblige him. Perhaps the novelty of the notion, acting on a somewhat adventurous fancy, made me yield the more readily to the old man's entreaty. I said "Yes," and was held to my word.



"Stop! stop! In the name of the law!"

"Come," whispered the landlord of the inn, as he led me cautiously round by the back door into the partially illuminated space without. "Wrap your overcoat well about you, and hide your face with this red handkerchief. We musn't let the people see as yet it's a raw hand that's to go aloft. Once up, you can laugh it off."

This was all very well for the innkeeper, whose only wish was to keep the rabble in good humour, and avoid a riot, which might lead to the pillage of his cellar and the demolition of his furniture; but I began inwardly to question the wisdom of my own choice.

However, it was too late to withdraw. One glance at the sea of keen, olive-complexioned faces, the flashing eyes and impassioned gestures of the spectators, was enough to show the risk that would attend the giving of wilful offence. They were gay enough, laughing blithely, but it would not have required much to arouse them to any violence.

There was the *Defiance*, majestically poised above the ground like a vessel riding at anchor. There was nothing for it but to carry out, as best I might, the madcap enterprise on which I had embarked.

"You had better get into the car, and be ready," said the landlord, still in an undertone, as he passed me through the cordon of police that kept back the foremost of the spectators. "Don't talk; but if anybody speaks to you, wave a flag—that does as well. M. de Villeneuve writes me word he'll not arrive till the last moment, when we start the fireworks. As soon as he's beside you, up you go, remember."

I was now in the rocking, swaying car, and, stooping down, I ascertained that the bags of ballast, the coil of spare rope, the flags, and telescopes were at my feet; then I assured myself that the grapnel was provided with its tough cord, and then the whizz of a rocket, and a descending shower of coloured spangles of fire, gave a warning note of preparation.

More rockets now soared aloft, amid the cheers of the crowd, and then, springing from the driving-seat of a light open carriage, drawn by a grey horse, there appeared a stout, well-dressed man, who elbowed his way so quickly through the throng that I had scarcely time to conjecture that this must be the volunteer companion of my aerial voyage, M. Victor de Villeneuve, before he scrambled into the car, and was at my side.

"Let go, boys!" he cried in a sharp, imperious tone, to the men who held the ropes. "Let go the ropes! Do you hear?"

A voice raised in accents of command seldom fails of its effect, however questionable may be the right of him who speaks, and the men addressed, in their astonishment, mechanically obeyed. The balloon rose a little, nothing now restraining its upward flight save the trigger cord, firmly moored to a post below, the spring being in my grasp.

"Well, comrade, off we go!" exclaimed the passenger, with a jovial laugh that had scarcely the ring of honest mirth in it.

Perhaps M. de Villeneuve, for all his swaggering deportment, was ill at ease as to the results of our voyage, and strove to carry it off gaily. Such were my

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Deliberately pointed the barrel at my head.

thoughts as the catherine-wheels began to revolve in cascades of whirling fire, and the crowd to cheer. It was the moment for our start; but I hesitated to pull the trigger, for now a strange bustle and confusion below attracted my attention.

A mounted gendarme, his sabre and carbine clanking, had ridden up at the full gallop of his reeking horse, followed at some distance by three others, who spurred furiously forward. There were a few hurried questions, then a smothered outcry, a roar of voices, and a swaying backward and forward of the excited populace.

I looked down at the crowd of upturned faces.

"Stop! stop! In the name of the law!" cried out the brigadier of the foot-police.

"Let go, fool!" thundered the man who sat beside me in the car.

"But it is the police that——" I began, thinking that M. de Villeneuve had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"Come down! stop—haul the rope!" was the shout from below; but as the words reached my ear, my companion bent forward. Something flashed in his hand —a knife—the cord was cut, and the balloon started upwards.

"In the name of the law, stop—ah! you won't? Here goes then!" cried a gendarme, discharging his carbine, an example that was followed by his comrades; but the balls whistled idly by, while we rose and rose until the inn and the gardens, and the shouting crowd, and the spluttering fireworks had diminished to pigmy size, and presently disappeared altogether; and the balloon rode on, solitary, through the air.

"Aha!" said M. de Villeneuve, with a chuckle that was incomprehensible to me. "A singular salute our friends gave us—eh, when they bade us *bon voyage?*"

The moon, half-full, had now risen, and I could see the face of my companion—the swarthy, keen face of a man forty years of age, with short, dark hair, slightly grizzled, fiery black eyes, and very white, strong, sharp-pointed teeth, which gave him, when he smiled, somewhat the expression of a laughing wolf. He was a man of powerful frame, and the fingers of the gloved hand which he now laid upon my arm were as strong as steel.

"Well," said the strange passenger, with a grin that an ogre might have envied, "you take me for a queer specimen of the French provencial gentry—eh? But first, how comes it that Killick is absent, and a youngster of your age has the honour to be my pilot?"

I told him briefly, and in offended tones, what had occurred, and how it was that he and I found ourselves together so far above *terra firma*, at the same time cautioning him not, as he had done before, to take it on himself to interfere with the management of the balloon.

"We must now," I added, "look out for a place to descend, for the wind is freshening, and——"

"Let it freshen!" rudely interrupted M. de Villeneuve. "Sets fair for Spain, does it not?"

"For Spain?" I echoed, in surprise. Could this self-conceited country gentleman really imagine that we were bound on such a journey as that? I could not help laughing, as I said: "Why for Spain, monsieur?"

"Well, Italy would have served me as well, had the wind been a westerly one. I talk both languages, and know the wine-houses in Cadiz as well as I do those of Genoa," answered M. de Villeneuve, again chuckling. "What are you doing with that rope?"

"I am opening the valve above," I answered coldly, "because it is time now to sink to a lower level, and descend——"

"Descend, eh," briskly put in my fellow-voyager. "We may as well understand each other at once. Hands off the rope, I say, if you would keep the roof on your skull," he added threateningly, as he drew a revolver from his pocket, and deliberately pointed the barrel at my head. "I'll show you who's captain up here!"

My blood ran cold as the horrible thought flashed upon me that I was, at that fearful height above the earth, in company with a madman. Nothing, surely, save

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insanity, could account for the extraordinary behaviour of M. de Villeneuve?

But I suppose I put a tolerably good countenance on the matter, for my formidable companion laughed again, but less ill-naturedly, as he said:

"You face it out well. I like a youngster who shows a heart somewhat bigger than a chicken's. And I'm not so bad as I look—never do this!"—he drew his hand as he spoke, edgeways, with a meaning gesture, across his throat—"when I can get my profits by quieter means. But you stare at me as if I were a mountebank selling quack medicines. Can you guess why those gendarmes were so peremptory an hour ago? Because they wanted the pleasure of my company back to Toulon, that's all. Did you never hear of Casse-tête?"

"Casse-tête?" I repeated in perplexity.

"Yes, Pierre Paul Grincheux, if you please, *alias* Casse-tête," said the man, with an odd sort of pride. "It's a name, if you read the reports of our tribunals, that you may have met with. Toulon, Brest, Lambessa—I know every one of those charming retreats. I have had enough sea-air for a while, so I gave myself leave of absence."

And then I remembered to have seen a paragraph in a local paper announcing the escape from Toulon of a criminal of the most dangerous type, who had not yet been recaptured, and whose grotesque nickname was Casse-tête. And here was I, voyaging by night in a balloon, in company with a runaway galley-slave, well armed with knife and pistol, and more than a match in strength for me, even had he been less well provided with weapons.

My terrible companion was only too much disposed to be talkative; and as we swept onward before the freshening wind, he was kind enough to favour me with a few brief anecdotes of his past career, in which the jocose and horrible seemed to mingle in cynical confusion. The one point on which he was uncommunicative was the manner of his recent escape from Toulon; or how—probably owing to the complicity of others—he became possessed of his weapons. But he told graphically of the ten days of hardship and hunger which he had endured while skulking among the rocky hills by night, and lying hidden among thorny brakes by day, until at last he broke into a pæan of triumph in relating how he had encountered and robbed the true M. de Villeneuve on his way to the village fête.

"Twenty shining naps in his purse!" he said exultingly, "and three thousand francs besides in notes. Well, I left him gagged and bound to a tree, after I had taken the freedom to change clothes with him; and there he stands, no doubt, trembling, but fortunate to keep a whole skin. And I found in his pocket the letter of M. Killick, promising to take him as a passenger in the balloon here, and so——"

And so the idea had presented itself to this daring and ready-witted ruffian to personate the victim of his recent robbery, and thus to procure the means of flight in what was certainly an unexampled fashion, while I was the luckless scapegoat of his audacious enterprise. Meanwhile the wind, as I have said, was rising, and as we hurried on I looked downward, and saw, by the shimmer of the moonlight on the tremulous waves, that the sea was below us. I could not forbear an exclamation of dismay.

The desperado at my side also looked down.

"Bah! sea or land! what matters it?" he said recklessly. "Throw out ballast—do you hear me?" and I complied.

The lightning sent its flaming arrows across the darkening sky.

The balloon instantly rose, and it presently became perceptibly colder, so that I shivered, and had to chafe my hands together to prevent them from stiffening My companion's iron frame showed no signs of suffering from the abrupt lowering of the temperature; but after a time the *Defiance* seemed to be nearer to the sea, for I heard the low roar of the waves; and then Casse-tête impatiently flung out another bag of ballast, and we rose.

My recollections of the voyage of that miserable night spent thus, and in such company, are vague. I suffered from cold and fatigue, and mechanically I obeyed the directions of the escaped galley-slave, who had now assumed the command. There was no doubt about the fixity of his determination to continue the desperate flight until we should be across the French frontier. How long our aerial journey might prove, undertaken as it was without warm clothing, provisions, or brandy, I could not conjecture, while it was certain that we were hurrying along with great velocity—how swiftly I had no means of calculating—before the wind.

So far as I could tell, the direction of the wind was uniform—steadily from north-east by east. The sea which I had seen beneath us was, no doubt, a part of

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the gulf, lying somewhere between the mouths of the river Rhone and the Spanish border, but the remainder of our route was, in theory, mere guess work.

A slight shift in the wind might cause us to be carried out into the broad Mediterranean. We might even drift beyond the Straits, into the broader Atlantic to perish, as many a balloon voyager has died, without a record of his fate. Where we were I could not tell. The dark, blurred outline of what lay beneath seemed to indicate hills and woods, not sea.

"If we come down in France, my young friend," said the strident voice of the escaped convict, as we floated through masses of misty vapour, which wetted me to the skin, "you may bid adieu to the world. It is no fault of yours, you will say, if the wind carries this flapping gas-bag to Poitous or the Nivernais. No; but is Casse-tête to wait while you crawl to the nearest brigade of gendarmerie to give notice that your fellow-traveller was Pierre Paul Grincheux, an escaped gaol-bird? No, thank you! So sure as we drop on French soil, with the Official Journal posted on the walls of the Poste de Police, I prove that one can keep a secret better than two."

I am not unduly timorous, but my heart sank within me as I heard these words, uttered with an emphatic ferocity which left no doubt of the speaker's sinister meaning. I fully made up my mind, should the desperado at my side attempt to realise his threats, that I would not be by any means passive in the struggle; but his weapons and his strength left little hope of a satisfactory ending to such a contest.

"There's something wrong with the valves," said my companion roughly, an hour later. "The gas is escaping, and we are sinking. You, aeronaut, must ascend the netting and stop the flow of the gas."

I was very reluctant to obey. To climb the netting of a balloon, when at a great height above the earth, is never a very pleasant task; but to do so, leaving behind me a ruffian who might at any moment shoot or stab me as I descended, thus relieving himself from an inconvenient witness, was indeed irksome. However, Casse-tête evinced such pertinacity, and swore so many grisly oaths, that at last I complied; and having adjusted the valve, crept back to the car, sick and giddy, but unhurt.

The moon had faded away. There were pale, crimson streaks in what I took to be the eastern sky, and below lay piled up gloomy masses of black cloud, through which gleamed at intervals something white and lustrous, like the marble pinnacles of the cathedral at Milan.

"We're steering straight. Fate, for once, befriends me!" exclaimed the sharer of my journey, "for those are the peaks of the eastern Pyrenees. Throw out ballast! Don't let us ground on them."

We were, in reality, floating among the serrated summits and white, snow-clad cones of the chain of mountains that forms a natural barrier between France and Spain. Below, the sullen cloud-banks menaced elemental war, and already low, muttering growls of thunder reverberated among the ridges beneath us.

"Throw over more ballast!" commanded my ruffianly companion.

I flung out, with some misgivings, the remainder of the last bag of sand and small pebbles, but the *Defiance* did nor rise with its former buoyancy. Much gas had been lost. The once smooth surface of the silk, painted in gaudy stripes of pink and blue, was wrinkled now, and fluttered loosely in irregular festoons. More than once it seemed as though we must be dashed against some one of the towering peaks above which the balloon slowly revolved.

I awoke to find myself lying upon a truckle-bed.

Crash after crash, peal upon peal, rang out the deep diapason of the thunder, echoed from glen to glen and from ridge to ridge, while far and wide the lightning sent its flaming arrows across the darkening sky. How strange it was to see around us those forked shafts of dazzling light, to hear from beneath us those awful rolls of heaven's terrible artillery, and to float helplessly above the raging tempest!

Day had broken; the sun was rising, red and angry, in the stormy eastern sky, and as a current of air wafted the balloon forward, I could dimly distinguish forest and meadow, and spurs of wood-clothed hills, lying to the southward of us. The snowy peaks, rosy-pink in the morning radiance, were being gradually left behind us, as we glided through the air.

"Hurrah!" cried out the galley-slave triumphantly, as he scanned the landscape. "We're well across the frontier now, and Pierre Paul Grincheux is safe from the chain-gang. Thank your stars——"

A stunning peal of thunder cut short his boastful discourse, and as it did so the *Defiance* heeled over, and was driven like a dead leaf before the gale, by the sudden rush of a mighty wind, that bore us almost to the surface of the ground, and hurried us along with headlong rapidity. Fields, woodlands, houses, seemed to pass us with feverish haste, and still we sped onward, so near now to the earth that I momentarily expected that we should become entangled among the trees that loomed so near us.

What was that, like a river of dancing water, on the

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dusty high road beneath us, the yellow road like a ribbon winding amid the rocks and thickets? Troops on the march, no doubt, the sunlight glinting on their bayonets. I could see that as we approached they came confusedly to a halt.

"Again, hurrah!" shouted the galley-slave. "A cheer, noble Spaniard, for your guest, Pierre Paul, now safely——"

As he spoke, I saw the earth very near us, saw the soldiers run to right and left, as though to clear the way for our passage, and then, with a sickening crash, the balloon and the car seemed to strike against a rock, thousands of sparks of fire filled my bewildered eyes, and then all grew dark.

* * * * *

"He'll live, never fear!" said a cheery voice, speaking in Spanish language, which I imperfectly understood, as I awoke to find myself lying upon a truckle-bed in a wayside cottage, surrounded by a group of officers, while a regimental surgeon was feeling my pulse. "Give him a few more drops of the brandy! Only a couple of ribs the worse, I think."

"And—and the man who was with me?" I asked feebly.

The doctor shook his head.

"Not your father or brother, I trust, sir?" he said. "Ah! then, I may tell you that his head was dashed against the rock, and his neck—a tough one, by-the-bye—very effectually dislocated."

And so it was. Casse-tête, who had broken many other heads, had finally broken his own.

Strange to say, my fortune was, to a qualified extent, made by the accident which had so nearly put an end altogether to my worldly anxieties. The kind protectors who had picked me up, a wayworn stranger, with two ribs broken, by the wayside, had conveyed me along with them on a litter to the garrison town of Girona, whither they were bound, and in the military hospital of this place I was cared for until youth and a robust constitution enabled me to get the better of the fever that ensued.

My strange story was noised abroad, and all Barcelona seemed eager to sit for its portrait to the young artist who had visited Spain in so singular a manner. Thence, with good professional recommendations, I passed on to Madrid, Paris and London, and have never since known the actual pressure of want.

I afterwards heard that a subscription set on foot at Marseilles compensated Killick for the loss of his balloon, but he and I never met again. H. Rogerson.

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION, No. 20.

The first prize of £5 this week goes to Mr. Bernard Parry, 2, Sterndale Road, West Kensington.

Prizes of £1 each have been sent to Miss A. D. Glassy, 17, Rufford Road, Elm Park, Liverpool; Mrs. Hill, 60, New Hey Road, Huddersfield; and Mr. E. G. Crapper, 57, Franklin Street, Derby Street, Salford, Lancs.

The sum of £2 has been sent to Sergeant F. H. Pannell, A. Pay Corps, Omah, Co. Tyrone, Ireland, who tied with the winner of the first prize.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION, No. 21.

The London guinea was awarded to Mr. C. H. Morley, 39, Great Tower Street, E.C.; and the Provincial guinea to Mr. W. Bruce, F.C. Manse, Largo, Fife. The miscalculation occurred on page 645, lines 20 and 21—27 hours should have been 14 hours 35 minutes.

AN ELECTRIC EYE,

MORE WONDERFUL THAN THE RÖNTGEN X RAYS,

IS THE TITLE OF ONE OF THE MANY CONTRIBUTIONS WHICH GO TO MAKE THE

CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER

OF

Pearson's Magazine

A PRODUCTION OF UNRIVALLED INTEREST.

It tells of the marvellous discovery of an Eastern Professor, which outdistances the Röntgen Rays as they outdistance photography. The fame of the Electric Eye will soon ring through the world. With it we shall see through stone walls and brick-built houses as clearly as we now see through a pane of glass. The Editor of *Pearson's Magazine* has obtained the first account which Dr. Bose—the modern miracle-worker, who has elaborated the Electric Eye—has allowed to be published. The contribution is no fairy tale. Dr. Bose's achievements are regarded with amazement by the foremost scientists of the day. Lord Kelvin, for example, writes of them:

"I have seen enough to fill me literally with wonder and admiration."

ONE SHILLING A WORD

is the unprecedentedly high rate at which Mr. Rudyard Kipling has been paid for the serial story which he calls "CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS." It appears in this country exclusively in *Pearson's Magazine*, and the first instalment of 10,000 words (£500 worth!) forms part of *THE CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER OF PEARSON'S MAGAZINE*, which is now on sale.

Among the other Stories and Articles which go to make up this number are:

Some Royal Artists. Joyce Garraway.
Illustrated with examples of their work.

The Mystery of Sada Sukh. (Complete Story.) Mayne Lindsay.
Illustrated by Warwick Goble.

The English Trappists. T. Edgar Pemberton.
Illustrated by S. Nation and with photographs.

The Bohemian Club. Written and Illustrated by Harry Furniss.

The Brown Man's Servant. (Complete Story.) W. W. Jacobs.
Illustrated by E. F. Sherie.

Some Triumphs of Fancy Dress. J. Malcolm Fraser.
With illustrations from the original designs.

The White Slaves of England. R. H. Sherard.
No. VI.—The Wool Combers. Illustrated by H. Piffard.

The Queen's Hobby. Dudley Heath.
Illustrated from photographs of the original Miniatures graciously supplied by Her Majesty the Queen, and from sketches by the Author.

The Capture of a Duke. (Complete Story.) F. Frankfort Moore.
Illustrated by R. Sauber, R.B.A.

Secrets of the Courts of Europe. Allen Upward.
Second Series.—No. VI. "Madame the Ambassadress."
Illustrated by Hal Hurst, R.B.A.

Wisdom Let Loose. Illustrated by Charles May. W. L. Alden.

The Moon Child. (Complete Story.) W. Bert Foster.
Illustrated by H. Piffard.

Aerial Railways. W. Arthur Woodward

WE HATE TO BOAST

of a Coloured Plate now when so many are, or are about to be, before the public, but a Chromo-Lithographic Picture, which forms part of *THE CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER OF PEARSON'S MAGAZINE*, is stated by competent judges who have seen it to be the finest piece of colour printing which has ever been turned out in England. The work is so good that it might be French—and higher praise than that cannot be bestowed upon colour printing—but it is done by an English firm.

PEARSON'S MAGAZINE. Price One Shilling

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THE DECISION OF CLYDE.

WHEN Brooke Clyde found himself in love with a woman whom he had no desire to marry, he wisely packed up his paint brushes and general utility clothes and fled her presence.

It was easier to do this because it was June, and the streets of the city were hot, and spoke with dusty throats of greenness and freshness elsewhere. The woman, for her part, took his desertion lightly. She had loved many times, but not much.

She had perennial consolation within herself, the forces of her nature finding vent sometimes in experimental romance, sometimes in a kind of intellectual greed.

A volume of clever stories, which had come in the same post, overshadowed Clyde's note of farewell.

He went to the seaside, and tried to convince himself that a world of women was not worth one glimpse of the ocean melting into the sky. He sought to put his soul—he knew he had one—into certain shades and combinations of blues and greys and greens.

So much for the artist.

The man was restless.

"That woman has force enough to upset my life, but not force enough to steady it," he said to himself, half angry because she looked at him from his canvas and obscured the picture that was forming there.

"I will write to her," he thought, piqued by some conjecture that she might not be taking his absence seriously. "That will impress her." A few days later he had an adventure. Then he said: "Now I have an excuse for writing—about another woman."

This is what he wrote:

"The church is noted hereabouts. It is old enough to be a part of the soil on which it stands. It is ivy-covered, of course. The sea wind rushes through its belfry and stirs its ancient bell. Its door is always open, to invite the worshipper—who never comes. Only artists come, and they say no prayers. Its altar is fresh with flowers—she places them there. An image of Christ is in the east window. He walks upon the sea, with one hand outstretched to save those whom the great depth might swallow up. I tell you of the church, because the church explains the verger's daughter.

"I wonder if you, a woman of the world, could understand this girl? Her father, as I found, actually a gentleman, who cast away Heaven knows what wrecks of a past life to hide himself in a verger's gown. The aroma of experience in a larger world still clings to him. I hoped that the secret might escape from between the covers of the books in his library. But no more of him. It is a shadowy paternity, fitting a girl who lives in the shadows.

"She is all faith, and no experience. The sea has moulded her thoughts, and the church has coloured her emotions. When I first saw her, she was placing flowers from her garden, a step beyond the mouldy tombstones, on the altar. There was something mediæval in the devoutness of the act.

"'Here is pure Gothic embodied,' I said, as I watched her, looking up furtively from my drawing of the chancel. Later I saw her swimming in the ocean—joy and energy in every limb, and was glad that the impression of the morning was partially wiped out. Hope she may not escape from this world until she has tasted some of its fierce joys. Maybe, one day, when the summer sun lies hot and golden on her flower-beds, she will feel the blood dance in her veins, and say with the Lady of Shalot, 'I am half sick of shadows.'

"Then she will put the flowers in her hair, instead of on the altar, and find out that she is very, very beautiful."

The Woman of the World answered in three lines:

"You are poetical. Tell me more about this girl whose face pleases you. Have you spoken with her, or is speech sacrilege?"

He wrote again:

"I speak with her daily. She listens and answers me through organ notes. I sit in the church while she makes music, always with its undertone of immaturity. Sometimes I sketch her, now as St. Cecilia, now as a sea syren. As the latter she is always a failure. Her face is innocent of the syren. She will never know how to make a man love her, unless I teach her."

The Woman of the World frowned over this last sentence.

She answered immediately:

"I do not wish to overvalue or undervalue your talents as a schoolmaster, but I know that one half-god can represent Olympus to a girl who knows her prayer-book better than she knows men. Let her be, and come back to that much misunderstood sisterhood, Women of the World. You will only disturb her, and then go away, while she, she stays—that kind of woman always stays—in the old places vocal with his voice and warm with his presence, and she tries to comfort herself with these ghosts of light and sound, until she becomes dyspeptic from over-much dreaming and too little healthy appetite for her actual surroundings.

"Remember, I love the verger's daughter so much that I dare say to you that you could never make her happy."

"But she can make me happy," he answered, "which is more to the point. Only think! she had never heard of Ibsen or of 'Christian Science,' though she reads both Greek and Latin, and loves her Shakespeare and her Milton.

"You need not be disturbed. My teachings are purely intellectual—addressed with austere singleness of purpose to the child's mind, which is highly sensitive, and utterly uncramped by that strait-jacket—modern education. She knew nothing of the modern warfare between science and religion Now she looks embarrassed when the service is read of a Sunday, where before she looked devout.

"I told her of you one day, and of your clever article

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in the *Exodus Quarterly* on the connection between miracles and superstition. She was curious to know more about you, and I noticed that she laid more stress on your personal charms than on your intellectual qualities. When I had carefully given her a synopsis of that more than happy article of yours, she said:

"'Is she pretty?'

"What does that mean?"

The Women of the World wrote thus:

"When she is no longer the verger's daughter, with a prayer in her eyes and Gregorian chant music in her finger-tips, you will cease to care for her. How like a man! to kill the charm for love of the butchery. Why make her like us? If we no longer see visions and dream dreams, why should you turn the electric light on her simple faith? I am ashamed of you, Brooke Clyde!"

He did not answer her letter for several weeks. Then he wrote:

"Since you found fault with one kind of schooling, I tried another, more to test my powers of—hypnotism, you would call it, than to build up a romance. I have succeeded in making the girl love me, not by making love to her, oh no! that is a very old-fashioned and clumsy method, but by simply bringing into prominence everything in my character that would be mystifying or unintelligible to her—the mysterious is always fascinating—so I turned myself into a sealed book which might hold a fairy tale or a philosophical treatise between the non-committal covers.

"The result justified the sweet reasonableness of the method.

"Of course she says nothing, but the child is alabaster—to be trite, all the love-light of her heart shines through her face. She never looks at the altar now, only at me, a poor but more human substitute for her devotion.

"We were in the churchyard at sunset, standing near the west door of the church with its sombre frame of ivy. She was in white, and the sun had somehow stolen into her hair, and into the diaphanous folds of her dress, and the light seemed to come from her, herself.

"I asked her to stand just so, against the black oak door, while I sketched her. She did as she was told, with that sweet obedience to my every wish which sometimes charms me, and sometimes makes me impatient—and while she stood there, swaying a little, like a flower when the air stirs, I told her an old German story of a knight who loved a lady, plighted his truth with her, and then rode away to the wars with her token on his breast.

"The war burns itself out, and after many years he comes riding wearily home, her token still on his breast, and a doubt like a snake in his heart lest she should not have remained faithful. Suddenly he sees her by the roadside, straining her eyes to catch the first glimpse of her beloved. She does not recognise him, and before he can call her name she cries out for news of her lover. To test her to the utmost, he replies that he was not slain, but is alive and well indeed, having married a women in the foreign country.

"'God bless him, whatever he has done,' cries the mediæval lady.

"I can hear you say 'Poor fool—a German *Hausfrau*,' but the child's eyes suddenly became the home of all the love and romance in the world, and she said, with a tremble in her voice:

"'How privileged she was to have such a test!'

"An ugly imp of irritation suddenly took possession of me. I put aside the sketch, and haven't yet finished it. I could have heaven for the asking, and yet I am ungrateful.

"As she said 'Good-night,' she looked at me with an all-unfolding look of love. How the gods work us mortals!"

Her next letter came promptly:

"This place is looking wonderfully well for the last of July, and justifies its reputation as a monstrous seaside resort. The park is still green as emerald, the libraries are full of cool, pensive shadows, the strangers in town are worth studying. By-the-way, I've formed a summer saloon of choice spirits, who meet of evenings to drink lemonade and claret, and incidentally to bare their souls to each other in a new sonnet or an unpublished sonata. We invoke the Muses till twelve, and then steal home with a delicious sense of having a great city to ourselves just because some acknowledged peers are out of it. No, a notable exception, Bayard Keith arrived last week from Italy. He is even more entertaining than his new book, which promises to be his best. He is reading it to me. We look forward to welcoming you back in October."

He answered her letter with a telegram:

"Will arrive in town Thursday afternoon. Must see you Thursday evening."

The Woman of the World awaited his coming in her parlour. The room without her would have been eloquent of the many elements which make up the artistic side of life in a great social centre. As it was, it faded into a quiet background for her. She seemed to absorb and express its charm.

His telegram lay on the table. The imperative "must" had told her the whole story in its past, present, and future tense.

When he came she welcomed him as if he had parted from her the day before. She began a conversation innocent of subtleties. He was uneasy under it, and broke in upon her flow of words at last, as if he did not hear them.

"You do not ask me why I left my sea-shore paradise and hurried back to town on the crest of a hot wave."

"I am never curious about people's motives," she said. "They are too much a part of character ever to be perfectly understood, and artists are privileged creatures. They are not obliged to have motives."

"I have a motive—the strongest of my life," he answered curtly. He was looking at her from under half-lowered eyelids, and was thinking that he had made a most judicious decision, a kind of precious crystal evolved from the hot jealousy provoked by her last letter. Her indifference, her languid attitude, the studied intellectual beauty of her evening gown, seemed fine wine to him after too long a draught of spring water.

"The strongest motive of my life," he repeated. "I love you, you only! I ask you to be my wife."

She looked a courteous interest in what he said, as if it concerned anyone but herself.

"You do not answer me. I did not think you the woman to enjoy entreaties."

"You are right in that. You shall have your answer. I cannot marry you."

"And why not?"

"I would never marry a man who preferred me to a verger's daughter."

ANNA McCLURE SHOLL.

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A ROMANCE OF ACADIA.

There is a village on a point of land in Acadia that runs out between two bodies of water. On one side is the harbour, called, like the settlement itself, Leboncoup; on the other, the bay, which flows from the ocean past the point for many miles, and is dotted throughout its length with more than three hundred fir-clad islands. This was appropriately called by the French, Baie des Iles, which in English speech became corrupted into Eel Bay, as it is now known.

Two years after the expulsion from Grand Prè, the French settlers were driven from this point and carried, like the exiles from the valley, to the neighbouring colonies, whence they returned twelve years later to the sterile point which had been their home. Here they found the clearings made by their fathers at the head and east side of their pretty harbour adopted by English settlers, and they gathered upon the unbroken, forest-clad west shore to begin a third Leboncoup, which should be purely French Acadian. All this happened a hundred and twenty-five years ago, and now the descendants of these people are living on the point, having preserved their tongue, faith and traditions, and the waters of bay and harbour wash a singular remnant of Acadian life.

In the doorway of a house overlooking the harbour a young girl stood shading her eyes from the rays of the setting sun. It was Saturday afternoon, and the fishing smacks, with their sails all set to catch the most of the light breeze, were coming up the harbour, for the fishermen returned regularly for their Sunday Mass-going, and to get bait for the next week's cod-fishing.

The girl in the doorway watched their coming with a face which the sunlight could not brighten, so glad a look rested on the soft lips and wide brown eyes. It was a face of the real Acadian type; oval in contour, chin small, lips full and sweet, nose straight, with fine, quivering nostrils; complexion which the frequent fogs made like the inside of a shell, and under a low brow and clearly defined eye brows large eyes of hazel brown, drooping in the outer corners, the whole framed in glossy dark brown hair. This was Colombe Pellerin, whose father, drowned at sea, had descended from one of the three families who had populated Leboncoup, and whose names had supplanted all others in the settlement, so that there was none but Theriaults, Pellerins, and De Villiers in the place—the De Villiers far predominating.

In the simple life of this little village there is no inequality, and there was no suggestion of degradation in Colombe's going, at the death of her father, to help her mother and the numberless younger children, by serving as maid and companion to the widow De Villier, whose only daughter was dead, and with whom the young girl worked with no thought on either side of the difference implied elsewhere by the terms "maid" and "mistress."

As she stood watching the coming of the fishing boats, the widow De Villier—called Mrs. Amand to distinguish her from all the others of the same name—came up behind the girl, and, laying a hand on either casement of the door, peered over her shoulder to see how near the boats had come. Her thin face and dark eyes looked content, but though her son was on the boat that led the others, she had none of the rapture of expression which lit up Colombe's face. To her the weekly return had become a matter of custom, and though always a thing to rejoice over, had lost the wonder of the miracle of bliss it had been in her youth, when love was new, and hard work had not made her angular and thin.

She laid her hand on Colombe's shoulder, pointed outward without speaking, and nodded pleasantly. The girl turned in an irrepressible rapture, waved her hands, palms outwards, with a graceful motion towards the water, and, lifting Mrs. Amand's hand from her shoulder, kissed it twice passionately. It was only in this pantomime that one learned that she was deaf and dumb.

An hour later Colombe knelt before the kitchen fire, coaxing the reluctant sticks to kindle. The room was very clean, the floor covered with sail-cloth, painted by skilful hands in figures to represent oil-cloth. Dark wooden chairs were ranged against the wall upon which hung pictures of the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary, that even when at work the women might not quite forget Heavenly matters.

A young man in a rough woollen shirt, weather-stained trousers, and battered hat, had entered; the girl's sealed senses could not welcome his presence, but an added sense supplied her lack. She felt his coming, and springing to her feet, darted forward, grasping his hands in a rapture which needed no speech for expression.

Toussaint de Villier was young, and the joy of the fair face so near his, born of happiness at his return, could not be displeasing.

He bent towards her his comely face, and putting his arm gently round her would have kissed her, but she drew back. The conventionality which taught other maidens to conceal their delight at such returns could never be conveyed to the deaf and dumb girl, but the instinct of maidenhood needed no teaching, and she shrank from his embrace while she fondled his hand.

Toussaint did not press her; fair as she was, he felt only a manly tenderness for his mother's good little

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silent helper, and his mind was very full of his own affairs. Withdrawing his hand with a kindly pat on the girl's dark hair, he went into the little bedroom off the kitchen, whence he presently issued, resplendent in best clothes, and the week's growth removed from his bronzed young face.

Tea was a short meal, and while Colombe and Mrs. Amand gathered up the dishes, Toussaint went out to join the group of men that had collected on the steps of the tiny shop opposite, where on Saturday and Sunday nights the entire male portion of the village assembled to discuss the week's fishing, and the prospects for the coming six days' haul.

By eight o'clock the group had dispersed; the admiring fringe of small boys which surrounded it had gone to bed, the older men had returned to their firesides, and the younger had gone to seek those who would one day preside over theirs.

The widow Amand glanced from time to time at Colombe's happy face. Toussaint, she well knew, had gone to see the pretty Odelle Theriault, whom his mother would gladly welcome in her dead daughter's place—but Colombe! Better than Toussaint, in his selfish happiness, Mrs. Amand knew that love had found its way into the secluded soul of the deaf and dumb girl. She knew, too, that she lacked the self-knowledge that could tell her what its coming meant, and without experience of books or men, had not yet felt jealousy; what would the rude awakening that lay before her bring to Colombe?

The elder women of Leboncoup are thin and lank, not unlike the prevailing firs—the effect in both cases of bleak climate, sharp winds, and sterile land; but in the worn bodies beat kindly hearts.

Mrs. Amand arose and laid her hand gently on the shoulder of the brooding girl, breaking into her happy reverie with the signal for bed.

Colombe obeyed with the ready docility she always showed, and except that the door was left ajar for Toussaint, the house was soon settled for the night.

The next day was, in the parlance of Leboncoup, "East-side Sunday." This means that on that day the priest, whose parish extends for sixty miles, would go to say Mass on the other side of the harbour, whither, as the tide served, a large portion of his west-side parishioners would follow him. At half-past nine the harbour was dotted with the white sails of the little crafts, prettily varied by the Venetian effects of those sloops, the sails of which are painted orange or red, all winding picturesquely through the dark islands, in their solemn fir and spruce growth, the blue of the water and the peculiarly clear air of this northern land giving the brilliancy that completed the picture.

Toussaint de Villier sat with his mother in the stern of a small boat, his face full of repressed, excited joy as he steered. In the bow, alone, sat Colombe; alone as no one else in the little community should ever be; wrapped in her unbroken silence like a consecration. Her eyes were dreamy, her lips smiling, and the fresh breeze ruffled her hair into little rings upon her flushing cheeks. No one could guess what the Mass-going meant to Colombe; no one could ever conjecture that anything in life meant to her to make her first communion like the other girls, doubly unlike them though she was through the difficulty in instructing her, and her innocence which knew no taint.

Toussaint, with his hand on the tiller and his eyes carefully ahead over the water, spoke, his dark cheek flushing. They used a *patois* French, at once a corruption and preservation of the French of two centuries ago.

"I spoke to Odelle last night, mother, and we settled it. We shall be married in September, after the fishing." His mother glanced hastily at Colombe; the sunshine rested on her happy face and Mrs. Amand lowered her voice, though no sound could pain her.

"Ah, poor Colombe," she whispered.

"Colombe!" exclaimed Toussaint. "What o Colombe? She never thought to marry me."

"She never thought at all. What does she know of your plans? But she can feel," answered his mother.

"Ah, well, she likes Odelle; she will be happy with us. She expects nothing better, a girl like that," said Toussaint easily.

"A girl like that is a girl like this," responded his mother. "But if she could hear, we would not discuss her; let us not now. My poor little tender one," she added, in spite of herself.

"Oh, Colombe! Colombe!" exclaimed Toussaint pettishly. "Odelle is the question. She will come home to supper to-night. Are you sorry to have me marry her? I thought you would be delighted, and now you talk of Colombe."

"I am very glad to have you marry her. She is the wife I should have chosen for you," said his mother, and they shook hands gravely. Colombe looked up, and seeing the movement, nodded gaily, and, rising, took a hand of each, and shook it merrily. Even Toussaint looked disconcerted for the moment, but seeing Odelle upon the wharf forgot Colombe in nodding to her. But Mrs. Amand's eyes were so dim that she needed Colombe's guiding hand as she climbed the steps.

The little fleet sailed back on the afternoon tide after vespers, and Odelle came to take tea in her future home. She was a pretty girl, and she looked very sweet in her happiness, which lent a grace to her every movement. Toussaint hovered about her, and Colombe sat forgotten by all but Mrs. Amand, who thought best to seem to forget her, too, as she saw in stolen glances the growing trouble in her face.

Odelle went away early to gain a longer time alone with Toussaint, who would start in the dawn for another week's fishing, and a lovers' eternity of separation.

When they were gone, Colombe came swiftly forth from the corner where she had watched Toussaint fold Odelle's cape about her with a tenderness that she had never seen in him, and which had made her cold and trembling with her first uncomprehended agony. Seizing the widow's hand in her shaking ones, she mutely asked the meaning of what she had seen. Words could have added nothing to the passion of her entreaty, and Mrs. Amand met her with the truth it deserved.

"*Oui*," she said aloud, forgetting her interlocutor's deafness. "*Oui, ma pauvre petite, il l'aime; nous t'aimons itou (aussi)*." Colombe understood, if not the words, the manner. Stretching out her hands in supplication to know all, she waited.

By gestures Mrs. Amand told her that Toussaint loved Odelle. Lifting the leaves of the calendar, she showed her the three months that intervened before the day when Odelle should come, and the capacity in which she would come she explained by leading poor Colombe into the adjoining bedroom—Toussaint's. Colombe stood quivering for a moment, trying to grasp this new thing, which was life and yet agony to her to whom hitherto life had meant joy and peace. Then she threw herself upon the floor beside the bed in a passion of weeping, more dreadful than it was inarticulate.

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The great festival of the year was approaching—the church picnic, at which the country assembled for an area of thirty miles. During the three weeks preceding it Colombe crept about her duties, the shadow of herself. A grey mask seemed to have settled upon her sunny face, out of which her brown eyes looked with the helpless expression seen sometimes in dogs. She carefully avoided the window, Mrs. Amand knew, lest she should see Odelle passing.

The day of the picnic was bright and clear; the frequent fogs did not gather at its close. A great Ferris wheel was raised on the grounds, and targets for shooting, booths for food, booths for the sale of fancy articles; for the picnic was a curious mixture of bazaar and country fête. A covered platform for dancing was the most important feature, where, upon a stand at one end, the men who could play upon the fiddle or triangle took turns in furnishing the music for quadrilles and "country eights."

The fishing boats did not go out that Monday, the day purposely chosen that the men might have a chance to stay at home for the picnic, and all day the crowd round the stand waiting for a chance to dance was considerable. Colombe stood among them watching the quadrilles listlessly. Odelle had not yet arrived, and Toussaint was not dancing. No one but these two and Mrs. Amand guessed the girl's secret, and many commented with wonder upon her altered looks.

Suddenly Toussaint's face brightened, and he started forward. Colombe followed him with her eyes, saw Odelle, and set her teeth with a look not pleasant to see. The young lovers took their place in the set forming, and Colombe watched them with an expression her childish face had never worn, and which many noted with sudden enlightenment as to the change in her.

It all happened in a moment after that. Toussaint took his partner in his arms to turn. Odelle stepped back into place, and Colombe sprang on her like a panther, bore her to the ground, and began an assault that might have ended tragically, had not Toussaint, recovering from his surprise, thrown her off, and lifted Odelle from the floor. The music ceased in confusion, a dozen hands were laid on Colombe, who remained quite still, except for the sobs which shook her slight body.

Odelle interposed between her and the gathering crowd.

"Leave her to me," she said. "She was crazy for a moment, and could bear no more. She will be her own gentle self again. Poor Colombe! Toussaint, lift her, forgive her."

"Forgive her! Never," said the young man wrathfully. "The treacherous cat! I will not forgive her now or ever."

Odelle bent over the girl, and softly stroked her hair.

"For shame, when we are so happy," she said reproachfully. "She was mad, I tell you. She has no help in her dull misery. Who can wonder if it broke bounds."

As if to verify her words, Colombe raised her head, and turned to Odelle a face so heartbroken that the bystanders burst into involuntary exclamations of pity, and clasped Odelle's dress in mute imploring for pardon.

Odelle stooped and kissed her, but when Colombe turned to Toussaint he moved away, muttering between his teeth that he could not forget her face as she sprang on the girl he loved, and that, while he remembered it, forgiveness was out of the question.

The two months that intervened between the picnic and the marriage of Odelle Theriault and Toussaint de Villier were filled for Leboncoup by interest in the little tragedy enacted in the widow Amand's house. The village, among its virtues, shared the vice common to all places where larger interests are wanted, of a lively concern as to others' affairs, and it was only natural that tongues were busy over the unhappy fate of Colombe. In the one outbreak of her life the passion that had turned her sweetness into bitterness had been vented, and those who had condemned her at first ended by accepting the theory of a temporary insanity of grief, and pitied her.

No one would have known her for the bright creature who had watched the boats come home in the June sunshine a few weeks before. All colour had faded from her cheeks, her step was slow, her form drooping; she never smiled, but went about her tasks in patient apathy, which touched all hearts. All but one, for whose mercy she vainly pleaded with all the eloquence of her speechlessness. Toussaint, who she followed with heartbroken eyes, Toussaint alone withheld the forgiving smile she craved. And so the week before the wedding came, and Colombe was eager in her efforts to make the house ready for Toussaint's bride, for he was the youngest son, and, according to the Leboncoup custom, to him as such belonged the right of bringing his wife to the paternal roof.

She had followed Odelle with imploring meekness and every sign of sorrow from the day of the picnic, and the happier girl had done all in her power to lighten the lot of her to whom she had brought pain.

In response to Colombe's appeal to be allowed to help in her preparations, she had given her the wedding veil to hem, and had insisted that Colombe alone should be her bridesmaid.

It was to her entreaties, and to the necessity of forgiving all wrongs before the marriage sacraments, that Colombe owed at last Toussaint's pardon, accorded as a good-night benediction on the eve of the marriage. When the girl saw him coming towards her with a half smile for the first time in so many weeks, she went to meet him and knelt suddenly at his feet. Toussaint extended his hand. Instead, she bent her head beneath it, and laid her cheek tenderly for a moment on his foot. Then she raised her face, trembling but tearless, and with a smile of strange brightness, signified that not then, but to-morrow he would truly forgive poor Colombe. And they wondered later if her life, sinless, except for her one bitterly repented fault, had won for her the right to hear with her sealed ears the rush of coming events and her silent lips to prophesy.

The wedding day was fair, with piled up clouds in the west that betokened the coming of wind. The nuptial mass was early, but from far and wide everyone came to see the marriage about which so much interest had gathered. Pretty as the bride was in her simple gown of rose-coloured cashmere and soft tulle veil, all eyes were turned on the bridesmaid, whose face was as white as her snowy dress, and whose eyes shone with strange lustre under her dark hair, as she walked as one set apart to some great purpose, or so they said later when they recalled her face, and interpreted her look by the light of subsequent knowledge.

According to the customs of the village, one meal of the day was eaten under the groom's roof, another under the bride's. As Odelle lived on the east side, the wedding breakfast, more probably dinner, was given at Mrs. Amand's, whence the bridal pair would go to take supper and spend the night in Odelle's maiden home. Old

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Nicholas Theriault, the fiddler, had come, and, dinner over, dancing began, where everyone claimed the honour of dancing with the bride. Pretty Odelle, flushed and gay, was glad to rest when the summons came for her to make ready for the sail across the harbour for the early supper, and to meet the friends who awaited her on the other side.

During the dancing Colombe had been absent. She had sat through dinner, not eating, but calm, with the same uplifted look upon her white face which it had worn in the church, and had immediately retired to the solitude of her room, whither many thoughts followed her with loving pity. Now in her capacity of bridesmaid she was to accompany Odelle across the harbour, she and Louis de Villier, Toussaint's cousin and best man. Odelle came down soon, with a dark cloak covering her rose-coloured gown, but Colombe lingered.

At last she came, stepping loiteringly down the stairs, still in her thin white dress, though the wind had risen.

As they saw her face, an involuntary exclamation broke from the guests who had gathered at the foot of the stairs to wish the bride God-speed, and an old woman crossed herself, as she drew tighter the black silk kerchief worn after the manner of Acadians in place of bonnet, saying:

"*Mon Dieu, elle voit les anges.*"

Colombe's mother, softly crying, and Mrs. Amand pressed forward to the girl, lifting her thin dress protestingly, signifying that it was growing cold. But Colombe shook her head smilingly, spreading wide her arms.

Then she clasped her mother's face and Mrs. Amand's in turn in her hands, kissed them each, and turned again to kiss Mrs. Amand, pointing to Toussaint waiting outside.

"*Dépêche-toi, dépêche-toi,*" he cried, turning at that moment and beckoning, and Colombe hastened to obey.

The bridal party went on board the little boat that awaited them at the wharf. Louis de Villier sat far forward in the bow, Colombe on the side, Toussaint and his wife in the stern. The wind blew in puffs, and the sky was darkening. Odelle shivered as Toussaint wrapped her cloak about her, but Colombe looked straight over the water with the gaze of one who felt neither cold nor heat.

It was in the channel, half way across, that the squall struck them. It was the work of a moment. The boat careened, then jibbed; the young bride, wrapped in her cloak, the heavy folds of which made her helpless, was swept into the water. She fainted and sank at once, when a white figure plunged after her, seized her as she rose, and held her up. It was Colombe, and she could not swim.

"Quick, Louis: take her," cried Toussaint madly, for the girls rose near the bow and he could not reach them.

But when Louis leant over to take Odelle, Colombe motioned him away, and pointing to Toussaint, sank with her burden.

Toussaint, with a dreadful oath, cursed her as a murderess; but in a moment they rose again. Colombe struggling to support the unconscious Odelle, and this time it was Toussaint who leaned out to seize her.

With a supreme effort Colombe raised Odelle and placed her in her husband's arms, and both men saw the bright smile with which she did so. Then she folded her arms upon her breast, and sank for ever.

In vain they hovered round the spot, and the boats from shore, bringing those who had seen the accident, came to their assistance. Colombe did not rise again, and in the last rays of the setting sun a sorrowful wedding party sailed silently to shore.

There could be no sleep that night, and everyone sat through the long hours, talking softly of the sweet dove's innocent life and tragic end.

Odelle sobbed on her husband's breast, seeking the comfort he could not give, as he remembered the pardon he had withheld from the dead girl, the price she had paid to win it, and read at last the meaning of her dying smile.

It was early in the dawn when they went once more to the shore of the little harbour, hoping that the incoming tide had brought them that which they had sought in vain.

And the kindly waters had done their work, for, white and still in the grey light, her dark hair clinging to her cheeks, her lips smiling with her last thought that now Toussaint would look gently on her, among the soft green grass lay Colombe Pellerin.

H. P. Rogers.

"An American Emperor."

A NEW STORY BY MR. LOUIS TRACY.

Those readers of ***Short Stories*** who read Mr. Louis Tracy's "Final War" when it ran as a serial through ***Pearson's Weekly*** will be delighted to hear that we have secured another story from his pen. This will commence in the Christmas Week Number of ***P. W.***, published on December 19th.

Mr. Tracy's second story is even more dramatic, more entertaining—more sensational, shall we say!—than his first. He has taken a daring plot, and daringly treated it. The story is called—

"AN AMERICAN EMPEROR."

THE STORY OF THE FOURTH EMPIRE OF FRANCE.

Jerome K. Vansittart is the richest man in the world, a young man, a man with an iron will, a man with high principles. He is at the opera, and falls violently in love with a lady in the opposite box.

How he gets an introduction to this lady would spoil the story to tell. Mademoiselle Honorine de Montpensier, however, is a lineal descendant of two lines of French kings, and will not marry Vansittart because she considers herself committed by Fate to re-establish the Monarchy or die unwed. A man will do anything to gain the woman he loves, as we know, so Jerome K. Vansittart decides to be a king.

It would be unfair to spoil the reader's pleasure by detailing more of this delightful narrative here.

If he would read one of the most entrancing stories ever written he must commence it in the Christmas Week Number of ***Pearson's Weekly.*** There we shall give a very large first instalment, so that the reader can get an interest in the story at once.

Remember,

"AN AMERICAN EMPEROR"

Will commence in the Christmas Week Number of ***Pearson's Weekly***, published on December 19th.

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Or, THE ROMANCE OF A LOST CONTINENT.

By Geo. C. Wallis, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Last Great Fight.

Scarcely two hours had gone since dawn when the rebels, by that time, doubtless, of their full strength, moved forward to the attack in jubilant array, thinking nothing but that we should fall easy victims to their overpowering numbers.

The ground we had chosen for our stand was a gently sloping plain, dipping down from a grassy knoll in our rear to a marshy tract right across our van, and thence rising again towards the hilly country beyond, which opened out straight in front of us in a wide, well-wooded ravine. On our left was the silent town, with its four-terraced, flat-topped pyramid—strange monument of Atlantian rule, towering above the empty houses. To the right a stream, narrow, but deep there, came from the hills, bubbling between its fern-fringed banks as it passed on its way to waste its eager flood in the saturated stretch of mossy, weedy marsh in the hollow below. It was an excellent position to await an enemy's attack, the more so as the enemy approached only from the front, and must force the passage of the marsh while at the mercy of our missiles. To take full advantage of the natural benefits of such a situation, I placed my men thuswise.

In our rear, on the slope of the little hillock, I stationed wary old Cuzcon, with five thousand picked veterans, all good swordsmen, as a reserve force. Their duty it was to guard the stores and camp followers until the tide of war wavered, and then to turn it in our favour by a headlong rush. In front, all along the edge of the swampy ground, I placed my two best regiments of archers and slingers, each five thousand strong, myself their captain; and between these and the reserve, Marenso with ten thousand spears and lances waited for the struggle when it should surge across the low level. On the left, Atris occupied the outskirts of the town with another ten thousand men, while Valdo, with an equal number, lined the banks of the rushing stream to the right.

The enemy advanced with little attempt at order, trusting more to overpowering odds than disposition of their forces, or previous instruction. In the middle of the army, as it poured down the gorge in their rear, came forty thousand renegade Atlantian soldiers and settlers; all the manhood that remained of our once great colony, now that many had landed to help the Prince of Aidè, and never returned, now that the savages, after years of subjection, had carried fire and sword through all the country, until the Governor had perforce made alliance with them to save alive the few who were left, and to raise the flag of revolt.

On the right wing, as they neared us, and spread out on the slope, came a yelling crowd of Huacans, marshalled under their own various banners and many-coloured ensigns, nearly twice as numerous as their white allies; and on the left wing a still larger force of Ulmecs, a sterner race than their kindred redskins, better disciplined, and more cunning in their tactics, a race of barbarians but lately from the wild region of the north. In the front rank, armour-clad, I saw with grim joy Vichri and Sothi stalking together with one whom some of my soldiers pointed out as Quitzaal, a fine, tall man with long grey beard, and another of lighter form and lither figure, more resplendently attired than the rest, whom no one in our army knew. Also, when their first line reached the sedges of the swamp I recognised the Prince of Aidè leading a party of swordsmen to the left flank, the white-crossed banner of blue that the rebels followed being borne before him. Of these they had several; in all our army there was one only, which I kept near myself, a torn and tattered rag, arrow-pierced, sword-cut, blood-stained, rain-soiled, but still streaming defiantly in the eastern breeze, the same brave flag of gold with the fiery sun upon it, that has floated over the conquering armies of Atlantis for more than a thousand years.

On came the vast array, surging like the sea in its resistless might, on, till the foremost files set foot in the treacherous marsh and sank at each step lower and lower, till they strode breast high through rushes and slimy water, struggling desperately to keep footing in face of the ceaseless shower of missiles that we discharged upon them with deadly effect.

Then those men in the rear brought hastily bound faggots from the forest, and piled them thick in the path to make a secure roadway across, but slow work they found it, with our arrows and bullets raining down upon them in a pitiless storm, pinning men to their own faggots, hurling them over into the black, thick ooze, and building up a causeway of writhing human flesh, more quickly than one of timber. Meantime, most of the Huacans, sweeping round, had fallen on our left, keeping Atris full-handed, while the crafty Ulmecs, creeping up through the bushes on our right, were engaging Valdo's flank with stubborn perseverance across the rivulet, slowly but surely pressing their way inwards and upwards. Seeing the danger of neglecting them, I bade the men in my command turn their volleying upon each flank into the swarms of barbarians, and let the rebels in front gain their way across the marsh if they could do so. That order obeyed, the causeway of faggots grew, though slowly and wearily, whilst the storm of missiles, diverted outwards, for a moment checked the savage advance. For a moment only, though, for, recovering from their first dismay, the teeming hosts pressed on again, throwing themselves headlong, heedless, reckless, upon our thin and faltering lines, dying by thousands as they came, yet those behind forcing on the front

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ranks with resistless impetus. Atris, indeed, continued to hold his own well; the nature of the ground was there more difficult for the attack, many of the outlying buildings of the town affording protection to the marksmen, also the Huacans had already tasted defeat at our hands, and were cautious of risking it again.

But the Ulmecs who were besetting Valdo so severely were a fiercer race, as yet unbeaten by our armies, and in greater number, so that it is no cause for wonder that after withstanding the terrible onslaught of the yelling horde with unparalleled devotion for three long hours, our right wing gave back a space, allowing the enemy to cross the stream, wavered under the renewed attack, and finally broke its ranks, falling in disordered array upon our centre, the triumphant barbarians pouring after in a countless host.

I hastened to Valdo's aid at once with my five thousand slingers, and rallying the shattered lines at last, made good another stand, presenting a yieldless front to the eager foes, who dashed themselves in maddened rage upon our solid ranks as the billows of an angry sea dash and break upon a rocky shore. At this juncture old Cuzcon sent down a thousand of his hardy veterans, taking the Ulmecs in flank and cutting through their crippled companies like a living spear as they tore along with splendid coolness till they reached our men. I had no fear of the right wing, then, and hastened down to the front, where Marenso stood calmly waiting the onset of the rebels, sending off a thousand archers to aid Atris as I went.

He uttered a fearful growl of pain.

By dint of hard toil, the main body, under Quitzaal, had won across the marsh and were engaged in a brisk skirmish with the Sleeper's weak but resolute force of 10,000 men, to whom I now added my 4,000 archers.

Forward came the rebels over the narrow, uneven, insecure footway, and as they came, hurled themselves upon us with all their strength. 'Twas a fierce, sharp struggle before all had passed the dangerous ground, galled as they were by our deadly rain of bronze-tipped shafts, and many rolled over into the reedy quagmire on either hand, or were trampled as they fell out of all shape of human kind as their comrades pressed sternly on, but, at length, some 30,000 soldiers, our own countrymen, armed and nerved as ourselves, were slowly forcing us, step by step, bit by bit, up the gentle slope, now rendered slippery by the fallen bodies. Long and stubbornly we fought them there, slaying two of them for every one of us who fell, now charging down and making them give back on the treacherous foothold, now retreating upwards before their gradual advance, and ever quitting ourselves as men who have no fear of death, but only of dishonour.

The sun rose higher in the heavens, reached the zenith, and declined from thence towards the western distance, but still, 'neath the broiling heat, 'mid all the din and roar of battle, we held our place on that hillside, retiring slowly, it is true, but fighting, fighting, fighting!—never for a moment relaxing our efforts, never ceasing to dispute every sheltering bush, or tree, or curving earth projection that gave us an advantage, never casting eye at those who fell around us, but stepping into their places with silent readiness.

The sun sloped nearer to the sky-line as the day waned, yet still we strove against those dreadful odds, not dismayed, not disheartened, by the exultant cries of the foe and the savage yells of the two barbarian hosts that still thundered impotently on either side; and despite the desperate endeavour of the enemy to compass our destruction by nightfall, held our precarious ground till darkness stayed the strife, and both armies took a breathing space in the quiet, friendly shadows, to eat and to rest, and, if it might be, to sleep before the morrow's sun should rouse to arms once more.

During the night I made several strategic alterations in the placing of my troops, bringing to the front two thousand men from the right, and as many from the left, and dividing our van, which had borne the brunt of the battle, into two brigades, one behind the other, myself leading the first and Marenso the second. That done, I spent the remainder of the night pacing our lines, looking at the hundred watch-fires of the enemy on each side of our post, blazing up and dying down in alternation, throwing long, deep shadows into the ghostly glades beyond, where the tall trees stood out gaunt in the glare of the flames. There was not the slightest chance of sleep for me that night, till the sounds of the busy camps had subsided to a faint murmur, and had risen again with the opening day to a muttering roar; till the stars shrank back into the depths of heaven, and the few night-clouds began to scurry across the sky in the growing light; till the watch-fires sank lower and lower in the brightening air, and their charred embers smoked and smouldered greyly in the new dawn. Then, as

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soon as we could make out friend and foe, we were locked in the death-grip again, striving might and main for life and victory upon that stretch of rising ground.

Thoth! what a stand was that, of our handful of soldiers beset by a myriad foes, all eager for our end! What deeds of heroism were wrought against those tireless copper-coloured armies, against the overpowering rebels who bore the blue banner up the slope in spite of all our struggles! What varying hopes and fears lightened and darkened our minds as the tide of battle rose and fell, now higher, now lower, but ever creeping up to the little knoll where Cuzcon waited, looking out over the scene with stern and unmoved visage!

For hours I searched along our line in quest of Vichri or Sothi, but my patience was unrewarded till noon had come again, when, in heading a desperate sally downhill, I met them both, fighting arm to arm.

"Now, demons in human shape and cowards withal!" I cried hoarsely, as I swept down upon their band; "at last I find you at my sword's point, where I have desired. Say your supplications to the Spirits now and quickly, that I may send you to haunt the shadows without delay, while you have no passport pieces in your hands!"

Sothi drew aside when I spoke, and his craven face blanched, but one-eared Vichri, bold in his badness, answered, scornfully disdainful:

"Great words from a little mind, Arnon the Pirate. Brave words from a hideous being. Loud words from a bullying cur. Rash words from a baffled General. Fate-sealing words from one already doomed."

"Villain! strong in acrid bitterness and evil lies and acts, and treacheries, and idle boasts; but frail of courage and unwise in head—taste that, and see if 'tis to your palate!" I said, striking out at him with "Sunderer" with all my force. The blade, though parried and foiled of its aim, came down like a dart of light, slicing off his solitary ear as neatly as it would have slit an orange in twain.

"Art one-eared no longer now, but earless!" I laughed loudly. "'Twill teach thee to heap vile abuse on thy betters in future!"

He uttered a fearful growl of pain as the severed member fell to the ground, and, made frantic by the agony and by my taunts, attacked me like a wild beast, raining blows upon me fast and furious, with sword in one hand and dagger in the other, cursing and shrieking the while, so that the sound of our conflict rose high above the roar of the battle that surged around us with unbated vigour. Parrying and fencing, I gave way before his blind, mad rage for a time, letting his strength exhaust itself, drawing him further and further from his own ranks, and then, when his blows came feebler and wilder, I turned on him with a fierce oath, and drove him back again, now plying him with remorseless rage, and spilling his blood with "Sunderer's" point in a dozen places before I made the finishing stroke.

Sothi, from the first clash of our weapons, had been seeking a chance to deal me a foul stroke in the struggle, but was prevented by the watchfulness of Alcis, the standard-bearer, who upheld the good old flag against all comers, guarding my back at the same time; and when I turned like a lion at bay and swept Vichri before me, Sothi turned tail and fled for safety a hundred paces away. A full half hour I played with my victim, piercing him here, slashing him there, dashing his dagger from his hand, shivering his blade into twenty fragments, and hacking his armour to unrecognisable shreds. In vain he strove with feet and teeth and nails when all his weapons were gone, and at last getting him down on his knees just as the Prince of Aidè and the unknown officer of the rebels rushed up with desperate charge, I struck off the hated head from the hated body, and, kicking it as it fell, hurled it far among the enemy.

"There goes the head of the vilest wretch in the camp!" I said to Alcis with exultation, "and an ugly one to boot, devoid of ears!"

"'Twere well off," said he, "and 'twere well if we could repel this onslaught or regain our men," for by this time the nearest of our soldiers was a hundred paces away, and the foe almost upon us.

"Lower the flag for a signal to Cuzcon!" I returned, "and we will stand our ground till he comes though all Ulmeca surround us. Take you this tall officer who comes here, the Prince of Aidè, and leave me the other."

"As you have said," replied the faithful soldier, obeying my order, signing to Cuzcon, and then with me facing the fearful charge that next moment burst upon us, overwhelming us as the incoming tide, urged by a strong head wind, submerges a defiant jutting point of rock arising from the sand.

Together we strove 'neath that tossing banner, now almost torn from our grasp or bent to the earth, and now floating aloft again in triumph, as one or other of us snatched it from the hands of the encircling foe. Once, with a great, hissing stroke, the Prince of Aidè shore its shaft in twain just above where my left hand held it, and a cry of victory rose from all around, but Alcis caught it as it fell and waved it aloft with a shout of joy, sweeping a clear space round him with his free hand the while. But our arms grew weary, for it was arduous work to guard our lives and that precious ensign too; and to us it seemed ages ere Cuzcon reached us, though we heard, as from afar, shouts of wonder and encouragement, and could just see, higher up the slope, Marenso striving to cut his way to assist us. At last, when I was growing faint from loss of blood—the sword-cut in my thigh that Thaska had given me in the great sea-fight having been re-opened by a thrice unlucky stroke—Alcis turned pale as death and tottering, would have let fall the flag but that I caught it from his nerveless fingers as he reeled against me. He was pierced through from the back with a long spear, the point coming out at his chest, and throwing up his arms in one last long sweep of his blade, sank expiring at my feet. But that last wild stroke of his sword cut its way through the heart of the Prince of Aidè.

Now Cuzcon and his veterans came thundering down the hill, Marenso's men parting to let them through, and all fresh to the battle drove our tired opponents before them down to the edge of the marsh as chaff before the wind, their keen, unsullied swords crashing as they went through helms and armour and shields, and leaving behind them a red track of death and dismay. As they passed I saw Sothi, borne on the human wave that went helpless before their front, and seeing him, fitted one of my smallest bullets to my sling, and whirling it singing round my head with all the strength I had, sent it hissing after the flying coward, and saw the tiny shining sphere bury itself in his brain. He reeled and fell, and that was the last of Sothi, who had not even courage to brazen out his evil deeds.

Then up the gradual declivity came Cuzcon again, scattering to right and left all the rebels who had formed in rank after the first charge; then down again to the swamp and out upon the causeway—now all solid with bodies trodden in among the faggots and the slime—repelling the barbarians who came to the relief of their discomfited allies, driving these latter, as they went over the slippery footway, into the red-coloured morass on either side, hewing away at the cloud of foes that soon encircled them, and slowly pushing them backwards and upwards. Higher up, however, Marenso's men, having had time to rally and re-form, made a determined stand, and the two forces, evenly balanced now, held each other in check till the light began to fail. All this time Atris and Valdo were keeping the two savage armies at bay; with difficulty, but with success.

Crawling away from the scene of carnage, I sought the border of the little stream over which the tide of battle had rolled, meaning to wash my wounds in its crystal waters, and cleanse my face from the grime and gore that disfigured it, but lo! when I bent to lave in the flowing rill, I

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saw that which made me recoil with loathing. *It ran ruddy with blood, as a rivulet of crimson dye!* while hacked and mutilated bodies and severed limbs, and fragments of flesh and shreds of stained clothing, came drifting down its reddened tide. Higher up, the fight was still raging upon its banks and in its flood, so that if I must have water I must seek it beyond the turmoil. Sick at heart, I turned away, and grasping "Sunderer" with wild resolve, strode along the winding, grass-grown side of the brook to where Valdo's regiments battled doggedly with the daubed and painted Ulmecs, led now by Quitzaal in person, who had left the main attack with intent to force our flank.

Right into the eddying strife I plunged, the pain of my wounds only serving to increase my recklessness, and right through it I struggled, making the good sword whirl around me as I went like a wheel of fire, bearing down axe and club and spear and blade and all things in its path, its keen edge drinking life-blood at every whizzing sweep

"I will protect thee in this fierce whirl of war."

and flashing curve, making the Red Barbarians, fierce-fanged creatures that they were, give back before my onset as a herd of frightened sheep before a hungry wolf, and at last winning for myself a clear way to the far verge of the battle, where the stream rippled over its pebbly bed untainted by the flow of human life. There, I threw myself upon its brink, drank a deep draught of the pure, refreshing fluid, washed off the sweat and dirt that stood on me in furrows and patches, bathed my hurts in the cleansing, restoring water, and, after binding them with grasses and pieces of clothing as best I could, sat awhile to rest and watch.

Looking to the left I saw Atris slowly sending the Huacans back, a dispirited crowd, towards the forest, while Valdo, in spite of the fearful odds against him, was also gaining ground, little by little, and forcing Quitzaal and his native troops more and more away from the grassy knoll lately occupied by Cuzcon. That worthy old veteran I could see with Marenso, striving like a lion to turn the current of war downhill, and so maintain the advantage already snatched by the first grand charge. The rebel Atlantians, so far as I could judge, seemed to excel our main body in number, and to be well able to prolong the contest till night once more put an end to the long drawn-out struggle.

Save for the unknown officer of slim, lithe form, this division of the hostile army was leaderless now that the Prince of Aidè and Vichri and Sothi were slain, and Quitzaal in another part of the field, but so far as the ability of one leader could compensate for the loss of four, the foe was well managed. The Unknown was everywhere, fought splendidly, led dashing sallies, or made gallant stands with equal ease, cheered on the flagging, laughed gaily with the brave, threatened the cowards and hangers-back, spoke words of comfort to those who fell near him, and ever kept so keen an eye upon the movements of our men that no stratagem availed to benefit us. Though the archers and slingers, as I could well see, made him their constant mark, though both Cuzcon and the Sleeper ever strove to reach him, the Unknown bore a charmed life and fought on as unconcernedly as though clad from top to toe in mail of proof. I followed his movements with admiring interest, thinking that presently, when I felt recovered, I would go down gladly to meet a foeman so worthy of my steel, one whom I could engage in honourable contest, to whom I owed no debt of vengeance unfulfilled; and noticed with pleasure how the rest depended on his leadership, showing how easily the day would be ours should he be laid low.

Hearing a loud cheer of triumph, I turned my head to discover Atris pursuing the beaten Huacans headlong from the field, with terrible slaughter. They had broken and fled, and the victors, after the first rush, checked their ardour and began skirting the edge of the morass with design to take our other enemies in the rear. "Well done, Atris!" I exclaimed, and "Well done, Valdo!" I added, when, looking west, I found that the Ulmecs were driven back across the stream at every point. I would have sat there some time longer, then; but, happening to glance once more at the main struggle, I saw that which made me spring to my feet in eagerness and tear down hill in hot haste, fitting a bullet to my sling as I went. Brave old Cuzcon had at last reached the Unknown Leader and crossed weapons with him, only to fall beneath a foul blow of the latter's long, thin blade. No thought now of honourable contest, for I liked that old veteran, who was always so hardy and hearty and jolly, with a liking akin to love, and was filled with anger at the dastard stroke that had laid him dead so suddenly, and as I ran, dispatched on its mission the leaden ball. It sang through the air, struck and shattered the long, thin blade, that moment uplifted to smite, but—accursed thing!—failed even to wound the Unknown Leader. I next tried an arrow, with still worse luck, for my hand was shaky and my aim hurried, so that the harmless shaft flew wide, and, growling thereat, I plunged into the thick of the battle with drawn sword.

The sun had now set, and the sky was gemmed with a thousand stars, unshaded by a single speck of floating mist, our arms were weary and our throats parched with thirst, yet we fought on there in the dim light with unabated zeal. Forcing my way to the front, I at last came face to face with the mysterious figure, and fire struck from our weapons as they clashed together, "Sunderer" sending the other's fresh blade spinning in the air a score of paces away. Then the Unknown, whose face was hidden by his mask, seemed all in a moment to lose heart, and shrank back to avoid my following stroke as no true soldier would have done, and the thirsting edge, baulked of its prey, rattled roughly, but harmlessly, upon the shining links of armour.

"Hast lost thy bravery all suddenly?" I said mockingly, holding my blade down. "When thou hast recovered it, will try another bout with thee, if thou art not too long."

For all answer, the Unknown snatched up another sword and fell upon me furiously, slashing and thrusting with

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feverish haste but little skill and less effect, so that a very few minutes sufficed me to send this new blade flying, and to wound the hand that held it, causing my opponent to sink to the ground with a moan of despair. I should have struck home then hard and true—and would that I had!—but that my gorge rose at the thought of slaying a foe so easily conquered and so helplessly at my mercy.

"Get to thy feet, and try another round with me!" I cried roughly. "'Tis naught but a scratch, and warriors are not wont to faint at sight of blood."

"Not warriors, indeed," answered the prostrate form, speaking now for the first time, and in a voice that awoke a hundred happy-evil memories, "not warriors, indeed, Macis, but high-born ladies may well be pardoned. Knowest me not, Macis, who art now known as Arnon the General? Hast so soon forgotten the Princess of Aidè, Listra, thy love?"

No, I had not forgotten, and I gritted my teeth in anger because I could not blot out the recollection of my fore-warned temptation and my miserable fall.

"I remember all," I answered sternly, bending down to raise my fallen temptress, who now tore off the mask to display her lovely features.

"Then, tell me, Macis," she asked, her soft eyes pleading harder than her voice, "oh, tell me, then, that what is rumoured of thyself and the Queen, that you are her secret lover, is an idle tale. Tell me that what I have done is wrongly done, and that you love me still," and she lay in my arms, not essaying to rise, though I would have helped her.

"What have you done, Princess?" I asked, thinking of Briseis, and feeling gladly that this wanton's spell was broken now for ever.

"Done," re-echoed she, "I have laid a trap for you and your army to walk into, I have set all my officers to slay you above all others, I have promised myself to whomsoever should cut short your career, nay, I have striven to kill you myself. All this I have done in my jealous passion, for, O Macis, I have loved you as I have loved no other, and I love you still with so deep a love that I could slay you and then myself sooner than see you the lord of a rival. O, Macis, by the ties that once bound us say that I have suffered needlessly, say that you love me as before. Vichri is dead, and the Prince, my husband, is dead also; there be none to come between us."

"Save the Queen," I answered coldly, not one word of her agonised pleading touching my heart to tenderness. "I cannot tell you what you wish, for 'twas only the thought—the baneful thought—of her falsity to me that led me to your arms. Elsewise I had not known you, and had left you to the warm attentions of your many lovers. Come, rise, I pray you, for the fight is closing round us."

She made no answer in words at first, but leapt to her feet with marvellous alacrity, and gave utterance to a piercing shriek—a shriek so long and shrill that it rose high above the din and clash of battle and the cries of vanquishing and vanquished men, a shriek so full of concentrated despair, embittered disappointment, and hopeless passion that its wailing echo rings in my ears even now. Then, with a gesture of intense anger, verging upon insensate hatred, she sank to the turf again, faintly murmuring as she fell:

"For this—for this—inconstant traitor—have I loved!"

"'Art overwrought," I said calmly, loosening the linked armour and allowing the cool night breeze to blow upon her. "Lie still, so, whilst I bind your wound," for I had noticed a thin red stream oozing from her side, and found a deep cut that needed bandaging. "When morning comes you will see matters differently."

Twice, with impatient motion, she tore off the rude binding, declaring, with a burst of bitter tears, that she would have no boon from one who spurned her; but at last tired nature gained the upper hand, and she suffered me to complete my task in silence.

"There, art safe now, till better help can be given thee," I said. "Now I will protect thee in this fierce whirl of war," and kneeling by her prostrate figure, with "Sunderer" drawn, I kept her from further hurt, for something—an evil spirit, it is likely—bade me act thus, returning good for evil.

A strange thing it seemed to me, the outcast and the whilom priest of Khem, to be bending there over the form of a princess whom I had once loved but now despised, who was clad in a soldier's garb, and wounded by my own hand; while all around us fierce faces pressed close and closer, swords clanged with ceaseless clamour, spears gleamed, daggers flashed in the dim light, arrows flew and fell in deadly rain, bullets whizzed about our ears like hail, men died by hundreds, and the woods rang with the deafening sounds of conflict.

Atris had now fallen on our foes on the rear and Valdo from the right, so that the remnant of the rebel force was now completely surrounded, and fast melting away before our triumphant encircling ring. They fought sturdily and long, did those doomed renegades; but without a leader, cut off from all hope, without ground to move into a good formation, the end was not long in coming, and with a sadly diminished and worn-out array, we were left the victors of that terrible struggle.

Thus, with a brilliant blaze of glory, the sun of Atlantis' military greatness set for ever.

(To be continued.)

People with Horizontal Heads,

IN OTHER WORDS,

LEVEL-HEADED PEOPLE,

Will do well to keep their eyes open on DECEMBER 22nd, 1896.

SOMETHING STARTLING WILL APPEAR on THAT DAY.

Jumbled Story Competition.—23.

On opposite page appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *December 7th*, and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 23.] [See Page 726.

LOST AT SEA WITH HON. DANIEL VILLMIRK

"She is discovered writing at a table.

"Madame Durand, you must know, had founded greatest sensations that Paris had ever discovered. Handsome? Superb?"

"The Count and I considered ourselves rivals in society?" asked the Millionaire, who was thinking every member of the society, their plans, their poisoned dart or a bullet would be shot with the estimation with which Madame Durand held us dart through the Count's eye.

"Now, as you know, I am not a smoker, and by his hands in an expressive gesture—"Siberia for you to execute in connection with M. Slavonski! She saw it, she opened it, she read it, and then the member had been given a mission when—a traitor in her little finger than all the power of the king on everyone," he said.

"After finishing the letter she rang a bell and disfigured the lower part of his face, which the heavy terrific force down the smoker's throat, while the scent calls up a thousand recollections to my mind that I might die the death of a traitor.

"'This is what she is writing: 'My dear Count, Durand committed suicide on hearing of the death in my handwriting, signed with my name, and inventive genius, and thus useful.

"Within were the names and addresses of his throne—this little woman with her hand of iron, The sentence pleased him and the story bade fair fortune so they ought to be good. What? you don't receive the credit of having frustrated the traitor. Madame Durand, who was delighted with the idea. Slavonski touched his lips—"is this. The cigar contained in the centre a tiny cylinder filled with the instrument of death in his hand.

"This was the plan that the Count devised to smoke. Nonsense, man. Well, make an exception to be interesting.

"On the contrary, small, delicate-looking—in a Government"—Slavonski paused, and threw out word, *petite*. And yet this woman had more power to look at a man who is smoking a cigar. The very cigar itself would be consumed away, so as to leave the cigar in the flame.

"The society went to pieces, since Madame recovered to find myself the hero of one of the arm of his chair.

"Well, a *grand coup* was to be effected, each was discovered—a traitor—Slavonski!"

"The Count showed this ingenious cigar to me. His face was near mine as I put the end of the merest accident I placed the wrong end of the table.

"Well, the Count, you may be sure, having noted for the selectness of its patrons. After dinner insisted on taking me to dinner at a restaurant where I was then staying, and to offer me a cigar, gave it to a man-servant, with orders to deliver it to-day."

"Thanks, I'd rather not," replied Slavonski. "The woman."

"Ah," said the Millionaire. "Her heart of steel." She ordered him immediately to proceed to Paris, and leaning across the table, held the light towards himself in his chair, and smiled blandly with the members—among them myself and the Count that he had not wasted his dinner.

"All that I recollect of what then occurred"——fools that we were.

The Millionaire drank off his port and settled air of a man who has dined sumptuously.

The Millionaire pushed a box of cigars across the objects, everything in fact that he knew concerning moustache he wore did not entirely conceal.

His companion sitting opposite him was a inventive genius. His latest idea was a cigar which selected the Count as executioner, and when he directed to the Russian Government.

"But what of Madame Durand and the secret Russian, Slavonski by name. A horrible wound came to her in obedience to her letter, he held nothing behind which might tell a tale.

"The Count, as I have told you, was a man of powerful explosive. When the cigar was ignited a exploded in my mouth, but drove the poisoned from the table.

"Slavonski. I. In truth, however, it was not of her chosen lover," said Slavonski, rising abruptly immediately to the Count.

"Slavonski? You!" exclaimed the Millionaire.

The Millionaire threw his leg carelessly over the cigar in my mouth. The Count struck a match, precisely? I have an important comm ssion for which you told me—a pretty device!'

"Two days later I met the Count in Paris. He the Count offered me a cigar.

"Good. The curtain is rung up, and a woman and her heart of steel."

"Try one of these," he said, "they cost me a small fact is, it is as much as I can do to force myself even —*ciel*, and what recollections!"

Slavonski drew his hand across his eyes. He did bring about my downfall. He drew up a document not care to disclose his life's secret to this man. This secret society had precisely one hundred whom I have mentioned, who was a man of puzzled, I see. I will explain:

"What recollections?" he said. "Tell me; I I who was the traitor. It was the Count. You are known."

"Well," he said, "this is my story: First; a little white hand signed a death warrant. She drawn up this document, took good care that it will you come and see me at eleven o'clock to-night, and was at the head of a Russian secret society. And be sure and bring with you the cigar of them. Had this letter reached the Russian should fall into Madame's hands, and that he should But he was expected to amuse him.

"I was unconscious for a short time, but soon would like to know."

"He fell dead across the table.

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A NINETEENTH CENTURY WITCH.

"THERE is something uncanny about the girl. I cannot make her out;" and Charlie Vanderveer puffed viciously at his cigar. "Why, the other night I was up there she started by reading my palm and ended by hypnotising me. By Jove! Tom, I was frightened—absolutely frightened."

"That is easy," answered Bransford with an indulgent smile.

"What, the palmistry or the hypnotism?"

"Both; and the frightening thrown in."

"Well, you will see her to-night, and can then judge for yourself. Here we are, now."

Saying which they walked up the broad steps of an uncomfortable-looking mansion, and were ushered into the drawing-room by a stately-looking butler.

Miss Morgan was as charming a girl as one would care to meet. She had beauty, numerous accomplishments, and, incidentally, wealth. Within the past few years she had developed a craze for anything bordering on the mystic or supernatural. At first it was palmistry, but recently it had developed into mind-reading, hypnotism, and ingeniously-planned, though entirely unsuccessful, wanderings of the astral body.

Yet she had impressed some of her friends to such an extent that they would dream night-marish dreams about her, and when they informed her of the fact she would calmly announce that she really had been with them in astral form.

Tom Bransford thought of all this as he was presented to this self-confessed witch. To her credit be it said that the young lady thought too much of her personal appearance to adopt any outlandish form of dress; on the contrary, the *tout ensemble*, while certainly bewitching, was anything but uncanny.

After the first introductions and perfunctory conventionalities, the conversation was turned to the subject of hypnotism, and Bransford volunteered to become a subject with foolhardy daring. "Just to see what the sensation was like," as he meekly explained.

Overjoyed at the prospect of a new victim to experiment upon, the young hostess offered him an invitingly comfortable-looking armchair, while she, seating herself before him and taking his hands in hers, directed that he should look steadily into her eyes. Bransford did so, while Miss Morgan fixed her lustrous eyes on his as though she would look him through and through.

"Don't stare at me that way too long, Miss Morgan; I have a weak heart," interrupted Bransford.

Estelle laughed.

"You must not interrupt the psychic current by talking. But tell me, have you experienced any strange sensations yet?"

"Yes," replied Bransford, "the strangest and wildest sensations. I can hardly talk. I feel that I am going—going." And, as a matter of fact, Tom's eyes closed while he was yet talking, and in another moment he collapsed, helpless and powerless, in the chair.

"I have never been so successful," cried the girl, clasping her hands delightedly. "He has passed beyond the suggestion stage, and now must be in the somnambulistic stage."

Then, turning to the limp form of Bransford, she commanded: "Stand up. You are now completely in my power. Stand up and open your eyes."

But Bransford did nothing of the sort. On the contrary, his legs and arms became rigid, his teeth clenched, and his breathing laboured.

Estelle turned pale.

"He is in the cataleptic stage; but I think I had better wake him up, don't you?"

"By all means," assented Vanderveer, whose face had assumed an almost greenish hue with fright.

But in vain did this fair disciple of Mesmer resort to passes, commands, and finally tearful entreaties. Bransford could not be aroused, and his condition seemed to become more serious every moment.

"Oh, Mr. Bransford, do wake up. If you have the slightest regard for me, I beseech of you to wake up,"

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cried the girl anxiously. "Oh, Mr. Vanderveer, do you please say something to rouse him; your voice will be more familiar than mine."

"Tom," cried Charlie at the top of his voice, "wake up, old man!" Then shaking him by the shoulders, he pleaded with him wildly. "Tom, old friend, you are all right. Wake up, Tom, if you love me, wake up." Then reproachfully to Estelle: "He told you he had a weak heart."

"Yes," she replied, now crying hysterically, "but I thought he was joking. Do please go for a doctor as quickly as you can."

"But I can't leave him here; he'll fall on the floor," said Charlie. "Don't you think I had better carry him to the lounge?"

"Pray do, and then I can bathe his forehead with some extract, and fan him while you are gone."

Bransford's remains—for they hardly seemed to be more—were then laboriously half lifted, half dragged from the chair to the lounge, and a daintily embroidered pillow placed under his head. Estelle had in the meantime supplied herself with all available restoratives and took her place by his side, while Charlie hurried away for medical aid.

Left alone with her unfortunate victim, she unburdened her soul aloud.

"Oh, what have I done? Perhaps he will die. And I had heard so much about him. I was sure we were going to be good friends. And I did like him from the moment I saw him this evening—and now I have probably killed him. Oh, how could I do it—how could I do it?"

A sort of spasm passed over the unconscious form before her, and she thought his breathing had ceased, so she put her hand over his parted lips to see if she could feel any breath, when to her horror and surprise the trembling hand was kissed in a most life-like manner, and Bransford's dark eyes looked into hers with a humourous twinkle.

"Remember," he said quietly, "I am not responsible. I am hypnotised, you know." Then, still keeping her hand in his own, he sat up and asked gravely: "Don't you think that you have had a pretty good lesson in the danger of playing with edge-tools and dabbling in occult arts you do not know anything about?"

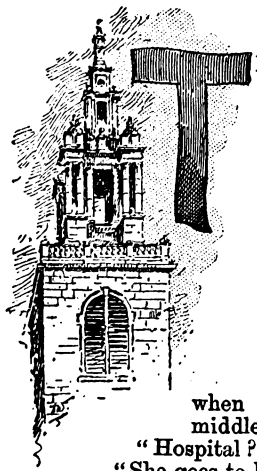
"I think it was perfectly abominable and cruel for you to give me such a terrible fright," she cried, pulling away her hand.

"It might easily have really occurred. Come now. You have said you like me, then forgive me; but promise to be a bewitching woman, and not a womanly witch in the future. The day of witchcraft has long since passed; nineteenth-century witches have no excuse for existing. Is it a bargain?"

"Rather a one-sided bargain; but I think you are right, and I promise."

When Vanderveer returned an hour later, after calling unsuccessfully on five physicians, he found Tom and Estelle chatting as cosily together as though they had been friends for years. BELLE BILLOWE.

THE SCUM THAT RISES.



THERE was the man, shadowing him as usual!

Mat was in the lodging-house, rallying not at all from the "accident" of three months ago. What kept the life in her? Gratitude? No it was not gratitude, for the mere fact of his dragging her from under the hoofs of the horses where she had let herself fall was scarcely calculated to call forth her gratitude.

He could recall that day, how she had looked at him when he pulled her out from the middle of the street.

"Hospital?" he had said to the policeman. "She goes to her home—my home. I'm her brother. Her name? Smith."

And there she had been nursed by him and old Mrs. Lanigan these three months, and—look!—there was that man taking the trouble of appearing not to shadow him.

He had been in close quarters before, and he might even now make a break for it and leave Mat.

Though, as for that, he might go and tell her the truth and the chances were that she would not despise him for possessing wit enough to baulk those who were tracking him. She had had her own failures in her short life, and she might even get up a new admiration for him because he declined a failure now.

Yet, if he told her the truth, he should have to tell her the manner of his life, and up to now he had kept that from her—he knew not why—and she would feel that he had been false to her in representing himself as a workman on half time, whose short hours of labour gave him the liberty to look after her, when Mrs. Lanigan was not sober enough to do so. He was now in the street where Mat's doctor lived.

He had gone out to see the doctor, after debating for hours with himself whether he should give in, or make a break for it. He pressed the electric button and entered the practitioner's consulting-room. He had called in for Mat. The doctor held out his hand in his bland manner.

"Ah!" he said, "you come concerning your sister. A most interesting case; the vitality is simply remarkable—remarkable, Mr. Smith."

"I want to know," said "Mr. Smith," "how long she's got to live."

The doctor looked at him; he thought this question

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as heartless as many a phase in people of this man's station in life—evidently the brother was tired of caring for his sister; it was not an unusual thing for such people to tire of their invalids.

"She may last a week," he answered, "though I do not think it will be so long."

Mr. Smith pulled a roll of notes from his pocket.

"This is all I've got," he said. "It's a good deal more than your bill can be. But Mat's to be looked after for a week, and you've got to be paid for keeping a secret. I am going to be arrested to-day. I am Bill Sharp—that's one of my names. I have been shadowed for months. I'm wanted by the police."

The doctor had stepped back. Sharp laughed:

"That's all right," he said. "But I think you'll do me a favour. Mat mustn't know what I am."

"She has told me how good you have been to her. Your sister——"

"She ain't my sister. I said she was to keep her from going to the hospital that time. See? Look here!" He frowned, noting the expression on the doctor's face. "I never saw her before that time she was hurt. She's had a hard scramble for her life, and she's only eighteen—no father, no mother, no anything, only hard, honest work to keep her soul and body together. She got tired at last and wanted to make an end of it that day I saved her. I—I want her to go on thinking I'm honest as she is."

"But if you are arrested to-day?"

"I'm coming to that. I'm going to have a job of work in Hackney and won't be back for ten days. Understand? In ten days—well, you know, it'll all be over with her by that time. All I want is for you to get a good nurse for her. And you won't give me away to her, will you? I don't think you're the sort of man to go back on a poor little thing like her, doctor—no father, or mother, all alone, and tired of her life. Doctor, I—I——"

"I'll help her," the doctor said. When Sharp stepped again into the street he saw evidences of his being apprehended before he had seen Mat for the last time. He would have proved dangerous to take at that moment—for hadn't he been sentimental in the doctor's office?

He lurched through a cross street.

Why should he break his record of eluding the grasp of the law? A note to Mat, a telegram would do as well as seeing her.

But he went on to the house, entered it, and went up the stairs.

He stepped to the hall window and looked out. Down in the street the man who had shadowed him for so long was reinforced by another, while two blue-coated "coppers" had paused in the doorway.

The looker-on smiled; he could do it, and it would be a joke to fool the men and in a place of safety plan for another bold stroke of business.

A low sound came to his ear, so low that he might have told himself that he had so often heard some such sound within the past three months that now it was always in his mind.

Should he go to that room?

"If Bill was only here!" A woman's voice in utter weariness sighed from the room.

He turned from the window and entered the room, closing and locking the door.

To see the cadaverous form upon the bed raised in expectation, to see the wan smile spread over the worn face till Mat was a thing transfigured—no longer a creature of pain and agony, no longer homeless and friendless, but a woman whose soul had waked to the need of woman—that one love in all the world upon which she can rely—was a cheering sight indeed to Bill.

"Why, Mat, old girl," he said, "have you missed me?"

"Oh, no," she answered. "I knew you'd come when you could."

He had a flower in his pocket, he gave it to her and she held it up to her heart.

"Now I'm going to fix up," he said, and went about the room tidying it as a man use to doing much for himself.

The girl was regarding the rose he had given her, passing one bony finger after the other over its velvet surface.

"It must be like the country, Bill," she said, "this rose, so fresh and pretty. Sometimes I get to thinking of the country, till I hear the air in the trees and the birds twittering as the sun comes up. My mother was born in the country and she used to tell me all about it when I was restless. When we were making coats for the sweaters she used to tell me about the cows on her father's place."

"I say, Mat," said the man, "Mrs. Lanigan's gone to a wake; she won't be any good for a week. By-the-way, how would you like to go to the country?"

"Would you go, too?" she asked, on the alert.

"Well, yes," he answered her, "after I get back."

"Back?" She let the rose fall on the sheet before her.

"I haven't told you," he went on confusedly, "that I've got to go to Hackney for ten days, have I? A job, you know. Ten days ain't long, and then, maybe, you can go to the country."

"That's all right," she replied drily. "And this job of work, will it pay you?"

"It's better than being on half time, isn't it?" he asked. "You might as well know it all. I've been to the doctor, and he'll have a nurse here to-day. And you won't miss me too much, you're too level-headed for that."

"Oh, no," she replied quickly. "Ten days, did you say?"

"Yes," he answered. "I'm going to-day."

He had told his lie and there was still time for him to get off and save his reputation as a successful man; that back window led to a court, the doctor would soon be here with the nurse, and there was an even chance that Mat would never know the truth, after all.

"Mat," he said hotly.

She raised her hand:

"Bill, let me say a word first."

"But I want to tell you——"

"Bill, what you've done for me has made me think of—up there." She pointed with the rose skyward. "Mother used to talk about it."

His face grew stubborn.

"I don't want to be soft," she said, "but wouldn't you do something before you go away? When you was a young 'un did you ever say 'Our Father'?"

"What rot!" he blurted out. She laughed. "That's all right," she said. "Perhaps it's lying here so long makes me soft, and——"

"Look here," he interrupted angrily, "it ain't much to say. I learnt it off of the matron at the Home when I was a kid."

"Oh, yes," she said gently, "you was brought up in a Home for children, wasn't you? I wish you'd had a mother—that is a mother to *know*. My mother would

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have liked you, and you'd have liked her. She was awful kind."

Every minute meant much to him; five minutes more and he might be too late to elude those men outside.

"It's your lead, Mat," he said. She hesitated a moment, and then she said, in a low voice, the "Our Father," in which he joined her clearly and distinctly.

When it was over, there was no movement on the part of either of them for the space of a second. Then slowly the man's face went down to hers, and for the first time since he had known her, his lips touched her cheek. With a low cry she flung her arms round his neck.

"Bill," she sobbed. "I hope you won't forget me—not all your life long."

"I won't, Mattie," he answered reassuringly. "I won't; so don't think anything like that."

"But why won't you?" she asked eagerly, still clinging to him. "Tell me why."

He did not answer her, but he held her off till she could look up into his eyes. Then he laid her head down upon his breast and folded his arms round her protectingly. He believed that she had seen in his eyes the answer he felt it would have been "soft" to word. A sound was borne in to him from the hall outside; someone tried the door.

He placed her head gently upon the pillow.

"Some friends o' mine," he said, "going with me."

He unlocked the door and rapidly gained her bedside again.

"Good-bye, Mat," he said hurriedly.

"Good-bye," she returned.

There were two men in the room, guarding the door.

"This is my sick sister," Sharp, or Smith, said quietly.

"No," cried the voice of Mat, "not his sister. I'm Mattie Morgan. He saved my life when I didn't care for anything in the world, and hadn't a friend. He did not know me till that minute, and he brought me here and nursed me, and he's the best man under God's Heaven. Now he's going away for ten days——"

"I've told her," interrupted the man, "that we're going to Hackney about that job of work, and I'll be back in ten days or so for a spell. I'm ready. Good-bye, Mat. The doctor will soon be here with the nurse."

"That's all right," she smiled cheerily. "Go, and have a good time after all this poking about the sick-room. Good-bye, old man—good-bye."

She kept her eyes on him till he was out of the room, though he did not again look at her.

"I'm glad he don't know how far away I'll be before ten days," she said softly to herself. "I'm glad he don't know how near the end is, poor Bill! In a few days—then I'll have the country out there in the cemetery."

She held the rose up to her lips, straining her ears to catch the last echo of the steps that went down the stairs. If she could only see him once more—if she might reach that window!

"Our Father, our Father, give me strength to get to the window so that I may see Bill once more!"

Out in the street, a man on each side of him, Sharp came. There was something in the men that angered him.

"You're thinking of the soft talk up in that room," he said. "She's dying, and she's such a young, little thing, and she hasn't anybody in the world, and—and——"

He struck his fist fiercely on the palm of the other hand, "I didn't know why I wanted her to think me an honest man. I know now. It was because she loved me; and if I'd been good enough for her I'd asked her to be my wife. Mat——"

Something seemed to force him to look up to the window of the room where she was. He started back; for she was resting on the sill, leaning far out, her eyes on him. He saw that she smiled and he smiled in return. Then with a weak movement she threw to him the rose he had given her. She saw him catch it and put it in his pocket, keeping his hand in the pocket with it. Then she saw nothing more, for she had fallen back from the window white and limp. So the nurse had really nothing to do when she came, and the doctor said the end had come suddenly, as it often did in these cases. But at that time Bill was in the car on the way to Hackney, his hand still clasping the rose, his thoughts reaching back to the girl he would have asked to be his wife if he had only been good enough for her.

R. C. V. Meyer.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER LI.

SOMETHING STRANGE FOR BREAKFAST.

"OH, my dear, it's really 'evvenly, it is indeed! Breakfast out here in the ferander, and the garden right down to the cliff, and the yaller merrygolds and sunflowers, and sea like silver, and the sky as blue as blue. My! What a scene it would make, my dear.—It does one good to breathe."

"Then you are pleased, Aunt dear?"

"Pleased ain't the word for it, my precious! I am glad I've come. Now, look here. We won't talk no more about dying, neither of us, like we did yesterday, 'tain't worth it. Spite of all its bothers and troubles and worries, the world's too good for people to be in a hurry to go. Why, what with the nice, pretty, clean bedroom, and the window open, and being a bit tired, I slept for hours, and never felt that splinter in my arm once.—I did sleep!"

"I am glad, Aunt dear."

"And so did you, my pet."

"Did I, Aunt?"

"That you did, for I woke at two o'clock, and there was the moon shining on the sea from right away to the shore. And I came through to your room, and there you were with your pretty face on the pillow, sleeping just like an angel, and as innocent and good."

"Oh, you dear, foolish old Auntie! There, sit down; you must want your breakfast."

"Want it? I'm as hungry as a hogre, my dear. What is it—soles? Now, that is nice, so long as they're fresh. How clever someone was as invented eggs and crumbs."

They had just commenced their breakfast, in the corner of the verandah, when a party entered the empty coffee-room of the little hotel, talking rather noisily, and one of them said:

"There's a table close to that window; let's sit there;" and directly after it was evident from the voices that three men were taking their places to breakfast.

"You didn't lose much time," said one. "I thought I'd better send and ask you to come over."

"Quite right: can't be too careful over business. I had the pony put to, and came on at once."

"Coffee?"

"By-and-bye, I'll take a glass of something short first."

The table gong was sounded, an order was given for brandy and seltzer, and the conversation was renewed, to the accompaniment of the clattering of knives and forks, but Aunt Duncan was too much occupied over her breakfast to heed anything else till, raising her eyes, she saw Lucy sitting grasping the edge of the table, looking white and strange.

Before she could speak, the girl, who was seated with her back to the window a few feet away, held up her hand and whispered "Hush!" Then, half closing her eyes, she appeared to be listening intently.

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"What——" began her Aunt, in an excited whisper, but an imperious gesture stopped her, and she, too, listened intently to words fraught with interest to another's fate.

CHAPTER LII.

A PLOT UNVEILED.

THE voice was familiar enough to Lucy. Once its rough tones had been heard they could not easily be forgotten, and, in addition, the speaker had a way of giving his lips a smack, as if to emphasise his words.

"Don't tell me," came clearly to the listeners' ears. "There isn't a doubt about it. She'll win, or my name ain't Vinnis; I haven't trained her for nothing. I know what I say. With my boy, Sam, up, nothing that's entered can come near her." And this was additionally emphasised by a thump on the table which made the cups rattle.

"Unless——" said the man who had first spoken.

"There ain't no unless in it," said the same harsh voice. "She's fit as a fiddle, sir; and it'll be a big thing for him, and so I tell you."

"Well, don't shout, old man."

"Oh, I'm not going to shout. You've sent for me, and I suppose you mean business."

"Of course."

"Stand in fair and square?"

"Stand in fair and square. And it means a pot of money for all of us."

"Ah, but it can't be done, sir."

"Oh, can't it? There, I'm not going to try and teach you your business, Josh Vinnis, I've known you too long."

"Yes. You've known me too long, sir."

"Well, I'm not the man for beating about the bush, and so I'll speak out. There's those behind me who will help us to make a big thing out of it. It means thousands apiece. We know, of course, that she's bound to win."

"Yes, sir, that's it. She's bound to win."

"Well, then, now's your time. You don't want to chuck away a fortune."

"That's so, sir. I don't."

"Will you join in it, then?"

"That depends. What does it mean? Put it straight out, and I'll tell you. I'm not going to spoil my character for a few pounds."

"Speak low."

"It's all right. The people at the other end have gone out of the room."

"Well, then, Mr. Vinnis, it means this—a couple of thou. if the mare can't win to-morrow."

"But she would win. A couple of thou. Bah! I shall clear that as it is, for I've made a good book, and so I tell you."

"Now we're getting to business," said another, who had hardly spoken before. "Very well, we'll guarantee you three. What do you say to that?"

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"I'd like to have my glass filled again, gentlemen," said Vinnis. "A man wants a drop o' sperrits to keep the heart in him when he's being insulted."

"Business first, sir, and then we'll have in a bottle of fizz. Come, be reasonable. I tell you we share fair and square."

"And guarantee me ten thou.? That's my figure, gentlemen."

There was a hearty laugh, and the scratching of matches, followed by the pungent fumes of strong cigars.

"Make it twenty, old man," said the first speaker. "Don't do things by halves."

"I ain't goin' to, sir, and I ain't going to be unreasonable, but this is a big thing to me, and my figure's share and share alike, with a certainty of five thousand for me."

"There's my hand upon it," said the first speaker. "We'll give you five thou. if the mare comes in nowhere."

"That mare can't come in nowhere, gentlemen," said Vinnis in a low voice. "No pulling would make her. She's a regular little devil, and if my boy were to begin to play tricks with her mouth, she'd just get hold of the bit, and away she'd go like the wind."

"Then she mustn't run."

"That's it; not if she isn't to win the race."

"Very well, then, you must work her."

"Nay, I'm not going to hurt the mare: maybe she'll be mine some day. She's no use to anyone else."

"Why?"

"Because there's no one else dare mount her but my boy."

"You needn't hurt her."

"I'm not going to try, sir, for twenty thou., so there!" and the speaker banged his fist down upon the table again.

"All right: work it as you like, but if you can't pull, and you won't—er—get at her, I don't see how you're going to manage."

"Don't you? Well then, I do. You leave it to me."

"And suppose she wins?"

"Why, then you'll lose."

"Yes, and you too. But business, business."

"I've agreed: what more do you want, gentlemen?"

"To feel sure that we're not going to lose a pot o' money, Mr. Vinnis, that's all. Why can't you speak out?"

"Oh, I don't mind speaking out. I'm about tired of him and his ways. He's reg'lar broke up, and it would be all the better for me if he goes, because I shall get the mare. No one else dare buy her. Look here, gentlemen: you may as well make a big plunge of it, for as I am in it I'll do the thing right. It's make your hay while the sun shines, eh?"

"Yes, of course," said one of the trio hoarsely.

"Well, I'll tell you: it's simple as simple. The mare won't let anyone ride her but my boy. She'd savage anyone else who went near her—strike him down with her hoof, and then seize him by the throat with her teeth. No one dare mount her but my boy."

"The beast! Why, it would be a charity to poison her."

"What, a mare that can win any race I like to train her for? No, thank you. She can be made to bring in a big income for the man who owns her."

"Indeed!" said one of the men sarcastically. "What about Lord Braetoun?"

"That's a different matter, sir. It means a big income for the man who knows how to manage her, and that man isn't Lord Braetoun."

"Then you'd buy her if she came to the hammer?"

"I should, and perhaps I shall, eh?"

"Seems very likely; but what are you going to do?"

"Never you mind. You leave it to me."

"Well, we are going to, but you might say."

Vinnis gave a little laugh, and Lucy felt that she could see his low type, animal face, as he leant over the table and said in a low voice, but one that was perfectly audible to the listeners:

"Easy enough. You've got the right man to help you, I tell you, my boy is the only man she will let mount her."

"Yes; you told us that," said one of the men impatiently.

"Well, suppose Sam isn't there to-morrow."

"What!" cried the other. "By George! Josh Vinnis, you're a very Napoleon among trainers."

"Pst!" whispered his companion, and, rising softly, he walked to the window, struck a match, and stepped half out, to stand lighting a cigar, and then puffed away for a few minutes.

"What do you say to a sail?" he said aloud. "Sea's like glass. Lovely morning."

"Ah, wouldn't be a bad thing," said the other, as he turned back and walked in. "But you haven't done, have you?"

"Done? Yes. I don't know, though. I'll have another cup of coffee."

"Anyone there?" whispered his companion, rattling a coffee cup in the saucer the while.

"Yes."

"The devil!"

"Only an old woman and a girl at breakfast. They couldn't have heard out there. Visitors from town, I think."

They stopped talking for a few moments, and then passed out into the verandah, glancing sharply at Aunt Duncan and her niece, but the old lady looked stolid enough, and sat sipping her coffee, while Lucy bent over a loaf, from which she was cutting a slice.

The next minute the odour of strong cigars was all that was left to indicate that anyone had been there, and Lucy bent toward her aunt.

"Could you hear what they said?"

"Every word, my darling," said the old woman excitedly. "Why, it's a regular horse plot. They're going to ruin him."

"Auntie! it's dreadful. What shall I do?"

"Go and—— No, you mustn't go to him, my pet—write to him, and tell him what's going on."

"But what good will that do, Auntie?" cried Lucy wildly. "Mr. Daines says he has staked everything on the mare winning."

"Well, if he knows they'll be obliged to make her win."

"No, no, Auntie; it's a horrible piece of trickery. If he is told, it would only mean a quarrel, and he would discharge both the Vinnises. Oh, I never liked that man; and the boy, his son, is a nasty, foxy little wretch of a fellow. It's ruin for him—ruin. Don't talk to me, please. I want to think. What shall I do—what shall I do?"

"If it was me, Lucy, I should send for the police," said Aunt Duncan decisively.

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie; be silent, please," cried Lucy.

"But I'm that indignant I feel as if I must talk, my dear. Yes, I should send for the police."

"But can't you see that would do no good?"

"No, my darling. It's as bad as robbery. It's a reg'lar swindle, and the police would take 'em before the magistrates, and punish 'em."

"But that wouldn't make his mare win the race."

"Yes, it would, the magistrates would make the proper jockey ride her and win."

"No, no, no, Auntie," cried Lucy despairingly. "It's ruin for him—ruin. What shall I do?"

"Oh, dear me!" cried Aunt Duncan, "I never did see such a world as this is. Just as I settle myself down for a real bit of enjoyment, if all this don't go and happen. I did think we was going to have a pleasant outing, that I did."

"Please—please, Auntie, don't—don't talk," cried Lucy pleadingly. "I want to think what's best to do. Oh! Quick, Aunt, dear, those men are coming back, and that wretched Vinnis knows me from going down to the farm."

"What! Go away? No, my dear. Stop and face the

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wretch, say I, and let him see we know of his wickedness. You shall stop."

"No, no, come quickly. He must not see me here." And before the trio, consisting of the hard, horsey-looking trainer, and a couple of over-dressed, loud-looking beings of the bookmaker type, had reached one end of the verandah from the grounds, Lucy was hurrying through the coffee-room, and Aunt Duncan followed her to her room.

CHAPTER LIII.

The Virtuous Vinnises.

It was the day of the race, and Browwood was, as usual, thronged. Braetoun had passed the night at the hotel, and, looking haggard and feverish, he was crossing the hall when he ran against Daines.

"Hallo! You here?" he cried.

"Yes, I'm here."

"Don't look very cheerful. Haven't been betting against the mare, have you? Because, if so, hedge while there's time."

"Hang the mare!" cried Daines.

"After she has pulled this off for me, and as soon as you like, for I'm about sick of it all. Too much worry and anxiety over it, and I want rest."

"Are you on heavily?"

"Heavily? It's neck or nothing—man or mouse, my lad."

"Indeed!" said Daines, looking at him closely; "well, I had gathered that bit of news pretty nearly. I suppose you'll be a fool to the end."

"Yes, my boy! I shall be a fool to the end. Here, what are you staring at? Don't glare at a man like that. I look bad? Well, of course I do, with a thing like this on my mind; but I shall be all right afterwards, when she has pulled it off. She looks in the most perfect condition, Cy. You ought to make something off her. Josh Vinnis is a splendid trainer. Said he had always believed in the mare, and that nothing can touch her. Here, what are you glowering at? I do hate for a man to look at one like that."

"I was thinking how bad you looked."

"Well, so do you, for the matter of that."

"Enough to make me."

"Eh, what's wrong with you?"

"You ask that?"

"Of course I do. I want to know. Confound it, how slowly the time goes! Here, what are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking what a scoundrel you've turned out, Braetoun."

"What! No, I won't get in a passion. I've got too much at stake to-day, and must be cool. But what the devil do you mean?"

"You swore to me that everything was at an end between you and her."

"Well, what of that? I did swear it, and so it is. I'm sick of the girl, and of everything else. Take her, and marry her if you like. I never want to see her again. Now, why am I a scoundrel?"

"For playing fast and loose with everybody—wife—mistress—even with the man who has helped and served you again and again."

"Oh, well, that's all over now. When I asked you to get her away from me I never thought you were going to make a fool of yourself over the little jade."

"But it is not all over," cried Daines hotly. "Poor girl! She might be happy now if it were not for you and your confounded trifling with her feelings."

"Oh, hang her feelings! and you too. Don't worry me now with your conundrums. I've too much at stake. Speak out, man, speak out."

"I will," said Daines fiercely. "Where is she?"

"Whom do you mean—the mare or Lucy?"

"Don't play with me, man. Where is Lucy?"

"How the dickens should I know?"

"You do know, you trickster?"

"Look here, Cy, if you weren't a miserable cripple I'd knock you down."

"You're too helpless a wreck yourself now to do it. Even I, weak as I am, could thrash you."

"Who's the coward now?"

"You, for getting that poor lass away from me, knowing what you do."

"I—I get her away? Not likely."

"There, it's of no use to deny it. At your instigation she came down to Sandiwell the night before last, and stayed at the hotel."

"The dickens she did!"

"Bah! No acting, man. Yesterday she left the place again, about the same time that you came down from town."

"Daines, the detective, by Cyrus himself. Why, here's the wily copper on the trail."

"Do you want me to take you by the throat, Braetoun, and choke the truth out of you? I'm just in the humour to do the desperate, so take care."

There was something so fierce in his old companion's eyes that, broken as he was, and with shattered nerves, Braetoun shrank from him, and changed his tone entirely.

"Here, what is it, old man? I swear I didn't know she came down."

"You swear!" cried Daines bitterly. "Once your word was enough, but the gentleman is dead, and one has to deal with a horsey trickster, up to every move, and ready to play it even on his best friend."

"Well then, I won't swear. On my honour."

"Your honour!" cried Daines scornfully. "Where is she?"

"Gone to the devil for aught I know or care. Here, get out of the way; I must go to the stable again."

"You don't go till you've told me."

"If you try to stop me like this, hang you!—I'll hand you over to the police."

"If you live to do it," whispered Daines fiercely. "You're ready to go down now with one of your fits."

"Hang you!" cried Braetoun, trembling. "You coward! Knowing what you do, Daines, don't, don't upset me, man," he said, breaking down into a feeble tone of appeal. "I want all my strength now, to see this race through. I must win it. If I don't I must go under—bullet or something—and the old woman will be ruined too. I tell you I didn't know Baby came down. I haven't seen her. I haven't had her taken away."

Daines looked at his shifty eyes searchingly, and then said bitterly:

"I'd give the world to be able to believe you, Rod; but you've cheated me too often: I can't credit a word. Look here, I throw myself on your mercy. If you have a spark left in you of the old Rod Braetoun I loved as a boy and thought all that was manly and brave, and heroic, as I writhed at my own feebleness, help me. I've gone mad over her, Rod. I love her, and I'd give my life for hers, or to spare her pain. Now tell me where you have sent her, or—yes—I know it—she's here in this hotel."

Braetoun's face flushed with rage, but he turned pale again, and he said quite gently:

"I can't help what you feel about me. I suppose it's right, Cy. I took the wrong turn, and I'm what I am; but what I've said is the truth. I haven't seen or heard anything of the girl for more than three months. There, I must go to the stables now."

Daines made no attempt to stay him, but looked at him half convinced, and then went to the office of the hotel, for, as Braetoun went away, the idea came back to him that Lucy was in the house.

"No, sir," was the answer to his inquiries. "We've had every room taken for a fortnight. There was two fell in

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yesterday, but they were taken at once by a lady and gentleman."

"A young, slight, fair lady?"

The clerk laughed.

"Not at all, sir. Quite the opposite."

Daines turned away, and stood musing for a moment or two, and then followed Braetoun to the stables, where after some difficulty at the doors, Braetoun came out with a fierce look in his eyes.

"Now, look here," he cried, "there's only one thing in life for me for the next two or three hours, and if you're coming to worry me about that cursed woman I'll give you in charge for a madman."

"I'm not going to worry you. I'm not going to say a word to you, Braetoun, but I'm going to follow you like your shadow till I've found Lucy."

"Follow me, then, only let it be like my shadow, and then I shall not mind."

He walked back into the stable, where the mare was standing turning back her eyes to the opened door, and laying down her ears and arching her back, with her tail tucked lightly between her legs, beautiful, satin-skinned, the veins standing out like a net-work all over her neck, the very perfection of a highly bred racer of the most savage, vicious type.

Vinnis was there on guard, looking hard and important, ready to scowl at the new-comer as he chewed a cigar in his lips, one which had never been lit but was growing gradually shorter from the wrong end, while just beyond the end of the loose box in which the mare was tethered by a couple of reins, sat Sam Vinnis, the little, old, yellow-looking boy, withered, wrinkled, and cunning-looking as an antique Chinaman, and watching everything and everybody with his twinkling, ferrety eyes.

The boy was seated upon a corn-bin, covered from neck to toe in a long drab overcoat, his closely cropped bullet-head looking unpleasantly suggestive of a term of penal servitude; and as Braetoun addressed him he drummed with his heels upon the galvanised iron corn-bin, and grinned with insolent familiarity.

"Now, I trust to you, Sam," said Braetoun, "you must pull this off for me. Recollect I shall not be shabby to you but be ready to give you a very handsome tip."

"You let him alone, my lord," said Vinnis almost roughly. "He knows his bit, and he's 'gesting of it. I don't want him crammed with no noo idees. He's been told exactly what to do, and if you let him alone he'll do it."

"I only want him to understand that he must win, man," said Braetoun angrily.

"Well, that's what I've been a hinstructing of him over, my lord. Now, if you'll just go in the hotel, and make yourself comf'table till it's time to go to the race, and then just give a look in at the saddling paddock, everything'll go right."

"Yes, but I must see how things are going on," said Braetoun impatiently.

"Then what's the good o' me, my lord?" said the man roughly. "What have I been doin' all these months? There's my work, look at it, and your friend too. Fit as a fiddle arn't in it, aside that mare. Did you ever see anything fitter?"

"No: she's in splendid condition, Vinnis: but I cannot help feeling anxious."

"Why, o' course, my lord, and that's what me and the boy feels. We'll do our best; but if you comes a-hoppin' in and out here like a cat on hot bricks, and a-worrying me and Sam and the mare, you'll be chucking over a good thing, and you won't see Bella Donna when the figures are hoisted."

"Oh, very well: I'll go," said Braetoun.

"And the sooner the better, my lord, and your friend too. Me and Sam and the mare can't stand no fidgeting just now when we're ripe, so if you want the mare to win this race you must keep outer my stable."

"His insolence: it's insufferable," cried Braetoun, as soon as they were out in the road, the boy grinning, and the mare striking out with her off fore hoof, as they passed. "And here I am, Cy, regularly at their mercy. I felt as if I could have broken that young scoundrel's neck—the grinning ape!"

Daines said nothing, but walked beside his companion back to the hotel, beginning to feel that perhaps after all he was misjudging him, and at last leaving him to his own devices, he went on to the course, and had a look round in the faint hope that he might see Baby Lee somewhere about, she having perhaps come down to see Braetoun's horse win.

CHAPTER LIV.

In his Deepest Hole.

The day wore on, but Daines looked in vain. He examined every carriage drawn up in the best places along the course; went opposite the grand stand to scan it with his race glass, and finally took a ticket and went up to the very top, and from there searched the sides of the course in every direction, but there was no sign.

One race had been run, and the horses were out for the next, and coming slowly from the saddling paddock, but the bright animated looking scene was like a confused mass of people to Daines, who neither saw nor heard anything of what was going on, till he had descended and was about to return to the hotel in search of Braetoun, hoping that perhaps after all he would find out where Lucy was by watching her old lover's movements. For once more the feeling was gaining strength that Braetoun had brought her down, and she was waiting somewhere to see the race.

He was about half-way back to his hotel, when he passed a knot of business-looking men—horsey business-looking men—talking eagerly together, and as he was close up another joined them.

"It's right enough," he said excitedly. "Braetoun's mare won't come up to the post. She can't run."

The words did not impress Daines at first, his mind was too full of his own trouble, but at the end of a score of yards their importance to his old companion began to grow clearer.

Braetoun's mare not run? Why, it meant ruin to him, after the book he had made; and growing excited now, he hurried on toward the hotel, to see Braetoun and learn whether it was the truth.

But he did not have to go as far as the hotel, for about half-way there he encountered the object of his search in company with the trainer—Braetoun with his face ghastly, and Vinnis flushed as if with drink.

"Why, Braetoun, what does this mean?" said Daines eagerly.

"Ruin—and a bullet through my brain, I suppose," said the young man, with unnatural calmness.

"But, but I don't understand."

"Ask this old scoundrel," said Braetoun, with a mocking laugh.

"Now don't you get a-calling names, my lord, because that won't mend it," said the man. "I put it to you, sir," he continued, turning to Daines; "you come into the stable this morning where I didn't want you, and you see for yourself as the mare was in just puffick condition. Even his lordship'll own that."

"Oh, yes, I own that," said Braetoun, with a peculiar laugh.

"And he knows, too, how I'd been a-beggin' and praying of him to keep away."

"Yes, from his own stable," said Daines.

"'Ired, sir, 'ired, or it would ha' been my stable. But he would come, messing about."

"Confound you; speak out," cried Daines impatiently. "Why can't the mare run?"

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"That's what I'm a-tellin' on you, sir, if you'll let me," said the man. "Don't you turn 'ot and 'orty too, like his lordship, here. It's 'art-breaking to me. My charickter's spyled as a trainer, beside the money I shall lose, for I'd put all I'd got on the mare—years o' honest savings, sir."

"Why can't the mare run? She looked in splendid condition an hour ago."

"She is in puffick condition, sir, but how could I help it? I've been watching her night and day my very own self."

"Then she has been got at—hocussed?"

"A mare as I trained, sir?" said the man scornfully. "Not she, sir. I've the key o' that there stable in my pocket—leastwise I had till his lordship snatched it from me, as no gentleman would ha' done, but that's neither here nor there, sir."

"Will you come to the point?" cried Daines, and Braetoun uttered a low curious laugh.

"Yes, sir, I am a-coming to the point. It's all his lordship's doing, and he's ruined me and my charickter for life. He would keep on coming to the stable over and over again this morning, and last night, for the matter o' that, and giving my boy, Sam, orders and orders till the young rip was half mad. You see what he was this morning, sir."

"Yes, insolent enough to make one want to horsewhip him," said Daines.

"That's it, sir—that's it, only it warn't insolence; it was pride. He's the best jockey going, sir. My own training: and he'd ha' taken that there 'orse—I mean, mare—to the winning post, showing the field her 'eels, but as soon as my lord and you had gone outer the stable his pride got the better on him, and he jumps off the corn-bin, and 'Father,' he says, 'that there's done it at last. I may be a light weight and a little un, but I'm a man now, and I can't stand it, and I won't.'"

"That's it, Cy," said Braetoun, with a bitter laugh. "It was the pride of the noble boy who knew his value—that he was the only one who could ride the mare, and he has struck."

"Struck?" cried Daines.

"No, sir, no, it ain't that," said Vinnis, "he's about 'art-broken. He couldn't do it. 'Father,' he says, 'I can't ride her now. It's all over. I feel as if I can never ride again.'"

"Here, we're wasting time," cried Daines. "Quick, Rod, old man: you must win this race. It's a matter of money. Pay, man, and win."

"No, sir," said the trainer, drawing himself up; "don't you go and insult us too. I'm above suspicion, and as to that boy of mine, he wouldn't do a mean action to save his life."

"No," said Braetoun, taking out a cigar, and lighting it calmly, "not to save his life."

"Where is he now?" cried Daines.

"That's what I don't know, sir," said Vinnis piteously. "Rooshed outer the stable after I'd begged and prayed of him to stop. I'd ha' gone down on my bended knees to him, I would, but he'd turned mad with pride. 'His lordship treats me as if I was muck, father,' he says, 'and I can't stand it;' and as I said afore, roosh, he does, out of the stable, ready as he was, with his lordship's colours on—amber satin shirt, and black an' amber cap, and he's gone."

"Gone where?" cried Daines.

"'Eaven, I b'lieve, sir," said the man, rubbing one eye with his knuckle. "It's my b'lief, sir, as they'll drag him out o' the river as soon as the race is over."

"Yes, Cy," said Braetoun mockingly; "the little beast thought he'd wash his equine sins away before he went upward. He was too good to live." Then with a shriek of rage he turned upon the trainer. "Curse you, you lying hound! You've sold me. Out of my sight, or before I finish myself, I'll blow out your cursed brains."

"Well!" cried the trainer, in virtuous indignation, "if that's being a lord——"

"D——n you! go!" roared Daines, and raising his cane he struck the man with all his might across the face.

"Help me back to the hotel, Cy, old man," whispered Braetoun, with a ghastly look in his face. "Quick!"

"Here, driver!" cried Daines to a man who was passing, and he hurried his friend into an open fly. "Queen's Hotel, quick!"

"Right, sir;" and they were driven off, leaving the trainer gesticulating to a crowd collecting now, and the next moment a yell of execration was raised.

"Want to get at me?" panted Braetoun. "Well, stop the fly, and let them."

"No," cried Daines, who was standing up in the fly, looking over the hood; "they're at him, hunting him like a pack of hounds, and he's running for his life. Now, hold up, man. I believe what you said about Lucy, and I want to help you, for old times' sake."

"Thankye, old chap.—Yes, it was true, lad. I haven't seen her. She isn't here."

"Can't anything be done?"

"Yes: I'll give you the key, and you can go to the stable and put a bullet in Bella Donna's forehead."

"Talk sense, man."

"That is sense. No one but that boy can ride her."

"Then he must be found. Look here: if he wins, what can you afford to give him?"

"A thou.," said Braetoun, with a flash of eagerness in his eyes—"I'll give him two."

"That's right. He's away from his father now. Here we are. No foolery. You'd want a great many dives in the river to wash away your sins, man. You can't afford to die yet. Go up to your room and wait. Is there plenty of time?"

"A full half-hour yet," said Braetoun excitedly.

"Good. You're not fit to stir."

"No: I shall break down."

"Then wait. If that boy is to be found I'll bring him to you yet. In with you." And then, as Braetoun staggered into the hotel, Daines gave an order to the driver, and the horse was lashed into a gallop.

(To be concluded.)

ON the conclusion of this story we shall commence a new serial by MR. ALLEN UPWARD, whose name is now so well known as the author of "Secrets of the Courts of Europe," appearing in PEARSON'S MAGAZINE. The title of the new story will be—

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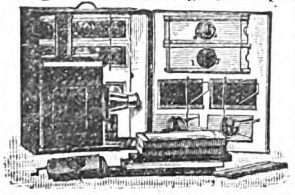

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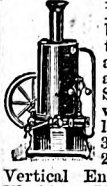

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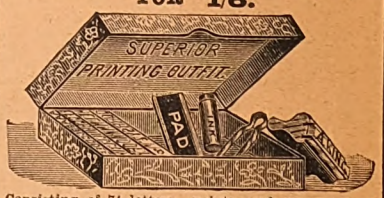

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SHORT STORIES

No. 415.] [ONE PENNY.

EDITED BY

C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

For the Week ending December 12th, 1896.

The Doctor's Diary.

STRANDED! That one emphatic word best expresses my position this pleasant spring morning. The catastrophe that has swept away my savings, the carefully garnered sum that was to pay for my summer trip is commonplace enough.

Banks break every day, and the funds of trusting depositors disappear in the collapse. I was one of those confiding depositors. Before me lies my cherished letter of credit, just a sheet of worthless waste-paper—nothing more. And when my hotel bill has been paid, and I have settled for that particularly stylish black-lace bonnet that tempted me on the Rue St. Honoré the other evening into becoming its purchaser, I shall stand alone in Paris with just thirty-seven francs in my purse. Stay—let me be exact—thirty-six francs and fifteen sous, to speak correctly.

And what an idiot I was not to have bought a return ticket when I purchased my passage! But I was so miserably run down when I started, and I had a vision of a visit to Berlin to investigate the Koch lymph question; and, also, I indulged in a dream of a trip to Vienna, and a consequent excursion to Trieste and Venice; and, in fact, there were so many delicious possibilities before me, that I could not decide what line of steamships I ought to come home by, or what exact date to fix for my voyage. And here I am, as I said before—stranded!

Well, I'll think the matter over. I'll bathe my face and smooth my hair; and then I'll go round to the little restaurant where I have been wont to take my meals, and I'll spend a few of my remaining francs on a good dinner. And then I'll try to come to some decision.

I want to think out some plan by which I can remain abroad for some time longer. I should hate to go creeping home, wailing and crestfallen, like a dog that has had his tail pinched in a doorway. Besides, I need the change so sorely, and I am just beginning to feel the good effects of my trip. I'll manage to stay over here somehow. I'll sink the M.D., and look for a situation.

But a situation—as what? I know little or nothing about foreign travel, so I cannot turn into a courier maid. I never could make my own dresses, or arrange my own hair satisfactorily, so I should hardly pass muster as lady's maid. I speak barely enough French to make my wants known and to get along with, so it is impossible for me to try for a place as governess, even if I were well up in the other fashionable accomplishments of the day, which, unfortunately, I am not. I can neither paint nor sing, nor play upon the piano.

The position for which I am really suited is that of nurse, or of companion to an invalid lady. I'll even stifle my pride and sink the M.D., as I said before, and look about me in search of such a situation.

There are so many persons who come abroad in search of health, that I might possibly discover a place that would be just what I wanted. Then I would remain on this side of the Channel for some months longer, and might have a chance of finishing my researches into the nature and effects of vegetable poisons, as compared with those of mineral ones. At all events, I'll write out an advertisement for the *British Blazer*, and I'll take it round at once, before going to my dinner.

JUNE 25TH. I take up my note-book to record the swift and unexpected success of my little scheme. have been engaged by Dr. Laurence Hurst as companion

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to Mrs. Hurst, who is in very delicate health, and who needs amusement and occupation for her mind. Dr. Hurst has himself taken the whole charge of his wife's case, and I can see that he is very jealous of any interference with his measures, for he asked me very particularly if I could be relied upon to administer medicines, and to carry out his directions in all respects.

I replied meekly that I had always been accustomed to obey my employer's wishes, and that I should never think of running contrary to any orders that I might receive.

What a providential thing it was for me, that twinge of pride that led me to conceal my actual status as a regularly diplomaed physician. For, from what I can see of Dr. Hurst, I am certain that he would never have consented to endure the presence of a rival doctor beneath his roof, and at the bedside of his wife. Fortunately, I persuaded the kind friends, that were my references as to respectability and capacity, to keep silent on the subject of my profession. So to-morrow I shall enter on my functions as plain Miss Davis—no longer Jane Davis, M.D.

June 26th. She is a most winning creature, is Mrs. Hurst, fair and delicate, with great, soft, wistful brown eyes, like those of a pet doe. There does not seem to be very much the matter with her. Certainly she is not consumptive, and I can ascertain no symptoms of heart disease. Still, she is far from well, and I shall study her case with interest. Meanwhile, I am already deeply interested in her as an individual, and not as a case. The plaintive sweetness of her voice, the timid touch of her delicate fingers when she took my hand in hers, and the shy, pretty way in which she said: "Now, I hope you are going to take good care of me, and help dear Laurence to make me well," all captivated me forthwith.

I am not altogether so fascinated with Dr. Hurst. He is small, and dark, and florid, is a great society man and an accomplished dancer, I am told; but he has a nervous, uncertain way of looking about him, and of acting, as well.

He fusses over the newspapers, and torments everybody about his letters and papers; and as soon as they arrive, he goes off to his own room to read them. However, he is certainly most devoted to his wife, and watches over her with unremitting solicitude. They have two fine children: Hugh, a rosy, sturdy boy of four; and baby Madge, who is just eight months old, and a most winsome little creature, as even I must confess, though in my position as an old maid I ought, of course, to abominate babies. But Madge is one of those cooing, laughing, sociable, little things that make friends with every stranger on the spot—never cries, and is altogther delightful.

Mrs. Hurst is not strong enough to have her little ones much with her; but her half-hour's play in the morning with the baby is, for her, I can see, the chief event of the day. She has an excellent nurse for them in the shape of a sturdy, good-natured Alsatian woman, called Catherine, whose patience, even with boisterous Hugh, seems to be untiring.

July 3rd, Boulogne-sur-Mer. Here we are established at this old-fashioned place of seaside resort. The move was rather a sudden one. The weather became very warm in Paris, so Dr. Hurst made up his mind to bring the whole party down here, having great faith in the tonic quality of the air, and also approving of the smooth, sandy beach as a playground for the children. Mrs. Hurst would have preferred Houlgate or Etretat, on account of the presence at either of those places of quite a number of her acquaintances, but her husband was deaf to her gentle pleadings.

"My dear Jessie," he said at length, rather impatiently, "society and excitement are just the worst things possible for you in your present ailing condition. Here, at Boulogne, you have nothing to do but recline on your *chaise longue* at the window, and look at the sea and read novels, and make haste to get well."

"I suppose Laurence is right, Jane," she said with a sigh, after he had left the room. "I do wish he could hasten my recovery in some way. It is so tiresome to be suffering always, and to feel one's self growing weaker day by day. Jane, I am beginning to believe that I shall never get well—that I am going to die."

"Dear Mrs. Hurst, you must not take to imagining all sorts of dismal things. Your recovery is only a question of time. And with a skilled physician always at hand——"

"And one who loves me so, and watches over me so carefully; and with such a faithful nurse as yourself, I ought to shake off my sickness very speedily. I have an idea, Jane—but you must say nothing about it to Laurence, for I once said something of the kind to him, and he got really angry with me—I think if I took less medicine that I should feel better."

Perhaps the medicines she is taking do not suit her case. At all events, she is looking very ill—far worse, in fact, than she did a week ago. Still, I have privately investigated the prescriptions; and they seem to be simple enough, and precisely suited to the nature of her illness, being chiefly preparations of iron in different forms. And as I am pledged to follow out the doctor's orders in all respects, I cannot very well encourage Mrs. Hurst in her idea of dispensing with drugs, even for a time.

July 8th. Decidedly Mrs. Hurst is growing worse. I can see a marked change in her within the last two or three days; and I am beginning to believe that I shall be professionally considered an arrant idiot. In spite of my medical studies, and the brilliant way in which I passed my examination, and my real enthusiasm for my profession, I fear that I am lacking in one of the most essential of a doctor's qualifications—the power of diagnosis. I cannot make out what it is that ails this poor lady, at whose bedside I have been watching for so many days. And, to make things worse, Dr. Hurst has been summoned to Paris on important business, which will detain him for a week or ten days. I can see that Mrs. Hurst feels his departure very much, though she is too weak to be very demonstrative. However, he has caused all the medicines that she is to take during his absence to be made up in sufficient quantities to last till his return, and has left me written directions as to the administering of them—in what proportions, at what intervals of time, etc. But the invalid will sadly miss, I fear, his constant companionship and his tender care, for he always insists upon preparing and administering even her beef tea, or milk and limewater, with his own hands.

July 14th. I am pleased to be able to record a decided improvement in Mrs. Hurst's condition. She is brighter and stronger, and declares that she feels infinitely better, in spite of the fact that she sadly misses her husband's watchful tenderness. But she takes nourishment now with genuine relish, and even with something of an appetite, and she had a game of romps

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with little Hugh this morning, which would have quite tired her out a week ago. Also she is resuming, one by one, the occupations that she had wholly laid aside. For instance, she wrote quite a long letter this morning in answer to one just received from her intimate friend, the Countess Cecchi, an Italian lady, whose acquaintance the Hursts made when they were at Monte Carlo last winter, and who stood godmother to little Madge, her own name being Margherita. She sent Mrs. Hurst one of her latest photographs the other day. What an exceedingly handsome woman!

I must not forget to record a piece of stupid awkwardness on my own part, which I perpetrated on the very day of Dr. Hurst's departure. It may serve as a warning to me to be more careful in future, if I set it down here in writing. In getting out the bottle containing the tonic, on whose effects the doctor relies so much for Mrs. Hurst, I let it slip from my fingers, and it fell on the marble hearthstone and was smashed to pieces. Luckily the side of the phial on which was pasted the label inscribed with the directions and the number of the prescription was merely cracked, so I was able to have the medicine made up again. I shall pay for the fresh bottle out of my own pocket, as a fine for myself for having been a fool, and shall say nothing about the accident to anyone.

JULY 20TH. Dr. Hurst returns this evening. The improvement in his wife's condition continues. If she goes on getting better in the same proportion that she has done within the last few days, she will be well by the time we leave Boulogne.

JULY 24TH. Mrs. Hurst is again very ill, and the doctor is more nervous and anxious about her than ever. He scarcely ever leaves her bedside, except to open and read the letters and papers which arrive for him daily by post. These he takes to his own room, and he shuts himself up there to peruse them at his leisure. I am certain that in the last lot he received there was a letter from the Countess Cecchi. Her handwriting is very peculiar, being unusually bold and heavy for a woman, and I recognised it in the direction. He said nothing to Mrs. Hurst about it, however. The Countess sent yesterday a pair of gold-embroidered Turkish slippers for the baby; tiny *babouches* in velvet, with wads of paper stuffed in the toes, to keep them in shape. A pretty token of remembrance, though little Madge is not quite old enough to put them on.

JULY 25TH. I am beginning to suspect that some of the worst of Mrs. Hurst's symptoms are caused by arsenic. I asked her the other day if she had ever taken any as a cosmetic to improve her complexion. She smiled faintly, and said that at one time an eruption had made its appearance on her face, and she had taken a preparation of arsenic for some months to remove it.

"And you never take any now, my dear lady?"

"Oh, no! Dr. Hurst would not approve of it, so please do not mention to him the fact of my having used it."

JULY 27TH. Mrs. Hurst's symptoms are much aggravated. If a change does not take place within the next fortnight, she will not live three weeks.

A horrible suspicion has gradually been taking shape and consistency in my mind. Seen by the light of recent occurrences, it seems to me that Mrs. Hurst is dying slowly by poison. But who is giving it to her? It is not I. It surely cannot be——

A strange occurrence has just come to arouse my suspicions to keen activity. Mrs. Hurst had been trying to take some milk and lime water, prepared with a tablespoonful of brandy, and all measured out by her attentive husband. She had swallowed only a small portion of it, and the doctor was coaxing her to drink some more, when little Hugh came trotting into the room. He spied the half-emptied tumbler on the tray, and seized it with a cry of triumph. His father literally struck the glass out of the child's hand, turning ghastly pale as he did so. Mrs Hurst was startled by the crash, but the doctor laid the blame on the little boy's carelessness. Yet the breakage was not Hugh's fault, but his own.

I have secured the bottom portion of the tumbler, as of course I helped to pick up the broken glass. It still contains sufficient milk to serve for an analysis.

JULY 29TH. I have made the analysis. My worst suspicions are confirmed. The milk was heavily charged with arsenic. I shall begin at once to administer antidotes to the patient. Also I had duplicate bottles of her medicine made up, which I keep under lock and key, and which I substitute for those which Dr. Hurst investigates so carefully.

But how to find out the truth? How am I to establish that link which is always so difficult to demonstrate in cases of poisoning—that which connects the poisoner with the crime? I must be on the watch; else, as the dangerous symptoms in Mrs. Hurst's malady begin to become ameliorated once more, the criminal, grown desperate, may be impelled to strike a decisive blow.

But what can be his motive? Why should anyone wish to murder so gentle and inoffensive a being as Mrs. Hurst? And from whence does he procure his supplies of poison? His prescriptions are all harmless; of that I have already assured myself. Perhaps I am mistaken, after all. But no, the poor lady's symptoms are unmistakable—and then that incident of the glass of milk!

AUGUST 5TH. Let me write down a relation of the events that have just transpired, though I can hardly as yet command myself enough to do it coherently.

Two days ago, Mrs Hurst, who has been gradually improving (thanks, I am assured, to the antidotes I have been administering to her in secret), was lying in bed in a very tranquil, if feeble, state. At the foot of the bed, and consequently screened from view by the bed curtains which are looped back, falling at the head and foot of the couch, was placed a low table, above which hung a mirror.

Dr. Hurst, after luncheon, brought in his writing materials, and declared that he meant to answer a number of letters to go by the post of the afternoon. "But I will not desert you, Jessie, dear, or even go as far as the sitting-room. I will not disturb you, but will be here within call." Mrs. Hurst acquiesced in her submissive, affectionate way, and the doctor sat down to his correspondence.

Just then Catherine brought in the baby to show off her new pretty slippers, the Countess Cecchi's gift, which were worn that day for the first time. The little one was sleepy, and was inclined to be cross, so as it was the nurse's dinner hour, I told Catherine that I would take charge of the child, and would try to get her to sleep if she would leave her with me. The truth was that I wanted to keep my eye on Dr. Hurst, a proceeding that I could very well manage whilst walking up and down the room with the baby. For a very thick letter, directed to him in the peculiar handwriting of the Countess Cecchi, arrived for him that morning. He

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retreated as usual to his own room to read it, and came forth looking visibly discomposed, and he has been absent-minded and gloomy ever since.

Time went on. Mrs. Hurst dozed, the doctor wrote and the baby went fast asleep in my arms; but I still continued my noiseless pacing to and fro. At last the doctor finished his voluminous epistle, signed it in his usual elaborate fashion with a grand flourish, got out an envelope, folded the written sheets, and slipped them into it.

Just then, his valet, Watson, tapped softly at the door, to announce the arrival of an English tailor from London, with half-a-dozen suits that Dr. Hurst had ordered, and over the non-appearance of which he had been fussing for some days past. So, merely wetting the gummed edge of the envelope flap, the doctor closed it; but without writing the direction, he tossed the blank envelope on the writing-table, turned, and went off in a great hurry.

Now was my chance—now or never! I laid little Madge softly down on the sofa, and snatching up the sheet of blotting paper that Dr. Hurst had been using, I held it before the mirror. Here and there a word only was legible, but those words confirmed my worst suspicions. I took possession of the letter, and hastily folded and placed some sheets of paper in an envelope, precisely like that which Dr. Hurst had employed. Leaving this *fac-simile* on the desk, I hid the real letter in my pocket, rang the bell to summon Catherine, and giving over the sleeping child and the slumbering invalid to her care, I hastened up to my bedroom, bolted the door to insure myself against interruption, and with a throbbing heart and trembling fingers, I proceeded to open the letter. This is what I read:

My own Darling, my only Love.—I cannot tell you, dearest and most adored of women, how much your last letter has distressed me. I can understand your impatience, but wait, and bear with the suspense and the anxiety of the affair just a little longer. I promise you that the crisis shall not be long delayed. I cannot comprehend how it is that Mrs. Hurst has lived so long. I thought her death imminent when I went off to Paris a few weeks ago (as I wrote you, I left so as to be out of the way when the final catastrophe took place), but when I returned I found her decidedly better.

One thing I have discovered—she used to take small doses of arsenic some years ago for the improvement of her complexion, and so her system became accustomed to the action of that poison, and she was thus enabled to resist its effects for so long. Also I mistrust that companion of hers—Jane Davis. I fancy she suspects something, but it is no matter if she does; I have never ordered or purchased a grain of arsenic all through my wife's illness, thanks to your wise suggestion of sending me whatever we found necessary. That was a capital idea of yours to forward the arsenic in the baby's slippers. I really thought that supply would prove sufficient to finish the affair, but there have been delays—inexplicable delays.

So we must try something else—something that will act with certainty as well as speedily. I suggest prussic acid, and send you the formula required to procure it. Have this prescription made up five or six times; for a single dose, though strong, would not necessarily prove fatal. I can administer it in a glass of almond cream, which Mrs. Hurst is fortunately very fond of, so that the peculiar odour of bitter almonds will excite no suspicion. You see, impatient though I am to fly to your side, I understand how to take all necessary precautions. And when all is over, what an existence of love and joy and luxury lies before us!

My wife's will, leaving me her whole fortune (with the reversion to the children, unhappily), is neither to be attacked nor set aside. I took good legal advice on that question when I was in Paris the other day. It will trammel us greatly to have the enjoyment of the income from the estate merely, but I could not persuade Jessie to leave me her fortune absolutely, as I wished her to do. However, we shall be wealthy enough to realise all our dreams of splendour—Love's paradise walled around with gold!

I think you had best send the prussic acid in some other article of finery for Madge. One of those large-sized Roman sashes would do to envelop it in, or you might send the baby a second pair of slippers; Mrs. Hurst was so pleased with the first pair. I think we have taken our precautions to perfection. No one can connect either one of us with Mrs. Hurst's death, even should the fact of the poisoning be found out, which is simply impossible. Good-bye, my dear love. In a few weeks we shall be together, never to be separated any more,—Yours adoringly, Laurence Hurst.

When I had read the last word of this dreadful letter I crushed it between my shaking hands and thrust it into my breast. What was I to do? How was I to save the unhappy lady from the direful fate that threatened her? The law? The commissary of police? Yes—yes—that was it—I must hurry to the police office. But while I was in the act of tying my bonnet there came a tap on the door, and Catherine's voice cried gleefully:

"Come downstairs, Mdlle. Jeanne—come down! The brother of madame has just arrived, and she wants you to help her to dress herself. And you must get out the new morning gown that monsieur brought her from Paris—so come—quick!"

"Her brother? Heaven be praised!" I murmured to myself, as, throwing aside my bonnet, I hastened downstairs.

I found myself face to face with a strongly built, serious-looking gentleman, Gilbert Flemming by name, a lawyer of high repute, as his sister had often told me.

After the first agitated greetings between the long-parted brother and sister were at an end, I took Mr. Flemming aside, told him the whole story of Mrs. Hurst's illness, and ended by placing the intercepted letter in his hands. As may well be imagined, he was inexpressibly shocked.

"I came over on a sudden impulse, Miss Davis," he said, "and I did not write to announce my coming, wishing to give my poor sister a surprise. It is as well that I did so, for, had the exact date of my arrival been known, that scoundrel would probably have terminated his nefarious work before I could get here."

Dr. Hurst was arrested for the attempted murder of his wife before the sun had set. In his elegant, carefully arranged clothing was found stored away enough poison to have killed a regiment. There was a packet of arsenic in the breast-pocket of his dress-coat, and another of corrosive sublimate in the lining of his dressing-gown, and so on.

And he must have had some deadly drug secreted in a hiding-place in the suit he had on when he was taken, for, though he was carefully searched before he was locked up in his cell, he was found dead the next morning, with every token of a death by poison on his distorted features. He had destroyed all the letters written to him by his accomplice; so the Countess Cecchi, not less guilty than himself, and probably more so, got off scot-free.

Mrs. Hurst long lay at death's door, no less from the shock to her system from learning of the guilt of her idolised husband, and his subsequent suicide, than from the effect of the poisons that had been administered to her. She recovered at last, and Mr. Flemming took her and her little ones back with him to England. He has settled on me a comfortable little annuity, as a reward, he said, for saving his sister's life. So I mean to remain in France for at least a year longer, to complete my investigations into the properties of mineral poisons.

L. H. H.

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IF A WOMAN WILL.

THE Rector of St Michael's sat in his study in deep perplexity. The general expression of his face was troubled; but occasionally an extremely self-complacent look stole over it, which was promptly and vigorously pulled back.

He held a cream-tinted envelope from which a faint perfume of violets was wafted. The charming writer floated before his mental vision. Her pretty white hands, appealing brown eyes, and small, daintily rounded figure, were quite pleasantly distinct; and the letter said:

DEAR MR. FIELDING,—I have no excuse to offer for this letter. I throw myself entirely upon your mercy and your manliness. I have argued. This is a matter of life or death with me. I see only one chance. Why is it unwomanly to take it? I have heard women say that a feeling of tenderness always sprang up in their hearts for a man when they knew he loved them. As for myself (is it brutal and indelicate to mention it?) I never thought of poor, dear Jack until he told me what I was to him, and I am sure his life with me satisfied him.

So arguing, I make a desperate throw. I love you. I have said it so often to myself that it is easy to write it. Has any idea of it ever crept into your absorbed, austere brain? With me, you can give your life to the church without one sordid thought; while I will give my life to you. Try to think of me. Try to withdraw yourself from your saintly absorption long enough to think of a woman—a woman who loves you.

MAY STARLEIGH.

It was an amazing letter. Again the self-complacent look came smirking up, and was disgustedly suppressed. The letter surprised him much more than the fact, for simple and austere as he really was he could not help noticing the extreme devotions of pretty little Mrs. Starleigh, and he often wondered why it did not touch him more. Why he felt so dreadfully bored sometimes. Now here this was. What could he say?

Just a little feeling of disgust came into his thoughts. "What ailed the woman? Why couldn't she act like other women? Really that reference to her wealth was a trifle coarse. Jack Starleigh in his life had been a good fellow, and to drag him in to point a moral in that kind of a love letter to another man was, to say the least, doubtful taste. Well, he must answer it the best he could."

There are a great many elements in which a man and a minister do not essentially differ. Even a minister cannot always tell the bold truth.

The Rev. Mr. Fielding had prepared a great many sermons, over which his wrestling was easy work compared to this answer to Mrs. Starleigh's letter:

MY DEAR MRS. STARLEIGH,—You have given me a higher mark of your regard than a man often receives, and I appreciate it accordingly—appreciate while I deplore.

Many years ago I had a romance which came to a sudden, sharp and awful termination in the death of the girl I was about to marry a week before the day of the wedding. Since then I have carried a dead heart. All women are as shadows to me. Your grace, beauty and kindliness, while they have been immeasurably grateful, have touched no responsive chord. The lack has been mine, not yours. It hurts me deeply to say this. I wish it were different.—Sincerely your friend, ROBERT FIELDING.

He wiped the perspiration away as he completed it. The pleasant consciousness of his own attractions, which he had first experienced, had quite passed away and he felt baited and uncomfortable.

"It will be pleasant," he said savagely, "to meet at every turn a woman who has proposed to me and been rejected."

A woman can reject a man, and meet him afterwards to any extent with the greatest equanimity; in fact it adds quite a delightful little spice to life, and if by any wiles of dress or manner she can keep the wounds still gaping, she is not especially averse to doing it.

With a man, a chivalrous man, though, it is different. He has the idea so firmly ingrained in him that a woman should have whatever she wants that he feels like a great sheepish brute if he has to deny her, especially when she wants *him*.

The Rev. Mr. Fielding found the situation quite unbearable. He felt uncomfortable to a degree whenever he met her socially. The formal parishonal calls which he was obliged to make on account of the observers in the parish of St. Michael were purgatorial. Quite often when he was preaching his eyes accidentally met hers and he knew he blushed to the roots of his hair, and she——

There never was a dog labouring under anything which his conscience could not quite condone, that guilt did not stamp itself indelibly upon him; while the cat—did you ever see her look anything but innocent even with the cream on her whiskers?

There was but one alternative for him and that was to leave St. Michael's. He did it sorrowfully, this poor victim to his own graces of mind and body, for he loved St. Michael's.

Life ran monotonously in his new parish for many months; he sometimes almost missed blushing at Mrs. Starleigh, when one day a visitor from the old parish said:

"Oh, by-the-way, it is rumoured that little Mrs. Starleigh is to be married. It is a wonder to me that, considering her wealth and what a charming woman she is, it has not happened before."

Mr. Fielding paced his study that night until very late; finally he wrote nervously, desperately, the following terse letter:

MY DEAR MRS. STARLEIGH,—Is it true that you are to be married? ROBERT FIELDING.

The distinctively feminine answer came by return of post:

DEAR MR. FIELDING,—Why? MAY STARLEIGH.

At precisely eight o'clock the next evening Mr. Fielding rang Mrs. Starleigh's door-bell. He was no longer austere or saintly absorbed, but tremendously agitated. If he hadn't been a minister he would have said he was a fool.

She came to meet him as though she had seen him yesterday, which might or might not be encouraging. He blundered into the parlour in some sort of a foolish fashion, then came to his subject with deadly directness.

"I have no excuse to offer," he said; "do with me as you will, but are you to be married?"

"That depends," she replied.

"On what?"

"On you," was the blushing but explicit answer.

And the Reverend Mr. Fielding felt that possibly there might be happier men than himself, but undoubtedly there were not—which all goes to show that a man's "no" is no more to be depended upon than a woman's.

JEANNETTE E. DENTON.

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THE QUEEN'S MESSENGER.

"I DARE not tell even you, darling."

"I think it very cruel and unkind of you; you cannot love me, or you would trust me."

"My darling wife, don't be unreasonable; as a Queen's Messenger I am sworn to absolute secrecy."

"Yes, to the outside world, but what harm could there be in telling me? you know I wouldn't repeat it."

"I know you wouldn't, dearest. Come here and sit on my knee and tell me what makes you so anxious to know my destination this time. You never wanted to know before."

"I don't know what's the matter with me to-night. I feel uneasy, as if something dreadful were going to happen," placing a warm, soft arm around his neck. "Tell me, Alec, just tell me the nearest big town, and I shall know that you love me and trust me." The appeal was followed up by a tender kiss.

Mrs. Cranston threw her arms around her husband.

Mr. Alec Cranston rapidly came to the conclusion that the only way out of this affair with peace was by telling his wife a deliberate lie, and as his expected answer was urgent—he promptly replied:

"Well, Kate, if you must know, I'm going to Paris."

Having progressed so far with the lie, and seeing the marked success it achieved, he couldn't resist adding to it.

"What will you give me if I will tell you more?"

"You dear boy, I knew you would tell me, and I only wanted to know to see if you loved me sufficiently to trust me with so great a secret."

"Then you don't want to hear any more?"

"Only when to expect you home again, my husband."

With the perversity innate in humanity, Cranston was disappointed.

"It's rather a risky business this time."

"In what way, dear?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I am taking documents over to Paris about the extradition of that dynamitard Tynan."

"Then you shan't go, Alec."

Cranston regretted his anxiety to continue that lie.

"I've no alternative, dearest, I must go."

"Oh, Alec, I knew something dreadful was going to happen. It is that you will be murdered; those horrid wretches will throw bombs at you, and I shall never see you again."

Mrs. Cranston threw her arms around her husband and wept as if her heart would break, and made Cranston feel a perfect brute—in fact he couldn't bear it.

"Forgive me, Kate, I was only yarning. Dearest, believe me, I am only going to Berlin on a diplomatic errand of the commonest kind."

"No, I knew you only say that to try and relieve my mind," looking up as if some brilliant idea had occurred. "What station do you go from?"

"Station? Oh, Charing Cross, of course."

"Then I will come and see you safely off."

"That would never do, sweetheart. First of all I have to call at the Foreign Office—and, by-the-way, I must be off—and in the second and most important place, if anyone from that office saw you there, it would mean my dismissal with ignominy and dishonour."

"But if I didn't speak to you, or appear to know you, and only just watched you safely away?"

"No harm in that, dear, of course, but would it be worth all the trouble?"

"I should come home contented."

"Very well, love, that is a compact. Now give me a long, loving kiss that will last me three days."

"Oh, will you be back so soon? Well, that is comforting."

Instead of allowing the cabby to drive to the Foreign Office as directed in the presence and hearing of his wife, Cranston told him to make for Temple Lane as fast as he could. Dismissing the cab in Fleet Street, Cranston ran down Middle Temple Lane, made several snipe-like

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dodges round corners, and quickly arrived at the particular building he required, up the stair-case of which he raced with most unbarrister-like haste.

"Hullo, Cranston," cried the startled occupier of the top flight, on seeing that gentleman enter unannounced, "I made sure it was an urgent brief for to-morrow, and I was wondering whether my numerous engagements would permit me to take it, and what the fees would be."

"You're a rapid thinker, Walter, but listen. Are you busy?"

"Not particularly."

"Then you can do me a good turn. I've received marching orders again, and for some unearthly reason or other my wife got the fidgets and persisted in wanting to know where I was going. To get out of it I told her a cram, but like a fool said I was going to Paris about the dynamitards."

"And you've scared her?"

"Rather. I tried to explain that it was only in fun I had said it, but no—the long and short of it is, she says she is going to Charing Cross to see me safely off, but as I didn't tell her by what train I was going, it is doubtful if she turns up. She has promised faithfully, however, not to speak or even appear to recognise me. Now will you take this long ulster of mine and go and pretend you are me, and lend me yours; you can have it back on Friday morning? Go on to the platform as if you were going by the train."

"But there seems a power of mystery over nothing, Alec. If your wife isn't going to molest you, why not go yourself; can't you trust her, or are you frightened of the waterworks?"

"I am not going from Charing Cross at all."

"If you had said that at first now, I needn't have exercised my legal acumen to discover imaginary why's and wherefores. It shall be done, Alec Cranston. Take care of that coat and don't dog-ear the pocket-flaps."

"I am about to dissemble," mused Mr. Walter Driffield, as he prepared for the fray. "Must be uncommon awkward sometimes for married Queen's Messengers. If I were the Government I would make the beggars swear to celibacy, for a clever woman could turn a man inside out in half-an-hour. I suppose they are given sealed despatches on that account. I must give Cranston full credit though, it is a neat get-out of the difficulty, if she don't spot me, by-the-way. By Jove, suppose she breaks down, and throws her arms round me and—Holy Moses, I never thought of that. Anyway, here goes," and the briefless Walter Driffield, barrister-at-law, started on his errand of doing a friend a good turn.

As Driffield was about the same height and build as his friend, there was not much likelihood of anyone detecting him when he put the coat-collar up—it hid quite half his face—and, determined to carry out the scheme to the merest detail, Driffield promptly did what he considered would be Cranston's first action—entered the refreshment-room. Before his drink had been touched, however, a well-dressed, nicely spoken man came up to Driffield and putting a hand on his shoulder said:

"You've given me a fine chase, Mr. Cranston, but quick, I think there is time. I have an imperative message for you to go to the Foreign Office. I've been to your house, but they told me you had driven there, and I've been on a sort of wild goose chase."

Anxious to shield his friend, Driffield, despite his legal acumen, couldn't decide whether to say he was not Cranston or to let matters take their chance. Thinking it might only be a letter or something, Driffield finally decided to risk going as Cranston.

"You've given me a fine chase, Mr. Cranston."

"If we are sharp, sir, you will be able to get the train; I've a good cab waiting."

Once in the cab and driving at a daring pace considering the traffic, Driffield regained his senses somewhat, and although he was afraid his friend might get hauled over the coals, couldn't help chuckling to think of the sell there would be for somebody on arriving at Her Majesty's Foreign Office if he had to see any of the big-wigs.

"Do you object to the window being down, Mr. Cranston?" asked his urbane companion. "I have a very weak chest and this east wind plays havoc with me."

Driffield had no objection, and the clumsy window was accordingly let down, soon to be covered with the steam breathed upon them.

Just as the hansom reached the cross end of Whitehall Gardens, where the light is disgracefully dim, the messenger from the Foreign Office blew his nose violently, and mopped his face and eyes, as if in the throes of influenza. This gave occupation to his left hand only, the other being busily engaged in extracting something from a case in his overcoat pocket. Upon this being accomplished, the hand was swiftly withdrawn and a handkerchief saturated with liquid ammonia was dashed into Driffield's face, blinding and stupefying him instantly.

When Driffield recovered consciousness and was able to piece together the incidents prior to his being nearly suffocated, he found himself in a windowless room about twelve feet square, lighted by a lamp, suspended through a hole in the ceiling, similar to those in railway carriages, only that this one was paraffin. His next discovery, after crawling off the bed he had been laid on, was that the room was partially padded, but whether to prevent self-injury or as a deadener of sound Driffield was of course ignorant. The bed was the sole piece of furniture in the room, and was a unique specimen of a craftily devised preventive of self-inflicted injuries. In the ordinary

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acceptation of the term there was neither head nor foot to it, and the parts usually hard were carefully covered with some soft material.

Such suggestive surroundings would scare most men, and Driffield was no exception. It was the uncertainty, the suspense, and feeling of dread that unnerved him, nor did he feel any easier in his mind when he noticed a sliding panel open near the ceiling, disclosing the lower features of a masked face. Only a few minutes elapsed, and three semi-masked individuals noiselessly entered the room.

Driffield's whole body quivered with rage, like a freshly trapped panther, and possessing extraordinary strength, could have swept the three intruders aside like straws, but to his agony saw they were each armed with a revolver.

"Sit down, Mr. Cranston, we intend no violence, at least, unless you decline to listen to reason. We have not taken the liberty of searching you, preferring to allow a gentleman of your position to avoid that disgrace, but we must insist upon your giving up at once all the papers and documents you were to have taken to Paris."

"You have made a great mistake; I am not Mr. Cranston at all."

"Come, sir, you surely know the world better than to think that desperate men like us can be bluffed that way!"

A handkerchief saturated with liquid ammonia was dashed into Driffield's face.

"Who are you?"

"Well! we call ourselves patriots!"

"Nihilists or Fenians?"

"Ah, it makes no matter which; we are all brothers, striving for one common end."

Up to this, one only of the three had spoken, as if elected as the spokesman, but another now interfered, and speaking with a strong foreign accent, and in a somewhat sneering tone said:

"Ve vaste much good time, *mes amis*."

"Yes, that is true," acquiesced the first speaker. "Mr. Cranston, I must ask you without any further procrastinating to give up your despatches."

"And I tell you, you are a pack of fools and have got the wrong man. I've no despatches! If you think I have—have a search for them."

The tone was anything but conciliatory, and the hitherto silent member of the trio immediately crossed the room and picked up the ulster, looked inside the collar, shrugged his shoulders and exclaimed:

"If you are not Mr. Cranston, why do you wear his coat?"

"It is his coat, I'll admit."

"And," producing a handkerchief from one of the pockets and reading "A. Cranston" on it, "you use his handkerchiefs for the same purpose, no doubt?

"We've tried persuasion and it has failed, now you shall have five minutes' grace, and unless you give up those documents within that time you will be searched."

"Might is right here I suppose," remarked Driffield, who was beginning to understand the situation.

And searched he was, the muzzle of a revolver being pointed at him during the operation. Each letter and odd bit of paper was examined and scrutinised with the utmost care, but on finishing without discovering those all-important despatches, the tempers of the three "brothers" slackened considerably.

"You have evidently got them concealed somewhere about you, Mr. Cranston. Again I ask you will you give them up, or is your clothing to be ripped to rags?"

"I have already told you, I don't know how many times, that I am not Mr. Cranston and have no documents or papers—except those you've seen, and look at those envelopes, you'll find them addressed to Walter Driffield, The Temple, and I am the Walter Driffield."

"We've had enough of this fooling, Mr. Cranston. I must now ask you to undress."

"That I absolutely refuse to do."

"Refusal means a repetition of your sensations in the cab last night, remember."

There was no alternative, but as a last protest Driffield said:

"If you will leave the room, and bring me something to put on, I will."

"You shall have my dressing-gown, sir, but you must disrobe here in our presence—you might swallow some

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palatable piece of information when our backs were turned. We will take care of your money and jewellery."

Driffield imagined it would take a long time to "rip his clothes to rags," but evidently there were professional pickers on the premises, for two of the original trio soon returned.

"As we have found nothing secreted about your clothing, Mr. Cranston, the reason is obvious, your instructions were evidently verbal. As soon as we leave the room, it will become absolutely dark, and will remain so until you call out that you are prepared to divulge your secret."

The room was perfectly dark, and not a sound penetrated from the outside world.

* * * * *

Despite Cranston's statement as to the improbability of his wife turning up at the station, she did, and saw her husband, as she thought, instead of taking train *en route* to Paris, quickly leave the station with some other man, and drive off in a hansom cab. Had her purse been more heavily weighted she would have followed that cab, for her suspicions were aroused, but as it was she had to be contented with noticing that the enamel plate at the rear of the cab was broken in such a manner as to leave the number a matter of conjecture. Debating as to her going straight home and upon the deceitfulness of men generally, she stood at one of the entrances of the station just as the real Mr. Cranston made his appearance. Taken so utterly by surprise she gave a little scream, but, suddenly remembering her promise, tried to look innocent. Cranston laughed.

"Trust you, indeed!" he said, still laughing.

"But, Alec, where have you come from, and am I to know you?" in a tone of bewilderment.

Three semi-masked individuals.

"Yes, little woman, it is quite safe fortunately. I thought I might be in time in case you did come to see me off. You see my marching orders have been postponed for a week."

"But, Alec dearest," still puzzled, "where's your coat and whose have you got on?"

"Oh, of course, that accounts for it; I had forgotten I met Driffield, and he was up to one of his larks and we exchanged."

"Then it must have been him I saw drive off just now?"

"In all probability it was. Now what do you say to doing a theatre now we are here, and a nice bit of supper somewhere after?"

"You dear boy; but look at me."

"Well—oh, hang the clothes. If not the best dressed you will be the handsomest woman there, so you needn't mind."

"Oh, you gave me such a turn, sir!"

It was considerably after midnight when Mr. and Mrs. Cranston returned home, and their reception was anything but cordial, the maid-servant giving a positive yell when she saw her master. Of course, such odd behaviour necessitated inquiries, and Martha, somewhat flustered, said:

"Oh, you gave me such a turn, sir, I thought you had gone to Paris."

"Indeed, who told you I was going there?"

"Nobody, sir, that is I thought——"

"Quite so, you were listening at the door. Well, you can go in the morning, as early as you like."

The whirring tinkle of an electric bell awoke the Cranston's during the night. After satisfying himself that it was the street bell, Alec slipped on a few things and went downstairs.

"Your front door was open, Mr. Cranston." The voice proceeded from a police officer.

"Was it?" he replied, slightly mystified. "I closed and fastened it myself last night. Just wait here a moment."

To use a slang expression—Queen's Messengers are awkward nuts to crack, either physically or otherwise, and practice makes them quick at taking in situations. Cranston dashed up to the servant's room and satisfied himself that Martha had gone, then as rapidly ran down to his own room, switched on a light, and to the terror of his wife began dressing as if life and death were at stake. They were, and he knew it. He quickly explained to his wife the arrangement of his with Driffield, and

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Cranston commenced a terrific onslaught on the door.

his fears, and she, although terribly frightened, remembered about the broken plate on the cab. In less than five minutes Cranston returned to the policeman, told him to keep an eye on the house, and vanished down the street, much to the man's amazement.

Luck befriended him in the form of a good cab and a better horse, which was soon flying along the empty streets at a pace that made the few belated pedestrians that were about stop and stare after it. Arrived at Charing Cross Station, Cranston stood near the few dilapidated conveyances that were there, and called out in a voice loud enough to be heard in Fleet Street:

"Which of you drivers wants to earn a sovereign?"

The effect was magical; there appeared to be five drivers for every cab.

"Do any of you know the driver of a hansom that has the tail-plate broken: it was here about 7 o'clock last night?"

No, there wasn't one of them knew. One old stager informed Cranston that they were night workers only.

"Wait a bit," suggested one. "I shouldn't wonder but what old Larry'd know 'un."

"Where is he?" asked Cranston eagerly.

"At the corfee stall by Morley's."

Cranston immediately ran off, telling his Jehu to follow.

"A' coorse I knows 'un. Where does 'e live? Back o' Guilford Street."

A sovereign placed in old Larry's palm quickened his memory in a marvellous manner, and he and Alec were soon off to the back of Guilford Street.

There was some doubt at first, old Larry being very uncertain as to the exact house. After a few minutes' careful examination of the bricks of one house, however, he drew Alec's attention to having found the right one, emphasising the statement with an oath. Finding nothing handier, Cranston commenced a terrific onslaught on the door with the butt end of a revolver, the first glimpse of which sent cold chills up Mr. Larry's back-bone. He made sure he had brought trouble for his pal. Suddenly an upper window was opened.

"Hello! hello! hello! we don't want no bloomin' earthquikes 'ere. Wot's this 'ere abart?"

"Come down quick, Bill, this 'ere gent wants ter see yer."

"So I should bloomin' well think," sagely remarked Bill, as his head vanished.

"You drove two gentlemen from Charing Cross station last night."

"Well, an' wot if I did?"

"I'll give you five pounds if you can take me to the house."

"Wot's this 'ere game?"

"Never mind now, time is flying; I can tell you on the way. Put a coat on—be smart."

On the way to New Scotland Yard, Bill was told all that was good for him to know, and he explained how the gent in the black coat had ordered him in King William Street to go to the station and wait. He further explained that his first instructions were to drive to the Foreign Office, but were changed to Bleat Street, Lambeth, where he took them.

Quite a procession of hansoms crossed Westminster Bridge just as Big Ben solemnly struck five—a procession of three. When the foremost arrived at George Street it stopped, as did the other two. The late occupants then walked down Bleat Street about twenty yards to an entry on the right, where half-a-dozen policemen were lying *perdu*. They had received their instructions at the Lambeth station by telephone. The inspector in command divided his forces, some going to cut off the retreat at the back, while the remainder walked straight to No. 9, front entrance.

The noise woke up the neighbours, but made no impression on those within No. 9, and finally the door had to be forced open.

The birds had flown; signs were not wanting to show the haste the late tenant had been in to vacate his domicile, but not a trace was left that could give the police the merest shadow of a clue.

Cranston and the inspector directed their search for Driffield, and were some time in finding him, but their efforts were finally rewarded.

"You were right, sir; that slavey of yours must have been in the swim, and given them the tip," remarked the inspector, while the men were still searching; "but, although they've got away now, I think we can pretty well tell whose work it is."

What a talk Driffield and the Cranstons had that day. Driffield was certain they would have tortured him to death, and of course Mrs. Cranston reminded Alec dear that she knew something dreadful was going to happen.

C. England Cowan.

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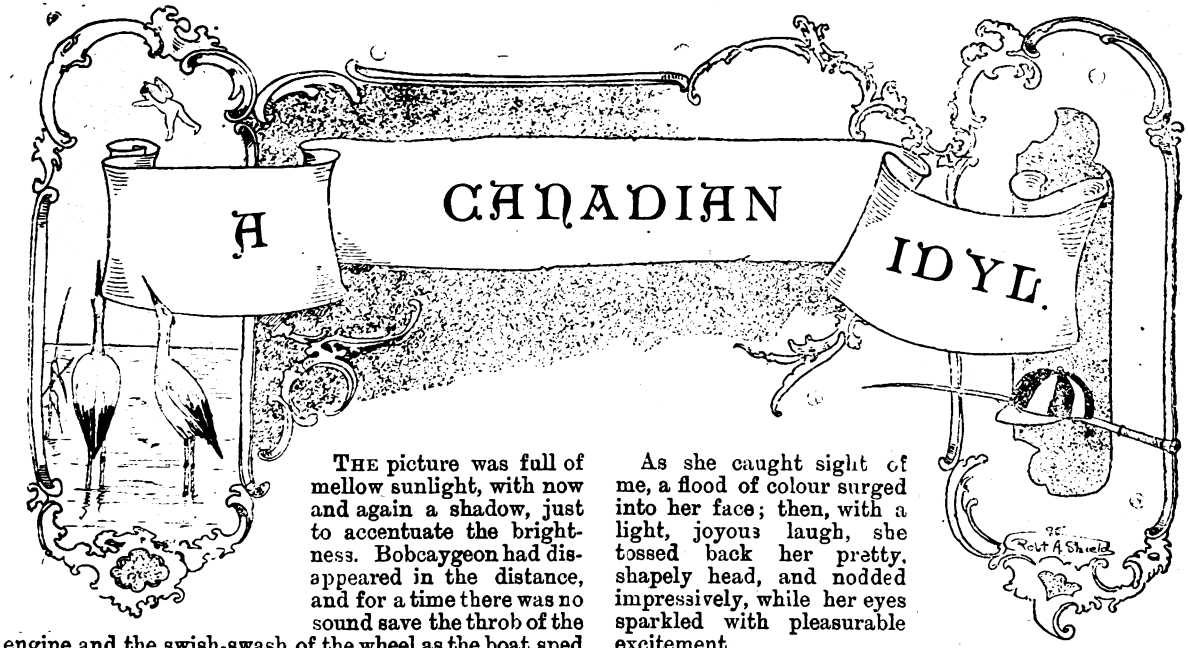

THE picture was full of mellow sunlight, with now and again a shadow, just to accentuate the brightness. Bobcaygeon had disappeared in the distance, and for a time there was no sound save the throb of the engine and the swish-swash of the wheel as the boat sped along through the clear waters of Sturgeon lake.

Two old women, who sat close together and talked in whispers to each other, were, beside myself, the only passengers aboard. Here and there we slipped past cool summer retreats, in their settings of green trees, with grassy lawns, rolling far back out of sight. There was a medley of bird notes in the air, and the fresh aromatic scent of the pines floated in upon the breeze.

"Yo' fust trip to Ontario?" asked the captain, seating himself on a camp-stool near by.

"Yes; I am spending a week or so at Bobcaygeon, for the fishing."

"Fine sport about here. Think I seen you an' the Scotchman out together day befo' yistiddy, if I don't mistake. Stoppin' at the Forest House, ain't you?"

"Well, I have a room at the Forest House, and drop in occasionally for meals; but I confine myself generally to fish diet. McDougal is a capital cook as well as fisherman, and he serves up the trout fresh from the water. I tell you what, they are fine."

"Ah, sir," he vouchsafed, "Canady is a great country—a big country, an' the fish an' the timber is prime; they can't be beat. But here we are at last. The Injun village is just about half a mile back. Keep to the path an' you can't miss it. You won't see much when you fin' it, howsomever—nothin' thar but dorgs an' half-breeds."

In another instant I found myself alone in the woods with no human habitation in sight. Everyone at Bobcaygeon had urged a visit to the Indian village, and I supposed I should find it along the regular line of traffic.

While I sat on a log, deliberating with myself as to my next move, a canoe touched the shore, and for one brief moment a young girl stood in it, lithe and supple, outlined against the quivering reeds. Her slim brown ankles peeped from under her crimson skirt, a blue shawl fluttered around her, and a yellow kerchief was knotted about her black hair. She looked like some bright, tropical bird poised for flight.

As she caught sight of me, a flood of colour surged into her face; then, with a light, joyous laugh, she tossed back her pretty, shapely head, and nodded impressively, while her eyes sparkled with pleasurable excitement.

"She is as beautiful as a picture, and I should like to frame her just as she stands," was my mental comment, but I lifted my hat and spoke to her in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I want to go to the Indian village, but have lost my way," I said. "Will you please direct me to it?"

"And why do you care to go there?" she asked, as she secured the canoe to the bank. "There is nothing to see. It is detestable."

She had come up very near me while she spoke, and now dropped down upon the log beside me as though it were quite the thing to do.

"Mamma and I, we have lived there since my father died," she went on, "for after he fell and hurt himself he could do no more work, and mamma was ill, so they were very, very poor. You know my father was half-Indian, and his father was a chief—a great chief. Once I saw him dressed up to see the Prince of Wales when he came over here. The old man had on his war paint, with feathers in his hair, and his blanket round him. I was little, and afraid of him, and I cried loud."

"Is your mother an Indian too?"

"Oh no! she is thoroughly French."

She raised her daintily pencilled brows and brought the tips of her fingers together with a tragic little gesture. She spoke English without an accent, but ever and anon, apparently unconsciously, glided into French, with which she seemed more conversant.

"Have you always lived in the village?" I inquired, with as small regard for the conventionalities as she herself displayed.

She looked at me deprecatingly through her silky lashes, and laughed a mocking little laugh.

"What an idea!" she cried. "I would now be dead if that were so. It is not life here. It is only to breathe like this"—and she sighed audibly.

Then for a while she was silent, with her eyes fixed on the water in a musing, dreamy gaze.

"Ah, monsieur, that marriage was a great mistake," she announced at last, facing me suddenly; "my father

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and mother. He had only his handsome face, and mamma was an orphan—and now see how we must work. *Sans doute*, Jean is much better as a husband."

"Who is Jean?" I asked.

"Ah, Jean!" with a shrug of her dainty shoulders. "Jean? He is—but it is time to go. Mamma will be waiting for me, and unless I work to-day I will have no baskets to sell to-morrow. Won't you come along with me?"

I needed no second invitation, and we strolled away side by side. The fields lay steeped in golden sunshine, the sky was as blue as a summer harebell, and the air full of a strange, soft radiance. The mellow tones of a distant church bell drifted across the water, and fainter yet fainter, floated on and on, until the last echo had hidden itself in the reeds along the shore.

"Won't you tell me about Jean?" I persisted.

"Why, Jean—Jean! I'm going to marry Jean next month," she told me, while a swift blush dyed her face.

"Then Jean is a very fortunate fellow," I replied. "But who is he? Where is he?"

In the silence that ensued I had time to study her face. There was passion lurking in her dusky eyes, and the crimson burned under the olive of her cheeks.

"Ah!" she said presently, with a quick turn of her head that brought to mind a little robin red-breast, "you English, monsieur, you think too much of marriage—*ce n'est pas le fin*. There is much afterwards. Should I wish Pierre to see me when I am ill, and old, and ugly? He will wear me in his heart, and there I shall always be young and beautiful.

"And perhaps—Bah! how I hate work! When I should like to float on the lake and dream, it is mamma that cries that I must gather birch-bark and sweet hay for more baskets and workboxes. Then, too, I have to dye the quills with which to trim them; and Jean, he has a house, and a cow, and two horses, and three thousand dollars," pausing impressively as she enumerated each piece of property. "But Pierre is only a soldier. *Ma foi!* But he is a fine fellow—tall and straight, like a young tree, and such big blue eyes."

"Do you love Pierre?" I queried.

"Well, yes," with a touch of resignation in her tone.

"And you say he loves you, too?"

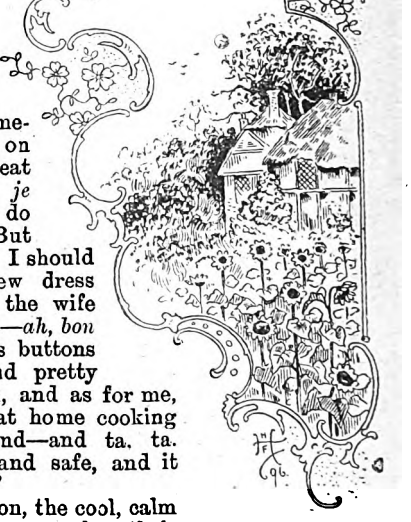
There was a slight quiver about her rosy lips, and she laughed a tuneless little laugh.

"Yes," she answered, "but what is the good of that, monsieur? He is poor—so poor—only a soldier, with a sword and a uniform, and——" she gazed up at me with her lustrous eyes that were dark and flashing, like the eyes of the women of Seville.

There was a wondrous blending of softness and fire in her face, and I marvelled as I looked at her, why the eccentric brain of this dainty, bird-like creature, innocent of any knowledge of angles and triangles, should fly off at a tangent, busy with the problem of life that is so difficult of solution.

We were in sight of her small cottage now, with the waving millet up to its very door. It looked like a tiny island in a big, restless sea.

"One must live, monsieur," she announced, parenthetically, with an impatient little *moue*, "and see, this is not life. Pierre, he spoke to me the day before he went away, but I knew he loved me before he said a word. There was something in his eyes when he looked into mine that cried out so loud that I thought everybody must hear it, and when he kissed me that first time, and said, 'Lorita, I love you,' it was all old to me even then, and I laughed, but something was laying on my heart like a great weight. *Ah, que je suis folle!* Why do I talk to you so? But what could I do? I should never have a new dress when I would be the wife of Pierre, and then—*ah, bon Dieu!* A soldier's buttons are so bright, and pretty girls smile at him, and as for me, why I would be at home cooking and scrubbing, and—and ta. ta. Jean, he is ugly and safe, and it is much better so."



The quiet decision, the cool, calm dignity of her remarks—their audacity was staggering. I passed my hand across my eyes, and looked at her again as she threaded her way in front of me along the narrow path.

"And next month you are to marry Jean," I said, as we reached the cottage door. "I believe you will change your mind yet, and take Pierre. I would, if I were you."

She shook her head and tapped the ground impatiently with one of her arched brown feet.

"*Non, non*," she asserted emphatically. "I am not a coquette. I will marry Jean." And she raised her eyebrows ever so little.

"May I come to see you again before I leave? I hope Jean is not jealous."

"He could not be of you," she cried, laughing, and flashing back one of her radiant smiles, as she looked at me with those mischievous, haunting eyes.

The captain had spoken truly. There was, indeed, little of interest to see at the village. The Indians (all half-breeds) were lazy, shiftless creatures, weak imitations of the white man.

"I am disappointed," I said to the shopkeeper, who was lounging in the door, with his stiff black hair pompadoured. "I came here expecting to find wigwams, wampum, and war-paint."

The man laughed.

"You might not have got home with your scalp," he replied, "if that were so."

The children stared at me stolidly, some half-grown boys were playing baseball, and in the back of the shop

POST-CARD COMPETITION. No. 24.

What is the longest sentence in this number (excluding serials) in which the last letter of each word corresponds with the first in the next. Example: "Valdo *of few words said* don't." Usual conditions. *Post-cards only.*

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I heard a baby crying. After buying a half-dozen baskets and tiny birch-bark canoes (I had engaged as many more from Lorita,) I turned my face to the lake.

Lorita and her mother—a bright-faced, Frenchy little woman—were engaged in an animated discussion as I neared their cottage, and I passed by unobserved. As I went down the little path between the millet I heard Lorita laugh, and there was a suggestion in it of the carol of a bird.

"So she is going to marry Jean for his money," kept running through my mind like a refrain, "because he owns a house, a cow, two horses, and three thousand dollars."

It was the same old strain, on a lower key. Women have sold themselves since the world began, but the blank dreariness of the girl's future appalled me.

I tossed away my cigar in disgust.

Two days later I received a letter calling me home unexpectedly, and the evening before my departure I went to bid Lorita good-bye.

The girl—she was scarcely more than a child—attracted me, interested me. Such quaint, sordid axioms from such guileless lips!

The air was fresh with that delicious fragrance of the woods after a shower, and the mist, like a grey spectre, floated up from the lake, and away. The odour of birch-bark and sweet hay seemed to hang about the cottage, like a visible presence, and the rustling millet nodded and whispered without ceasing.

In the doorway I found Lorita, pale and troubled, but she extended to me a brown, delicately-modelled little hand as I paused upon the steps, and greeted me with her characteristic, insouciant smile. Then her beautiful face, as capricious as an April day, again relapsed into sadness.

"Ah, it is too bad," she began, with a sob in her voice, "that it should happen so. Jean, he tries to please me. He came yesterday to bring the great trunk of wedding clothes from Montreal. You see, I would have it so, for it is there that we used to live, and there is nothing to buy at Bobcaygeon."

She spoke so rapidly that her words tripped over one another, in their undue haste.

"Such silks and laces, monsieur. Ah, but I shall look like a princess with them on"—with a fleeting smile, and a bird-like poise of her head. "But mamma and I were looking through them, and Jean, who insisted that he must see, too, he sat down beside us, and in a moment he was asleep: Bah! only fancy! And he snored frightfully, but that was all the better, for then we might say what we liked, and mamma was sure that one dress was *bon marché*, for there was a spot as big as your button under the top ruffle."

With an unmirthful, pathetic laugh, she added:

"It was hidden, indeed, snug away, but mamma found it, for her eyes are sharp. Then I put on my wedding gown and pinned on the long white veil, monsieur, and I looked beautiful, like the little Mother in the church and when I turned from the mirror Pierre was standing in the door just here. The sun was shining on the buttons of his jacket, and he was where you are now, with his arms stretched out to me and his eyes half shut, under the shadow of his cap.

"Mamma was gone to show some lace to a neighbour, and I did not speak, but—but—what say you?

"The veil is not hurt, and it is dry again, but Pierre's tears and mine, ah, they fell on it very fast

"Suddenly he saw Jean—poor Jean!

"His mouth was open, so—and his nose was red like a cherry, and while he snored Pierre looked down at him and clinched his fists, and under my lace my heart was aching—throbbing."

Her bright changeful face grew soft and tender as she spoke, and the rosy glow deepened on her cheeks.

"Ah, well, Pierre, he was gone when mamma came back, and you know Jean is rich—very rich—but something aches so here in my breast."

"So you are surely going to marry Jean next month? Good-bye, Lorita," I said, turning to go.

A sunbeam quivered across her exquisite face, and lingered lovingly in the tearful black eyes.

"It is better so," she answered, with a pitiful effort at a smile. "Pierre, he is gone away now, and—*bon Dieu!* The wedding dress is very fine! It is real brocade, mamma says—ah, it is destiny, monsieur—destiny!"

As I reached the gate I heard her sobbing, and looking back I saw her, with arms outstretched, like a broken bright-hued lily, lying across the threshold.

I scarcely knew whether to weep or smile.

PAULINE SHACKLEFORD COLYAR.

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The Last King of Atlantis

OR,

The Romance of a Lost Continent.

By **Geo. C. Wallis,** Author of *The Winning of Gunhild,* etc.

CHAPTER XX.

In Quest of Quitzaal.

On the morrow I sought out Marenso. I told him who our prisoner was, and, as briefly as I could, the story of our illicit love. He listened gravely, interposing sundry headshakes into his silence, and when I asked his counsel regarding my duty, answered, after long communing with himself, that the Princess must go before the Queen as a prisoner and a rebel, and receive from the royal lips her sentence. To this I agreed, as it had been in my mind to do the same, for it is a coward's act to slay a helpless woman, however dangerous she may be.

"Then into your charge I commit our fair prisoner," said I, "and shall trust you to take her safely to court. It would be well were you to set out on the return journey with most of the troops at once, as with a chosen band I intend to track down Quitzaal before I go back."

"A foolish plan," said Marenso regretfully. "If the white rebels are destroyed, there are teeming hosts of Red Barbarians left in their trackless woods."

"None but what have heard or will hear of our prowess," I said, "and few who came against us yesterday will dare to face us again. Give me five hundred stout-hearted, well-armed men, and I will wager to capture this runaway Governor, and bring him down to the coast in safety."

"Well, well," he replied, "your blood is young blood and mine is old, much as I rejoice in the sound of war! Have your way and I will go; but let your force be a thousand strong, and let Valdo and Atris go with you. Then only shall I dare to meet the Queen alone."

To these conditions I consented, and the day but two following, having by then buried our dead and razed the town to the ground—excepting the pyramid, wherein we placed the corpses of Alcis, Cuzcon, and others who had done nobly in the fight—and shared up the food and spoil, our forces parted, Marenso, with 24,000 men, beginning his march to the coast, and I, with the other thousand and my two lieutenants, striking out and following the trail of the Ulmecs, with whom Quitzaal had last been seen.

For some distance our way led through level country intersected by little rippling water courses, through forests where the air was heavy with the rich perfume of summer flowers and the crisp scent of dry timber. In places we found clearings where once had been a settlement, now abandoned or used only as a burial ground, where the bodies were interred, as is the native custom, in a sitting posture.

One of these places of the dead we saw not far from our camp, and there, it seemed, had been hurriedly interred many of the slain in the recent battle, put into the ground in the usual way, but with many of the heads sticking out of the soft earth, some scratched and dragged out and gnawed and mangled fearfully by the roaming denizens of the forest—the tiger-cats and wolfish wild dogs that made night hideous with their howlings and barkings.

A gruesome spot it was, even in the daylight hours, with its skull-like brows projecting from the soil in silent horror, chawed and chavelled out of all likeness to humanity; with its polished bones lying scattered about, rooted up by the sharp claws of the beasts and cleaned of every scrap of flesh by their savage fangs; with its many useless and broken weapons, chiefly knives and swords of obsidian, that hard transparent stone, so common in that country; with its mute but telling evidence of sad defeat

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and carnage. Quickening our pace, we left the grim spectacle behind as soon as possible.

Our course now lay through fields of maize and beans and fertile stretches of fruit-plants and productive trees; through districts rich in amber, cocoa, cochineal, and lime; round hillsides bored with tunnels, where dusky workers delved for lead and tin and copper, and here and there for silver and turquoise stones; and further on, still following the trail of the fleeing Ulmecs—which was easily traced by their footprints, the state of the fruit crops and the white ashes of their camp fires—we came to rising ground again, climbing out of the valley up one of its southern slopes, meeting on our upward journey the pines and larches and oaks that told of the chill air of that higher altitude. Now and again we crossed a foaming torrent, swollen by

Fell headlong into the horrible depths.

recent rains, getting over on rude wooden bridges laid from rock to rock. It taxed our nerves to the utmost to walk along those rough-hewn logs, poised so lightly on the points of rock that jutted sheer out of the boiling flood beneath; but, save three who fell off and were swept away in the rapid currents, we made the transits in safety.

Anon we passed by mighty ruins, half buried beneath dense forests; palaces crumbling to dust; temples with grinning, sculptured idols before altars covered with nearly effaced bas-reliefs; houses of granite, black and rose-colour, rough and polished, all falling to decay, overgrown with twining creepers and rank weeds, resplendent with the gay flashing of the brightly-plumaged birds and resonant with the tuneful notes of the sweeter-voiced, if less gaudy, songsters of the shade. What race of men was it that built these fast-declining edifices, so soon to be blotted out of existence by the ruthless hand of Time?

'Tis a riddle that the centuries may not answer. The few Huacans we captured on our journey could tell us no more concerning them than that it was a tradition of their tribe that long ago their forefathers, the first Huacans, had driven these unknown people, who came from the land to the west, beyond the sea—out of the valley to a country further south, as the Ulmecs might some day drive them. When asked why Quitzaal and the Ulmecs with him had gone south instead of north to their own nation, our prisoners answered very ingenuously: because the white chief thought to evade any pursuit, expecting we should strike northward. Up to now I had had several brushes with the natives, who fought in the undergrowth instead of facing us in the open, covering themselves with leaves so as to be invisible while pouring in a volley of arrows, but after getting all the knowledge I could out of the captives I set them at liberty, with a word to their fellows that I wanted the white chief Quitzaal only, and that when he was once in my clutches I would leave the land to them. From that time, with such amazing quickness news spreads in those desolate wilds, our march was unmolested.

Continuing our journey on the plateau we reached after leaving the lovely valley, we found that at length the fugitives had wind of our coming, and were pressing forward with greater speed and caution, though it could avail them little, being then but a day's distance ahead. At last we came to a halt on the brink of a deep cleft in the ground that extended to either side of us as far as our gaze could reach. It was a gorge too wide to warrant the hazard of a leap, and yet so narrow in proportion to its depth that it seemed but a long, deep gash in the earth, as though some giant had drawn his blade across the old world's face, leaving an ugly mark behind. At the bottom of this precipitous rift ran a river, reduced to our eyes, by the giddy height, to a brawling stream. A couple of huge trees, growing at the very top, whose gnarled boughs interlocked, were the only means of passage over this fearsome obstacle.

"Quitzaal and his band must have passed over," I said; "and what others can do, so can we. I, for one, shall cross. You, Atris, with five hundred men, I shall leave here to guard the place, on which the safety of our return depends, the rest must follow me."

So saying, I wasted no further time, but securing my weapons firmly, began to climb the massive trunk of the nearmost tree, and up into its stout branches, until I firmly grasped the twining arms of the further giant oak. Here, amongst the scant foliage I paused and looked down into the awful abyss that yawned beneath. There the great river flowed like a thin line of shining silver, inlaid in dark, dull ebony, and the sound of its rolling, as it washed its rocky bed, floated faintly to my ears, like the far-off sighing of a summer breeze.

Some might have lost head and dizzily fallen, but Phrena the Iron-Fingered was not of them, and so I came across in safety. After me Valdo cautiously crept, warily avert his eyes from the emptiness beneath, and he, too, reached the far side. Then others followed, though hesitatingly and grumblingly, till a score stood with us on the coveted brink. When the twenty-third man had nearly reached the middle, however, he looked down with morbid curiosity, trembled a second on his lofty perch like an aspen, strove in vain to keep his hold, and then, with a piercing cry of despair, unloosed his fingers, and fell headlong into the horrible depths. Down, down he sank like a stone, his armour-clad form flashing in the sunlight like a falling star as he descended between those frowning walls of living rock, and plunged into the swiftly-flowing torrent beneath. Breathlessly we peered over the dread verge and saw his body disappear, the only sound that reached us being a tiny splash, as of a little pebble idly thrown in a purling brook.

Now the rest hung back, fearful of his fate, but came on

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at my urging till forty were over, when another missed foothold and fell like the first, with a shriek of terror, into the fast-rolling flood at the base of the silent cliffs. Then they refused, one and all, to stir one step on that bridge, nor could I, either by threats, or entreaties, or curses, or badinage, or sneers, make them alter their resolution.

"Stay there, then, for ever, cowards, men with the hearts of women! Stay there till you rot as you stand!" I cried in anger. "I and this brave company will pursue our quest though the very spirits bar our way. You, Atris, leave them and come with me, lest you be disgraced by the taint of their foolish weakness."

Izitla's lover obeyed as though he had been told to go aboard a ship, and when he joined us I gave the word and we continued our journey without so much as a moment's pause to give the faint hearts time to screw up their courage, soon getting out of their sight, and quickly picking up the trail of the rebels. The chase was now further in front than before, and it was with difficulty that we made it out as it wound through dense thickets of cypress and clustering groves of cedar, through belts of fragrant pine, over bare and storm-swept spaces, down shrub-fringed gullies, and up the steep sides of snow-clad mountain spurs.

More than one startling adventure and narrow escape we had on those ice-bound ridges and overhanging crests of sparkling crystal; more than one hairbreadth saving from slips that would have sent us churning up the crusted snow down glittering slopes on our way to white-hung, death-still hollows opening out in awing vastness underneath our feet! The men I had, brave as they were, often wished I would turn back, but doggedly I held on. I had not got so far for nothing, and where the foe could find a footway so could we; therefore on we went through that region of rock-waste and snowy solitude, with mountains piled on mountains towering round us, white-mantled, tapering peaks jutting up into the cold, clear blue of the sky on every side, bare, black, rounded hills and sharp angular crags, strewn about in inextricable confusion, soaring heights and yawning depths in close proximity, precipices sheer and slanting ledges winding side by side, cloud-draped summit and mist-filled valleys lying near together, and over all, the calm, chill stillness of eternal peace, broken only now and then by the hoarse cries of the eagles and condors that whirled in wheeling flight high above the dreary scene.

With feelings of relief we left that icy land behind, and after travelling for many days along a level sandy country, came to the refuge that the fugitives were making for, and ran them to earth as well-trained dogs tire out and run down their fleeter-footed quarry. It was in a region more desolately grand, more melancholy, yet more vast, than any tract of mother earth that I have seen in all my wanderings.

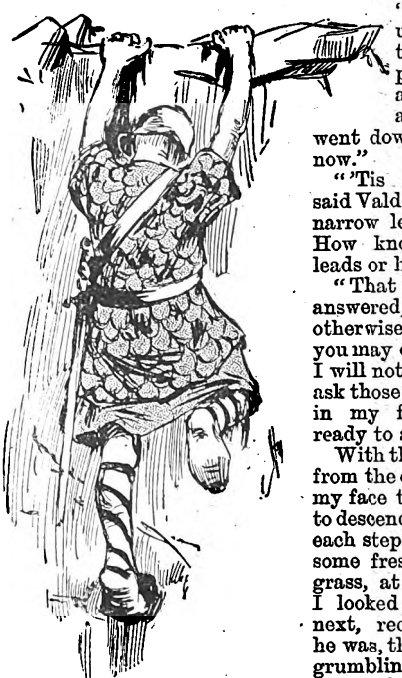
Imagine, if you can, an arid table-land of lime and sandstone rock, breeze-blown, and scantily covered with vegetation, broken up in all directions by gaping cracks and fissures, thousands of cubits deep and inaccessibly steep, with rivers rolling over gritty beds at the bottom of these great ravines; imagine, wherever a depression was that could be called a valley, sloping paths that led from height to height, seeming, on the great, square-shouldered earth masses, like lines drawn with a finely-pointed spear.

Imagine these valleys to be few but the dark, awesome gorges many, and think of these as cut sheer down through alternating layers of limestone crag and ruddy sandstone cliff, with strata of shale and clay between, and think of these soft beds as worn away by wet and weather into deep, delving ledges and rounded caves, on which, and in which, houses, forts, and towns, were built and peopled by a strange, retiring race of dusky natives. Imagine these smooth, bare cliffs, darkly facing each other, to be dotted by rudely cut footholds and spider-webbed by long, frail ladders fastened to the stone, by which dangerous and tedious means these people reached their rat-like haunts and descended to the narrow strip of sand at the river's edge beneath; imagine here and there along the ledges, on jutting curvatures of rock and along the skyward brinks of the highways of this land, dense clumps and belts of mammoth cedars larger than are grown elsewhere on earth; picture to yourself all this and you will know what manner of country it was* wherein Quitzaal sought safety, and wherein he found it not.

Up one of the winding, thread-like paths we had wearily toiled at the close of a dry and scorching day, under a sky of pitiless blue, and exhausted, outworn, were preparing to make a blissful sleep in the welcome shades of night, when, advancing to the edge of a chasm that opened out not many paces from our camping place, I saw, looking down, a sight that gladdened my heart and made me forget my weariness.

Along a narrow ledge which, starting from where I stood, wound down by long, slow gradations, the rebel Governor and a hundred Ulmecs were softly stealing, one by one, and one by one vanishing into the black darkness that already filled the lower depths, though on the mountain tops the red twilight still lingered. I watched them disappear into the rising mist of night, then called the others together, and told them what I had seen and the plan I had formed.

"We must follow them under cover of the night," I said. "They would see us in the light of to-morrow, and pick us off with arrows, one after another, as we went down. We must go now."



My other foot found a hole.

"'Tis a daring thing," said Valdo, "to descend the narrow ledge in the night. How know we where it leads or how it ends?"

"That we shall find," I answered, "if we go—not otherwise. I go, and lead; you may or may not follow; I will not command; I only ask those who dare, to tread in my footsteps and be ready to act as I wish."

With that I swung myself from the edge, and, keeping my face to the cliff, began to descend crabwise, making each step sure by clutching some fresh root, or tuft of grass, at every movement. I looked up. Atris came next, reckless fellow that he was, then Valdo, though grumbling as he came that he liked it not, then half a score of the soldiers, and then no more.

"Stay where you are till our return, weak hearts," I said, as low as I could talk, "and fear not for our safety till you see us brought up dead!"

Then the night closed round us also, and down into the unknown deep we crept, step by step, pace by pace, feeling our way along that slanting projection in the midst of silence solemn and darkness profound. Down—down—I went, the others creeping after with many a whispered word of caution and courage, till, when I thought we had travelled leagues upon leagues of distance, my right foot, extended onward for its next step, trod on empty air, and I realised that the ledge came to an abrupt end.

"Halt!" I passed on the word to my comrades; and reflecting that if our enemies had gone down here, we, too, must find a way. After a moment's pause I went down on

* The Cliff-Dwellings of Southern Mexico, now deserted

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my knees there in the awful, silent blackness, slowly let my body over the edge of the projecting rock, and kicked about with my feet for a foothold which would tell me that a rough stairway here led further down. It was a terrible moment, and but that I knew the strength of my iron-grasp, I should not have held on so long. As it was, finding the cliff-face hard and smooth, and discovering no inlet for my foot to rest upon, I faltered for a space and, hanging there, looked up.

Night had now fallen alike on mountain-tops and in the darkening hollows, but above my head—it seemed a great way off—a narrow riband of golden stars shone out on a ground of inky black, gleaming and twinkling down upon me in merry unconcern, each glittering point of light standing out from its neighbours as I had seen them in my vision of Isis. Like a lightning flash my thoughts passed from that vision to the words of Unim, the priest, that he had twice told me in the Sacred Grotto of the Sleeper: "Till thou hast been here a third time, fear not death." New courage and hope came back to me then, and looking up once more at the strip of shining stars I thought they glanced down now with a kindly smile rather than a gay indifference, and even as I gazed my left foot, scratching the rocky wall, found a place wherein to lodge. A little to the right, a little lower down, my other foot found a hole in the cliff, and I knew I was at the top of a rude stairway. Climbing up again, I told my companions, and, bidding them follow me, descended again till my head was level with the topmost cavity. Atris came next, and as he hung over the verge, vainly trying to find his foothold, I seized his legs and placed them in the right position, then receded out of the way.

Each one thus guiding the feet of those who came after, we slowly and laboriously went down that invisible stair into the chasm. I had counted fifty footholes passed in this way when suddenly, without an instant's warning, a rumbling and rattling of boulders and dislodged earth, accompanied by a yell of terror so wild and unearthly that it made our hearts stand still, followed by a dull splash, and then another shriek of fright and another splash, rose up out of the dark deep below, the noise and echo of the fearful sounds vibrating dismally in the vasty space. Then all was still again—silent and gloomy as the grave, save for the murmur of the river as it wound along its sandy channel far beneath. Two of our foes had missed their hold and fallen into the stream.

Not one of us dared to speak, as, with bated breath and shaken nerves, we continued our mad descent till, with an exclamation of relief, I felt my feet rest on the topmost rung of a cedar-wood ladder, firmly fastened to the rock. Down this, with quickened pace and fresh zeal, we stepped, finding ourselves, when at its lower end, upon a broad landing-place under the shelter of an overhanging crag. I would have gone on down a sloping path to the right, that I thought I could make out, but the soldiers, one and all, refused.

"We have come far enough," Valdo said, even his rough voice trembling a little; "let us stay here till dawn."

"So say I," urged reckless Atris; "in the light we can at least see our way."

"So be it, then," I said, yielding, and posting myself on the right to guard against any sudden surprise from below, I told them to get what sleep they could. For myself I could not close my eyes, though to do so would have been a welcome relief from the sight of the overpowering darkness that encompassed me, rendered all the darker by contrast with that narrow ribbon of twinkling stars overhead, like an arch of golden spray flung over a gulf of gloom. So I sat and watched it with weary head until the far-off ravine top began to glow with a pale pink light, that broadened and brightened with wonderfully soft gradations till the stars vanished, and the edges of the gully stood out sharp and clear against the sunlit sky. But down there in the gorge night lasted longer, nor could we see our way until an hour had passed since dawn.

Then we saw, by the spectral light that filtered down, that we stood at the top of a sloping path that led to a large settlement of the cliff dwellers, whose cedar-wood houses were grouped together in a large hollow in the rock face. Also, bargaining with the inhabitants, we saw Quitzaal and his ninety and odd Ulmecs just at the foot of the dizzy path. They saw us at the instant we saw them, and one of the Ulmecs, a long-limbed savage, drew bow and sent me a shaft which splintered against the stone on which I stood.

"Two can play at that game!" I cried, "and I will teach these rebels that I am not called the Slinger for nothing! You, men, give them a volley, but avoid the Governor, and try not to injure the cliff people."

They answered me by sending a deadly volley amongst the exposed troop, whilst I managed to hit and topple over the clumsy giant who had shot at me, and, thrown into confusion, the whole band broke into a run, and passing the village, came to bay on a little platform, from whence a long ladder fell straight to the river's edge. Down this ladder the hurried rebels began to scramble thoughtlessly; it broke beneath their weight, and, taking over a score of them with it, collapsed into the foaming torrent, and was swept away. The quarry we had hunted down so long and doggedly, was now delivered into our hands. Running past the cliff-dwellings we thirteen attacked them without a moment's pause, and though they numbered over sixty, had much the best of the struggle, having choice of ground to retreat, whereas with them to step backwards meant instant death.

The Ulmecs stoutly resisted my efforts to reach the Governor, but "Sunderer" proved an irresistible talisman, and hewing my way through with the good blade, I at last got him separated and engaged him hand to hand. He was older than I, and more cautious, but so used had I become by this time to all the tricks and twists of swordcraft, that I soon obtained the mastery, and could have slain him a dozen times had I wished. But I was weary of killing, and meant no more than to take him prisoner, so that the Queen could pass sentence upon him, and make his degradation a warning to all others who might meditate similar revolt. He, divining my intention, strove hard to cripple me by one foul blow, and finding that in vain, lost his coolness, threw away his weapon, and sprang upon me suddenly in a mad effort to bear me with him over the platform's edge.

"Ha!" I cried, "you surely forget, Sir Governor, that I was once named the Iron-fingered, and that on board the *Ravager*, when I was but twenty, I could hold a man out at arm's length!" and getting a good grip of him round the waist, despite his frantic struggles, lifted him clear off his feet and dragged him away from the dangerous brink. In so doing, so great was his frenzied resistance, I felt "Sunderer" escape my hold and heard it slide along the sloping ledge and fall into the abyss. Calling to Valdo to seize the Governor, I disengaged myself roughly from his embrace and sprang to the verge to see the last of my dear and true comrade of steel. So quickly did I spring that I was in time to see it glancing from a jutting limestone crag, chipping off a piece as it glanced, and clanging thence down a shelving sandstone slope towards the river. I gave a cry of despair when I thus beheld Mitres' priceless gift, as I thought, doomed to be lost in the current, but next moment was so relieved as to give vent to an exclamation of delight. The matchless sword, as though conscious of its repute and aware of the great deeds it had yet to do, wriggled as it slipped like a living thing, and just when its hilt touched the water, caught by its point between two inequalities in the red rock, and there lay, out of my reach, but within my sight.

Now I turned to ward off a blow that one of the Ulmecs aimed at me, and in so doing felt a quick fiery pain in my back, and knew that another foe had driven his weapon

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into me. Striking down the savage in front with a fierce stroke, I twisted myself half-round so sharply that the blade quivering in my back was wrenched from the grasp of its owner, and so roughly that as I turned I saw him lurch forward, and then disappear over the awful brink. Then, seized with a sudden faintness, I fell upon the ledge, Atris stepping over me barely soon enough to avert a dozen hovering swords. With a swift jerk he pulled the rankling blade from my flesh, and heedless of the barbarians who beset him, bound up the gaping wound as well as he was able. Then he gently turned me on my back, and picking me up in his arms, bore me up to the ledge, away from the fight, staggering under my weight as he went, but holding bravely on, in spite of the steep ascent, the narrow track, and the darts that whistled after him.

Looking over his shoulder, though feeling as one in a dream, and all things appearing to me in that guise, I could see Quitzaal lying bound upon the platform, while Valdo and five others were keeping the remaining Ulmecs at bay. As my preserver climbed heavily up the path, turning an angle in the cliff, I saw, glancing upwards, the thirty men who had refused to follow at sunset, coming down the long ladder with all the speed so awkward a means of transit would allow. Atris saw them, too, and called loudly for them to hasten, his voice sounding like the roaring of a cataract in my ears.

It was not many paces now to the cliff dwellings, and he stumbled on with almost superhuman strength that he might place me there in safety, for to leave me lower down would be to block the way. Loudly rang the wild yells of the infuriated Ulmecs along the rocky walls of that great ravine; loudly our friends, hurrying to our relief, called to us to be of good cheer; grimly stern Valdo, blood-stained, and dust-soiled from head to foot, held his own against the terrible odds; hoarsely my comrade of few words panted and groaned, as with faltering steps he bore my great weight up the dangerous declivity, the sweat standing in great beads upon him.

"Only a few more paces, brave Atris, only a little more endurance, and we shall reach the hamlet on the cliff—another staggering stride and we are there; he has placed me flat upon the cool rock, and, exhausted, sat down to regain his breath, and wipe his heated brow; there go the rescuers, running past us down the ledge—one, two, three—thirty of them, all told—now many faces cluster over me, pity in their gaze; many gentle hands are busied loosening my armour and tunic—some of them are women's faces, swart, but pleasing. Hark! there comes a sound of sharp fierce fighting from the unseen depths; it lasts a moment, then all is still, and all things swim before my eyes in a white cloud mist. Am I truly dead? Is this truly the Land of Shadows? And where is my magic blade?"

Thus my thoughts ran whilst they tended my hurts, and I glided into a dreamless sleep, nor did I know any more of what was happening around me till two suns had risen, and shone, and set, and a third was piercing the gloom o'erhead.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION, No. 21.

The first prize of £5 goes to Mr. Geo. Percival, signalman, H.M.S. *Australia*, Netley, Southampton Water, Hants.

Prizes of £1 each have been sent to Mr. Alan B. Maclachlan, 4, Mildenhall Road, Clapton; Mr. H. H. Harrod, 7, Dingwall Avenue, Croydon; Mrs. McQuaker, 7, Ailsa Place, Girvan, N.B.; Miss Kate Hedderwick, care of Mr. G. Morton, Morton's Theatre, Greenwich; Mr. A. F. Howgate, 43, Ince Green Lane, Ince, near Wigan.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION, No. 22.

The London guinea was awarded to Miss Mary Wilson, 19, East Dulwich Grove, S.E.; and the Provincial guinea to Mr. George Humphreys, 19, Colville St., Nottingham. The words transposed were *organisation* and *employment*, p. 680.

JUST TO PROVE YOUR UNSELFISHNESS,

Ye men readers of *S.S.*, give a thought to your lady friends this coming Christmastide. *Pearson's Weekly* has provided a very excellent Christmas number, but when you're reading it you won't be happy unless the people about you are equally so. Go then and straightway invest in

THE TREBLE CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF

HOME NOTES.

And go quickly, for the edition is a limited one, and you may otherwise be doomed to disappointment.

Everyone likes to entertain their friends with Charades, or something of that character: the charming drawing-room play by **Huan Mee**, entitled **"Sitting it Out,"** should therefore prove of great interest to you.

If your overwhelming pride at the longest and most peaceful reign on record has not caused your end ere reading this announcement, your appreciation of

"The Private Life of the Queen,"

which figures largely in this issue, should know no bounds. Furthermore, it is illustrated with photographs especially taken for the purpose by one who has had rare opportunities. Here are some of the headings of future articles:

The Queen as a Dancer; The Queen as a Housekeeper; The Queen's Gold and Silver Plate; The Queen's Friends; The Queen's Religion and her Sunday Observance; The Queen as a Hostess; What the Queen Eats and Drinks.

Miss JEAN MIDDLEMASS has altogether excelled herself in the preparation of an MS., the first instalment of which appears in the Treble Christmas Number. There is also a dainty little country idyl, **"The Lassie with the Sun-kissed Locks"** by name, which cannot fail to please.

That Charming Mimic, Miss CISSIE LOFTUS, too, has been persuaded to wield her pen for the further gratification of *Home Notes* readers, a second short story, entitled **"A Tiny Tragedy,"** being the result.

A Charming Coloured Plate, **"A Morning Call,"** will also be presented gratis with each copy.

Jumbled Story Competition.—24.

On opposite page appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *December 14th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 24. [See Page 754.

THE IDEA OF FLEN.

The detective curled up his long body on my sofa, and smoked my cigars with the keenest enjoyment. I implored him to relate one of his thrilling experiences.

The detective rose to his feet, and threw the end of his cigar in the fire.

The detective paused, with due regard to effect. I implored him to continue.

The detective paused for a moment, and gazed wistfully at his empty glass. I hastened to refill it.

"I will tell you a story of the very worst man I followed. All that is known for certain is that Scotland Yard, laid the matter before the police.

"At one time this man occupied a certain position that were lying at the side of the line. Without hands the effect might have been very serious.

"When we arrived at Lyndhurst, I was surprised in Society. That was before his true character approach her again.

"In the meanwhile the wedding bells rang out a mile from the station. I followed him cautiously.

"A nature like Evelyn Carrington's could, of doubt, of catching the first train to town. When he publicly announced, the fury of the rejected suitor "A scoundrel of the name of Carter.

"His love was of the kind that you writers so ventured to approach Mr. Egerton, and told him the line carefully, and then waited until it became the very eyes of the assembled company.

"Thus ended the life of the worst man that I ever have ever had the misfortune to meet," he said.

"That was the end of his social life."

"As I came to the station I saw that the special had disappeared. I assure you it did not take me quietly at the bride's country home at Lyndhurst, seriously alarmed, and, bringing them up to my hand on his arm. He swung round, and for a a little out-of-the-way village on the East Coast. In spite of the disguise, I recognised my man.

"When, on the top of this, the engagement of bridegroom had already taken their places. I communicate with my superiors. I found this easy became generally known. Incredible as it may seem making a detour, came out on the railway line about turns to hatred.

"One night there was a reception at the conservatory. That was the first act of the tragedy. Had they all been allowed to reach Miss Carrington's house. He found Miss Carrington alone in the work, for Carter spent most of his time in his rooms.

"You must understand that after the line leaves Carrington's, and Carter forced an entrance to the Lyndhurst Station it runs round a sharp curve, and he fell passionately in love with one of the purest knew."

"The wretched man threw open the carriage door to see him walk away in the opposite direction to to Liverpool Street Station.

"No sooner had Carter boarded the train, to destroy the bride and bridegroom on the very wedding-day approached his letters became so repulsive to the girl, and she forbade him ever to to shadow the man Carter day and night, and on the crash over the aqueduct, into the water below.

"Having laid the sleepers across the line Carter knew no bounds.

"As the train drew out from the platform I laid slightest suspicious movement on his part to Miss Carrington to the Hon. Charlie Egerton was and fairest girls that ever God created; this man stamp of Carter. Nevertheless, throughout a much difficulty he laid these across the line in such a rush for the retreating train, sprang on to the North."

"After this incident Carter began a long series thankful for having escaped my clutches, than he set out again for the station with the intention, no altogether surprised to find myself following Carter Carter was forcibly ejected by the butler before dawn of their married life."

"The train crossed the aqueduct, and bore the violent and threatening that the Hon. Egerton was London season he forced his attentions upon her. In the end, the very sight of the man became who was little more than a brute beast.

"This, then, was his diabolical plan of revenge; for Carter. A workman, with a bag of tools on his happy couple smoothly and swiftly away to the dusk before making his next move.

"The wedding ceremony was to take place quite course, have nothing in common with a man of the thoroughly appreciate; a love, when scorned, that of persecutions against Miss Carrington. As the train was preparing to start, and that the bride and telegraph office to have the train stopped.

"I will not attempt to describe the scene that footboard, and so into an empty carriage that had against the parapet, and then dropped like a stone man, and, believe me, they were not pleasant reading.

"My orders were clear and simple. I was told off When the eventful morning arrived I was not the Hall. He struck out across the fields, and man slip through my fingers. I rushed to the shoulder, was slouching up and down the platform.

"These letters were my first introduction to the Egerton. I saw the evil look in Carter's face, and then over an aqueduct that spans a large stretch of water, and so on to the North. Carter examined merrily. Evelyn Carrington became the Hon. Mrs. had all been done in an instant, but I had let the a way that a train rushing round the curve would been reserved for luggage. I stood stupefied. It remembered the sleepers that he had laid across the his. Then he shook me off, and with an oath made come to inevitable destruction, and in all probability moment looked at me with those piercing eyes of long to remove the sleepers. Then I followed him. that he had nothing to fear. Then I looked round presently watched him approach a pile of sleepers line. Already the train was nearing the fatal corner. and sprang out. His body shot with terrific force to the water.

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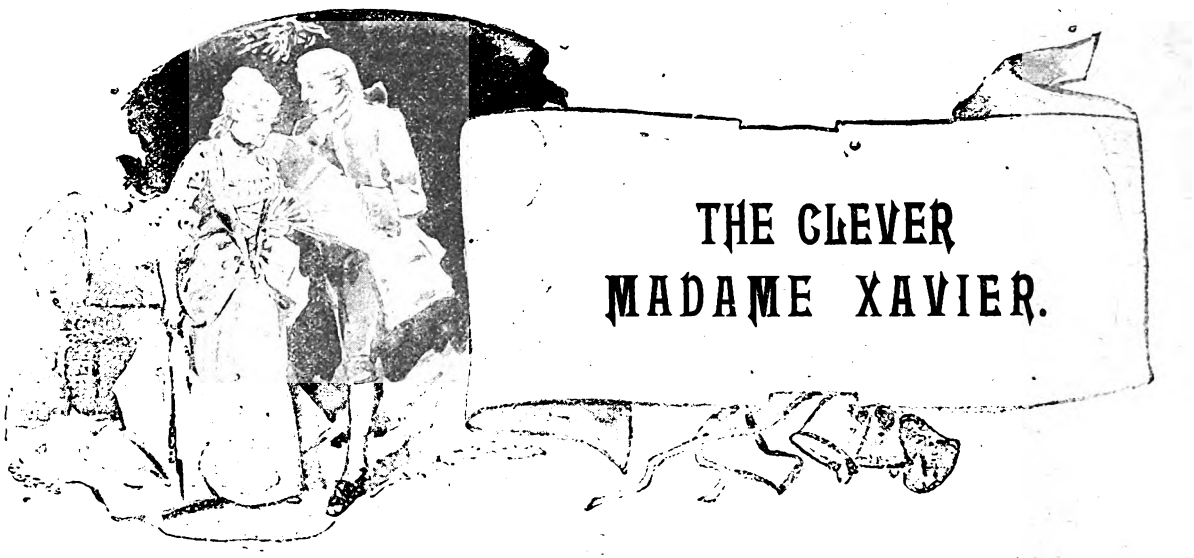

THE CLEVER MADAME XAVIER.

MADAME XAVIER kept a shop at the end of the street. Such a tiny shop, with only one window to it and a bit of a counter piled high with bunches of gay yarn and boxes of cheap tinsels. There was a bird in a cage in madame's window which always sang furiously in the early morning, and a pot of mignonette in blossom adorned the sill.

Just across the road lived the sausage vendor, a little old man, who wore a wig, and dressed in snuff colour.

He was early at his post every morning frying sausages, but being cruelly afflicted with asthma, he could only speak in a loud, hoarse voice, so his daughter, Annette, a dream of health and beauty, would stand beside him in her neat stuff gown, and call in a voice as lusty as a chanticleer:

"Hot sausages! Hot sausages!"

Now, diagonally across, in the next street, was a tall brick building, used as a storehouse. Its lower rooms were piled with dusty white bags full of grain, over which the satin-coated mice frolicked and grew fat as the livelong day; but up in the top of the building was a large garret rented by a poverty-stricken artist.

Here were pictures strewn all about the room, while in the middle of it stood a large stout easel supporting a bare canvas. Every morning the artist crept down from his lofty quarters to buy hot sausages of M. Laubeau and to cast sly glances of intense regard at Annette, who, for her part, kept on at her calling as if there were no young men in the world.

But when he turned to go back to his garret then would Annette smile and toss her head, with its white cap, in a coquettish nod to the little madame across the road, as much as to say: "See, I have an admirer!" And madame would smile back, for she dearly loved a romance. Sometimes she would beckon to Annette, and when the girl ran lightly across the street the old woman would say:

"When will the wedding be?"

"Ugh!" Annette would answer. "Could I eat paint? I thrive now and am comfortable. Monsieur must make his fortune ere Annette weds him."

"And he shall do it," returned the little madame one day. "I will myself speak to monsieur."

That very day when the artist passed her shop with a canvas well wrapped in paper under his arm, the little Frenchwoman called to him. "Come in," she said. "Show me the picture."

Reluctantly he undid it, and disclosed a pensive-faced Madonna.

"*Fi donc, monsieur!*" exclaimed madame. "But she has a sickly look. I do not wonder you may not sell her. We have enough like her. Monsieur must paint different—something gay and cheerful—fresh, you know."

"I am too poor to hire a model," said the artist gloomily.

"Ah, truly," replied madame; "but suppose I could find a model. Would monsieur paint?"

"Perhaps."

She led the way through the tiny shop to a tinier living-room. There, in one corner, looking very big and clumsy, stood an oaken chest, with the lilies of France carved upon it. The old woman unfastened a key from her chatelaine, and knelt before the chest. She paused.

"Monsieur must know," she said gravely, "long ago in France my people were not poor, but rich. That was before the Revolution, monsieur, before their names were knitted into the cruel Madame's stocking. They fell. We have always been poor enough since. *Ce coffre* contains my great-grandmère's ball gown. Monsieur shall see."

She unlocked the chest, and lifted a covering of tissue paper, shook out a rich white satin gown, heavily embroidered with pale blue forget-me-nots. The stomacher was thickly sewn with seed pearls, and wide ruffles of rare old lace edged the neck.

The artist gave a cry of admiration: "A costume of the time of Louis XVI. How exquisite!"

"Here are her slippers," continued madame, holding up a pair of white satin slippers adorned with tarnished gold buckles, "and these are the gloves she wore. To think I have them yet, monsieur, and my great-grandmère dust these one hundred years! We might have sold her

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toilet over and over again when we were hungry and cold, but we always preferred to suffer for my grandmère's sake. Listen, monsieur. Little Annette across the street—you love her. I have seen so. She has a heart as sweet as a nut, and as bonny a face as ever the sunshine kissed. If I put these robes upon her she will look like *une grande dame*, fit for monsieur's brush. She will be fresh like a rose, and as beautiful. She shall be monsieur's model, and will make his fortune."

That night, then, the sausage vendor took in his stand. Annette, free at last, slipped across the road, and the old madame robed the girl in the grand toilet and fastened her soft, fluffy curls in a knot high on her head with a quaint tortoise-shell comb. Wrapped in cloaks, the two stole down the street and entered the tall building. They threaded their way among the dusty bags, scaring the satin-coated mice, and climbed the stairs to the artist's studio.

When his eyes fell upon the vision of loveliness madame presented to him they shone with a new light. Love? Well, part love and part artistic rapture, but in either case Annette was the cause. The little Frenchwoman clapped her hands and laughed joyfully.

Always during the sittings madame sat decorously by, knitting industriously, but keeping open a sharp eye, as became a good chaperon. Not the slightest symptom of love-making escaped her. The portrait grew beneath the brush as if the very fairy of good luck had lent her spell to the artist. Never had his palette glowed with such colours, nor had such hitherto impossible tints blossomed forth. Every detail of the fresh young face became familiar to him, until at last from the canvas looked forth the sausage vendor's daughter in the grand dame's robes as beautiful as the proudest lady in the land.

"I can do no more," sighed the artist. Then madame arose, and, taking the girl by the hand, led her towards the door. "Monsieur has no longer need of us," she exclaimed. "Adieu!"

But the artist would not have it so. He pushed past the old Frenchwoman and stood before the girl.

"I love you, Annette," he cried. "Will you not marry me?"

"Tut, tut," said madame. "You must first speak to M. Laubeau. We will have no bold English manners here. If he consents, then Annette may think of you. Come, Annette."

It was, indeed, true that the little madame had brought good luck to the poor artist. The portrait was sent to a picture dealer. In less than a week it was sold, and orders had come through the dealer enough to set the artist busy. He went to thank the old Frenchwoman.

"The good people like something fresh," said madame. "Monsieur might have sat in his garret and pined and been melancholy until he died. Good luck would have had none of him. One must be brave and smile to win fortune."

"I owe everything to you," said the grateful young man.

"Ah, true!" returned madame nonchalantly; "but, tell me, have you yet won M. Laubeau's consent?"

"Alas! he refuses me Annette's hand! He will give me no reason."

"We must learn," said the madame, and leaning far out of the window of her tiny shop, she beckoned frantically to the sausage vendor across the road. He came, followed by Annette.

"Why is it M. Laubeau refused his daughter to the young monsieur who loves her truly?" inquired the Frenchwoman.

"I could not get on without Annette," grumbled the old man. "There would be none to cry out 'Sausages!'"

"True, true," said madame; "but must the young people be unhappy for this?"

"I am old," continued the sausage vendor, "and I have but Annette. If I yield her to the young monsieur, who will care for me?"

"Let me think," said the Frenchwoman. "Ah, I have it! 'Tis well to be comfortable in one's old age, and a companion is useful. If M. Laubeau wishes it, I will reconsider the proposal he made me years ago. He shall fetch the sausage stand across the road and set it here—in front of my shop. The priest shall make us one, and I myself will cry 'Hot Sausages!'"

PERCY WINCH.

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ALSO

A SPECIAL ARTICLE ON "MUSIC OF THE MONTH."
By R. HICHENS.
And a most interesting article by **Joseph Bennett,** entitled,
"CHRISTMAS IN SONG."

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The Mirror

THERE was once a kingdom where mirrors were unknown. They had all been broken and reduced to fragments by order of the Queen, and if the tiniest bit of looking-glass had been found in any house, she would not have hesitated to put all the inmates to death with the most frightful tortures.

Now for the secret of this extraordinary caprice. The Queen was dreadfully ugly, and she did not wish to be exposed to the risk of meeting her own image; and knowing herself to be hideous, it was a consolation to know that other women at least could not see that they were p retty.

You may imagine that the young girls of the country were not at all satisfied. What was the use of being beautiful if you could not admire yourself?

They might have used the brooks and lakes for mirrors; but the Queen had foreseen this, and had hidden all of them under closely joined flagstones. Water was drawn from wells so deep that it was impossible to see the liquid surface, and shallow basins must be used instead of buckets, because in the latter there might be reflections. Such a dismal state of affairs, especially for the pretty coquettes, who were no more rare in this country than in others.

The Queen had no compassion, being well content that her subjects should suffer as much annoyance from the lack of a mirror as she felt at the sight of one.

* * * *

However, in a suburb of the city there lived a young girl named Jacinta, who was a little better off than the rest, thanks to her sweetheart, Valentin. For if someone thinks you are beautiful, and loses no chance to tell you, he is almost as good as a mirror.

"Tell me the truth," she would say; "what is the colour of my eyes?"

"They are dewy forget-me-nots."

"And my skin is not quite black?"

"You know that your forehead is whiter than freshly fallen snow, and your cheeks are like blush roses."

"How about my lips?"

"Cherries are pale beside them."

"And my teeth, if you please?"

"Grains of rice are not as white."

"But my ears, should I be ashamed of them?"

"Yes, if you would be ashamed of two little pink shells among your pretty curls."

And so on endlessly; she delighted, he, still more charmed, for his words came from the depth of his heart; and she had the pleasure of hearing herself praised, he, the delight of seeing her. So their love grew more deep and tender every hour, and the day that he asked her to marry him, she blushed, certainly, but it was not with anger. But, unluckily, the news of their happiness reached the wicked Queen, whose only pleasure was to torment others, and Jacinta more than anyone else, on account of her beauty.

* * * * *

A little while before the marriage Jacinta was walking in the orchard one evening, when an old crone approached, asking for alms, but suddenly jumped back with a shriek as if she had stepped on a toad, crying:

"Heavens, what do I see?"

"What is the matter, my good woman? What is it you see? Tell me."

"The ugliest creature I ever beheld."

"Then you are not looking at me," said Jacinta, with innocent vanity.

"Alas! yes, my poor child, it is you. I have been a long time on this earth, but never have I met anyone so hideous as you!"

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"What! Am I ugly?"

"A hundred times uglier than I can tell you."

"But my eyes——"

"They are a sort of dirty grey; but that would be nothing if you had not such an outrageous squint!"

"My complexion——"

"It looks as if you had rubbed coal-dust on your forehead and cheeks."

"My mouth——"

"It is pale and withered like a faded flower."

"My teeth——"

"If the beauty of teeth is to be large and yellow, I never saw any so beautiful as yours."

"But, at least, my ears——"

"They are so big, so red, and so misshapen, under your coarse elf-locks, that they are revolting. I am not pretty myself, but I should die of shame if mine were like them." After this last blow, the old witch, having repeated what the Queen had taught her, hobbled off, with a harsh croak of laughter, leaving poor Jacinta dissolved in tears, prone on the ground beneath the apple trees.

* * * * *

Nothing could divert her mind from her grief. "I am ugly—I am ugly," she repeated constantly. It was in vain that Valentin assured and reassured her with the most vehement oaths.

"Let me alone! you are lying out of pity. I understand it all now; you never loved me; you are only sorry for me. The beggar woman had no interest in deceiving me. It is only too true—I am ugly. I do not see how you can endure the sight of me."

To undeceive her, he brought people from far and near; every man declared that Jacinta was created to delight the eyes; even the women said as much, though they were less enthusiastic. But the poor child persisted in her conviction that she was a repulsive object, and when Valentin pressed her to name their wedding day—"I, your wife!" cried she. "Never! I love you too dearly to burden you with a being so hideous as I am." You can fancy the despair of the poor fellow so sincerely in love. He threw himself on his knees, he prayed, he supplicated; she answered still that she was too ugly to marry him.

What was he to do? The only way to give the lie to the old woman and to prove the truth to Jacinta was to put a mirror before her. But there was no such thing in the kingdom, and so great was the terror inspired by the Queen, that no workman dared make one.

"Well, I shall go to Court," said the lover, in despair. "Harsh as our mistress is, she cannot fail to be moved by the tears and the beauty of Jacinta. She will retract, for a few hours at least, this cruel edict which has caused our trouble."

It was not without difficulty that he persuaded the young girl to let him take her to the palace. She did not like to show herself, and asked of what use would be a mirror, only to impress her more deeply with her misfortune; but when he wept, her heart was moved, and she consented, to please him.

* * * * *

"What is all this?" said the wicked Queen. "Who are these people, and what do they want?"

"Your Majesty, you have before you the most unfortunate lover on the face of the earth."

"Do you consider that a good reason for coming here to annoy me?"

"Have pity on me."

"What have I to do with your love affairs?"

"If you would permit a mirror——"

The Queen rose to her feet, trembling with rage. "Who dares to speak to me of mirrors?" she said, grinding her teeth.

"Do not be angry, your Majesty, I beg of you, and deign to hear me. This young girl whom you see before you, so fresh and pretty, is the victim of a strange delusion. She imagines that she is ugly."

"What is all this?" said the wicked Queen.

"Well," said the Queen, with a malicious grin, "she is right. I never saw a more hideous object."

Jacinta, at these cruel words, thought she would die of mortification. Doubt was no longer possible, she must be ugly. Her eyes closed, she fell on the steps of the throne in a dead swoon.

But Valentin was affected very differently. He cried out loudly that her Majesty must be mad to tell such a lie. He had no time to say more. The guards seized him, and at a sign from the Queen the headsman came forward. He was always beside the throne, for she might need his services at any moment.

"Do your duty," said the Queen, pointing out the man who had insulted her. The executioner raised his gleaming axe just as Jacinta came to herself and opened her eyes. Then two shrieks pierced the air. One was a cry of joy, for in the glittering steel Jacinta saw herself, so charmingly pretty—and the other a scream of anguish, as the wicked soul of the Queen took flight, unable to bear the sight of her face in the impromptu mirror.

CATULLE MENDÈS.

The XMAS DOUBLE NUMBER of SHORT STORIES will be published on Tuesday, December 22nd. Price 2d.

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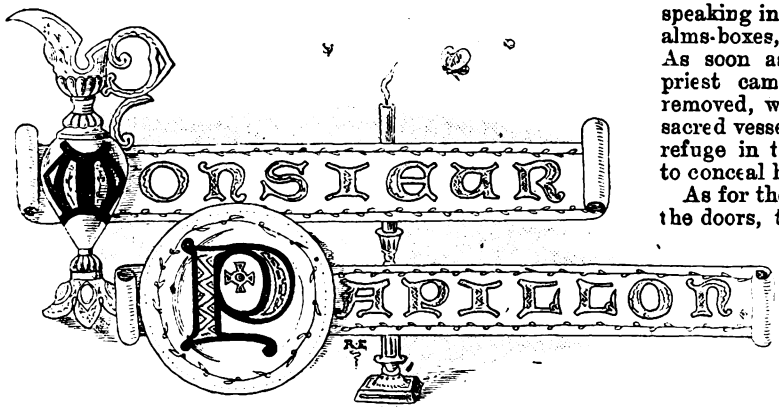

M. Papillon had lightly doubled the cape of his fiftieth birthday, and for twelve years had been beadle in a grim old church in the upper part of Paris, not far from the fortifications. He was a tall man, an old soldier, strong as an ox, and more inoffensive than a lizard on the wall. He had a large, round figure, a comfortable double chin, closely shaven; his eyes were frank and kind. The calves of his legs, strong, egg-shaped, with the muscles well developed, exactly filled his snow-white stockings, and rounded out fully, with an air of good health, under the garters, which were tightened until they creaked. They were his sole coquetry, and he seemed as proud of them as a wrestler of his biceps.

On fête days the boys and young men of the choir, when they had taken a drop too much, amused themselves by tickling those two cushions of good flesh as they passed, and an old beadle, M. Jolitour, who remembered his youth, had said many a time, while complacently admiring those legs: "They are Parian—pure Parian."

M. Papillon, who had not the least understanding of any Grecian word, while relishing the compliment, would have been glad to know the meaning of the word "Parian," but had never dared to ask. He was a colossal model—a pearl of a beadle. He took snuff, smoking no more. Under no circumstances did he take the name of God in vain. He expressed himself always with decency and drank only to quench his thirst. He avoided the other sex. His handling of his cane was very distinguished, and his masters had left him grand traditions of the halberd. After the siege of 1870, during which M. Papillon, as everyone else, had done his duty on the ramparts, a singular, confused murmur of revolt filled the capital. Groups formed themselves on the pavements.

The policemen were questioned; they professed ignorance, but lifted their heads with a knowing air. People speechified. In the wine shops, orators aroused the working-men. Social questions were discussed in a suggestive manner. The working-men demanded finally what belonged to others. This agitation troubled M. Papillon. He heard on all sides the words, National Guard, riot, civil war, eighteenth of March. But, as he did not wish to believe anything disturbing, he said: "It is some trick of the Stock Exchange."

However, to believe became inevitable, when one morning a handful of men wearing red sashes presented themselves and demanded to see the priest; they showed a paper signed by a magistrate ordering the immediate closing of the building. They strode about the church speaking in loud voices, took the money from the alms-boxes, and withdrew without harming anyone. As soon as they had taken their departure the priest came out hastily from his concealment, removed, with the assistance of M. Papillon, the sacred vessels and the richest ornaments, then took refuge in the house of a woman who had offered to conceal him.

As for the beadle, that same evening he closed all the doors, that of the main entrance, whose folding doors had iron-work of the fourteenth century, and those of the side aisles. He locked them with a triple lock, drew a bolt a foot long, then fastened across them the safety-chain. This done, he placed the chairs in piles against the walls. When he had fulfilled those painful duties, during which night overtook him, he was assailed by terrible thoughts of the aged priest, and that the incidents of the day would be a terrible blow for his brain; the vicars would slip away to the provinces, hiding themselves with their families, and that he would remain alone, in future, all alone to guard the church.

At this thought, in the terrifying calm of the silent sanctuary, it seemed to him that an immense responsibility had fallen from the lofty arches upon his trembling shoulders, and he had a moment of weakness as he weighed the difficulties of the task and the powerlessness of the servant.

M. Papillon had always shown for "his church" an adorable personal passion. "She" belonged to him. For nothing in the world would he see her overthrown. "She" belonged to him, and to the good God. He loved the grand nave, the choir, the side aisles. He admired the baptismal font, the organ pleased him greatly, and the crypt was dear to him. But the sacristy, with its encaustic placards, its doors draped with velvet, which fell softly, its penetrating odour of ecclesiastic robes, inspired in him a peculiar tenderness. It was there, in a small, cold room, where were placed the chasubles commonly used, that he slept ordinarily, and it was his home during the time of the Commune.

The house of the Lord had the appearance of an abandoned gymnasium. It slept, torpid, in its robe of grey stone, lugubrious and desolate as those churches of the Middle Ages bending under the weight of an "Interdiction." One would scarcely have believed that in the shadow of those walls, only a few steps away, a revolution was established. Sometimes the strains of the Marseillaise sounded about the angles, sometimes the shocks from artillery caused the dust of ages slowly to fall—that is, the sawdust and small pieces of stone gathered in all the nooks of its ogives, and then all fell again into an unrelenting silence.

M. Papillon guarded the church like a faithful dog: at night his ears caught every sound; he started at the least nibble of a mouse. It seemed to him that someone was picking the locks of the doors. Horrible nightmares bathed him in perspiration, or unnecessary vigilance drew him from his bed, in bare feet, a light in his hand, and in spite of the clamorous beating of his heart, he would go the rounds of the church.

It was as dark as a cave. As he passed by, the green curtains of the confessionals floated lightly. The chandeliers, with their pendants of crystal, fell from the roof like monstrous spiders at the end of a thread, and the pulpit, suspended to a column, stood out in the shadow like a giant holy-water vessel. The

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spectacle unnerved M. Papillon, and he returned shivering to his bed.

By what marvel had the Commune forgotten this old church, hidden in a tangle of old streets? Why did the storm pass over it without attacking it? No one ever knew, not even M. Papillon. From day to day he tried to make himself less conspicuous, hiding himself, living in an obscurity reached only by the mole, as if all these precautions would be a safeguard for the temple and shelter it from all inquisition and sacrilege. He spoke only in a low voice, and wore slippers. He went out as little as possible, and always, by preference, at dusk, in order not to attract attention to "her."

When he returned he resorted to the ruses of a Nihilist being pursued, exhausting himself in frequent turns and roundabout ways, regarding each passer-by with anxiety. Objects also became accomplices in his pious thoughts; they were sunk in a profound torpor. The woodwork did not creak, and the organs held their powerful breath, as if they understood.

From time to time to distract himself, he climbed to the tower, and when he mounted the two hundred and fifty steps of the narrow winding stairway, near to the great, silent bells tattooed with inscriptions in Latin, he looked at Paris through a narrow opening. Paris the great criminal, covered with heavy clouds. The clamours of the delirious city rose insolently towards heaven, and to him, M. Papillon, simple beadle; violent anger took possession of him as of "Moses on Sinai," on seeing in the long avenues, in the places, in the courts of the barracks, intrigues and rioting, and the swarming of the revolutionists, who looked no larger than insects.

What good purpose will it serve to follow honest people as if they were beasts, and to declare war on the God of Armies, when one could be so happy doing one's easy little service, keeping the wood floors of the sacristy polished like a mirror, and leading the church wardens to their pews? What a misfortune! And he redescended from the bells, muttering some words remembered from an Easter sermon: "You will become a second Sodom and Gomorrah;" and it was true, he saw it.

One afternoon, when he had ventured out a little, to take the air, he had a real fright—he came upon a platoon of the National Guard, who were singing.

The officer, a large man, looked him in the eyes, and stopping him, said: "You belong to this quarter, citizen?"

"Yes," murmured M. Papillon feebly, and it seemed to him that "his" church loomed up above the roofs larger than Notre Dame, looked gigantic, causing itself to be seen for miles. But it was not "she," poor thing, they wished. The officer sought the number of a house in a neighbouring street. Although M. Papillon did not know the address, he immediately offered himself as guide, found the street, ferreted out the number, and accompanied the lieutenant, whom he called "*my* captain," as far as the door. This man was capable of every baseness to distract attention from "his" church.

* * * * *

However, time passed The interminable days slipped by in the most dolorous enervation. The dust heaped itself on the altars, the spiders wove their webs between the chandeliers; at the bottom of the holy-water basin some bands of copper were spotted with verdigris. He effaced them, filled with despair. One day, when he had gone out according to custom to make some small purchases, Madame Davouille, at the bakery, whispered in his ear: "It is for the day after to-morrow!"

"What is that you say?"

"From Versailles!" whispered she.

M. Papillon remained silent from the shock, not finding a word to say.

"Yes, the day after to-morrow they re-enter!" affirmed the honest woman. "If I were in your place I'd take a four-pound loaf, because I shall not open the shop after this evening."

M. Papillon, his bread under his arm, returned excitedly. It was true, then. This revolution was about to be finished; he would no longer be obliged to hide himself like a brigand. He would see again the white head of the priest, the large hands of M. Loiséau, the organist; the red skirts of the choir boys, and the silk cap of Father Branchu, the bestower of the holy water.

The lamps of the sanctuary would speedily be relighted! Thank God, there were now on the list some grand marriages and rich interments! As in the good times, there would be the catechism, again the holy eucharist would be carried to people in the last extremity, all would be happy again! And he felt tremors of delight at the thought of a church thoroughly clean, with clouds of incense floating over the kneeling faithful ones; what joy to see appear again points of gold on the tall candles.

The following morning he was awakened by the noise of cannon. There was fighting in the streets. The baker had not been mistaken. Dread and hope rent the heart of the beadle. Erect, in a corner of the chapel of St. Agnes, he listened to the sounds of artillery which rapidly approached. The loudest detonations threw him upon his knees. They were killing each other in the quarter, behind the barricades blood would flow in streams. They were slaughtering the women certainly, and the children also, for cries surged up like the wail of savage beasts when being hacked to pieces, rending the air each second. A great light illuminated the church at times, when it seemed to be embraced by the purple rays of a glorious setting sun.

M. Papillon, in his narrow and simple fashion tormented by I know not what military and religious coquetry, resolved to make himself fine to assist in the triumphal entry of those brave soldiers who were going to bring peace once more. He imagined, innocently, that the conquerors, with the clarion sounding, would bring back with them the priest, the vicars, the organist, the little *Benedicamus*—all the dead absentees. He opened a clothes-press, drawing from it a package of clothes enveloped in a napkin, and reverently, without haste, carefully made his toilet to the sound of the cannonading, with as much tranquility as if to the sound of the organ.

He put on the fine stockings, the kneebreeches of "crushed strawberry," with vest of the same shade, the coat trimmed *à la* Louis XIV., also a baldrick of embroidered velvet, from the bottom of which dangled a sword in its steel scabbard; took in one hand his cane, in the other his halberd, and wearing his plumed hat, gravely seating himself and waited, pale and expectant.

Now they were fighting behind the church. With a dry sound, like pebbles rattling on a sheet of paper, the balls perforated the windows, sometimes splintering the leaden sashes, which came down upon the stone flagging with loud clatter. Two frightened owls fluttered in the nave. M. Papillon looked and listened.

Suddenly the great door, with its ironwork of the fourteenth century, trembled from top to bottom, beaten

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by the butt end of guns, in the midst of a clamour of imprecations: "Open the door! In the name of God open the door!" The beadle hastened, and in a clear voice, that trembled from emotion, asked: "Who is there? Is it Versailles?" Silence followed.

The cries redoubled, became shrieks: "Yes, yes! Versailles, Versailles!" But as he proceeded to draw the bolts, under the weight of the enraged and violent assailants, with blows like that of a battering-ram, the old door gave way—the lock flew in pieces, and folding doors rattled back against the walls with such force as to break some Venetian blinds, which, thus opened, admitted the dawn. In the light from a conflagration a crowd burst into the church—women with hands blackened with powder, in the mask of the damned, took possession of the house of the Lord.

When M. Papillon saw those devils escaped from Hades invade "his church," spread themselves everywhere, enter the choir, he attempted to cry out against the sacrilege—to speak—to weep. He extended his arms, but he had not even time to move his lips—to make a single gesture. The torrent overwhelmed him, carried him as if he were a cork. In the twinkling of an eye, the doorkeeper of the good God was snatched up—his shanks in the air, his backbone broken, he was drawn along the floor by his coat, like a used-up puppet. A half-hour later, when some soldiers penetrated, with circumspection, the great, empty, silent church, which presaged nothing good, they were stupefied to see, stretched on his back across the steps of the grand altar, a huge man in kneebreeches and French dress.

About the body two owls hovered in the rays of the sun.

Henri Lavedan.

An Eye for an Eye.

A Legend of Venice.

"Come nearer, my little pet dove, and lay thy head on my breast—so. Now am I better able to defend thee from danger."

The man bent down, and impressed his passionate kisses on the dark cheek of the maiden. The gondola rippled slowly through the moonlit waters, while above, the bright Italian stars shone lovingly over the fair city of Venice.

"Ah, Marguerita, it is good to live. How happy we are together. What wouldst thou do if I were to leave thee?"

The girl stroked her lover's hand with her cool fingers.

"Speak not like that, Francesco, for thou knowest well that thou wilt never leave me, nor I thee."

"Supposing an assassin were to plunge a stiletto into my breast, what then, little dove?" For in those days such deeds were common.

The dark eyes of the maiden flashed fiercely, and her little hands clenched.

"First I should be avenged, Francesco. I would slay thy murderer even as he had slain thee. Then should I follow thee to the bright land of which thou hast told me."

The man gazed down at the girl in his arms, and knew that her words were spoken in earnest. With such lover-talk as this the hours were chased away, until the moon rose high into the bright sky. The gondola was drifting slowly down a secluded canal. On either side were tall, grim-looking houses, indicating that their owners were people of no little wealth. Presently the young man rose to his feet and steered the gondola to one of the more pretentious of these.

"Farewell, Marguerita; sleep well, and dream of me." The girl ran lightly up the steps, and, after pausing for a moment to wave her hand to her lover, disappeared within.

Humming a little tune to himself, Francesco sprang back in his boat, and with a few swift strokes, shot out into mid-water.

But what is this which moves behind the curtain What is this which slowly rears its head of wild, dishevelled hair, whose eyes shine like burning coals, whose teeth are as the fangs of a tigress, whose nails are as the claws of a she-wolf? What is this which creeps slowly forward, and then springs on the man, and buries its claws in his eyes, and its fangs in his throat, that drives a dagger three times into his heart, and then seizes him in its arms, and hurls him into the dark waters? What is this strange thing which steers the gondola back to the stage of Pietro the boatman, and then runs quickly away until it finds shelter in the darkness of night?

"It is an evil Spirit," said Pietro, and crossed himself devoutly.

For a man and a maiden had set out in his boat together, and the boat had returned with neither man nor maid, but only with a wild Thing, which said no word, but ran swiftly past him.

Soon the early morning sun shone out over the

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lagoons. For long years the little latticed window of Francesco's room had opened, and his rich, mellow voice had gone out to greet it. But to-day it does not open, and the singer is silent, for Francesco is lying dead beneath the waters near his lover's home.

That night the old father had dreamed strange dreams of his son. Now he is waiting for the sound of the opening window and the cheerful song.

"I will go to arouse him," he said at last, as he hurriedly slipped on his garments and left his chamber. He opened the door, and called gently: "Francesco! Francesco!" but no answer came.

"I will go to Pietro the boatman," said the old man, "for he, perhaps, has seen my son."

But Pietro, with his white face, could only answer to his questions that Francesco, the night before, had gone out with Marguerita on his arm, and that the gondola had returned with neither one nor the other, but with an Evil Spirit.

"Show me the gondola," said the old man, "we may find something that they have left behind them."

"It is this," replied Pietro, "and there is nothing—stay, what 's that in the corner yonder? Holy Virgin, it is a dagger, and see, there are the marks of blood!"

"Alas! Francesco, oh, my son Francesco, is it possible that thou art dead?" The old man's grief was pitiful to behold. Pietro, too, was sorry.

"I will go at once to Marguerita. She, perhaps, may know something."

Marguerita was standing on the steps of her house, throwing bread to the pigeons.

"Good-morning, father," she cried. "Hast thou seen Francesco? Is he well to-day?"

"Alas, my daughter, I know not whether he be dead or alive. The gondola returned without him, and Pietro says there was only an Evil Spirit. There were marks of blood in the boat, and see, we found this dagger. Surely my son is dead."

"Let me see the dagger," said Marguerita. She looked at it for a moment, and then she said: "I do not know it." But in her heart she knew that it was the dagger of Laurella, her rival.

All that morning Marguerita shut herself in her closet, and mourned for her lover, and planned to avenge his death, as she had promised to do. She knew well that it was Laurella who had done the cruel deed; for she had loved her lover with a mad love, as she had hated her with a mad hatred. Often had she sworn to slay the one or the other, to avenge the love which had been denied her, and the oath of an Italian maid is not lightly to be despised.

It was all made clear to her now. Laurella had cunningly hidden herself in the gondola, trusting that the lovers would sit together and drift quietly down with the current. Then, when she herself had sought her home, she had sprang out, and murdered Francesco.

"She has slain him," cried Marguerita, "and even as she has killed him, with her own dagger, so will I kill her."

Thus she remained in her room, weeping, and musing on her vengeance.

Laurella, too, with the mark of a murderess upon her, kept her closet that morning. Then, lest appearances should be against her, she strolled out through the many little lanes and by-ways of Venice. At this moment a boy brushed past her, and placing a missive in her hand, ran hurriedly on. With trembling fingers she opened the paper and read these words:

"Thy life is in danger. One who has something to give thee seeks opportunity to speak with thee. Be, without fail, in the old courtyard of the ruined Palazzo, near thy home, at two in the morning."

Laurella returned hastily to her room to solve the riddle. She waited until the sun had sank to his rest, but heeded not the glories that he shed over the City of Waters. She waited until the stars came out in the sky, and then her mind was determined. She put on only a long, dark cloak, that hid her form from head to foot, and placing a dagger carefully in the folds, she set cautiously out to the ruined Palazzo. The place, now old and deserted, at one time was the palace of princes. The four walls of the courtyard almost surrounded it on every side, while in one corner the grand stairway led up to the entrance.

Laurella, keeping cautiously in the shadow of the moon, hid herself behind a pillar, and waited, trembling. As her eyes became accustomed to the dim light, she discerned a figure moving among the pillars opposite. It was robed, as she was, in one long garment, but this was white, and glistened strangely. Suddenly the figure stepped out into a patch of moonlight, and Marguerita's clear tones came across the square.

"Laurella, I have something to give thee!"

She started at the words, but answered boldly:

"Ah, it is Marguerita, the stealer of hearts. I, too, have something for thee."

Hastily throwing off her robe, and grasping her stiletto firmly in her hand, with a laugh on her lips, she stepped forward.

Marguerita also placed her cloak on the ground, and came slowly forward, with one accusing arm pointed towards her rival, while the other, the arm of the avenger with a dagger in the hand, was held aloft.

Thus the strange duel began, woman's arm against woman's arm, woman's love against woman's hatred.

Slowly, step by step, they advanced towards the centre of the square. Then, with a sudden spring, they rushed onward, and the sound of clashing steel rang out sharply.

They recoiled, and closed again in fierce embrace. Laurella's breath came hot and quick, in short gasps. Marguerita's face was white and stern and set, as she warded the blows with her dagger, and awaited the opportunity to stab.

Fast and hard came the strokes from Laurella's weapon. The lust for blood flowed through her veins, and suddenly, gathering all her strength together, she sprang wildly forward. Marguerita stepped aside, and her own steel entered the uplifted arm. With a cry of pain Laurella dashed her weapon to the stones, and, turning, fled away. She sped swiftly round the square, with arm uplifted, and her long hair streaming out behind, but fast as she ran Marguerita ran faster behind her, until she felt the hot breath upon her neck. Then with a wild cry she darted towards the grand staircase.

At that moment her naked foot trod on the dagger lying on the ground. She stumbled heavily forward, her head crashed against the foot of the stairs, and she lay, with her face towards the stars, white and rigid on the cold pavement.

Marguerita stopped and gazed for a moment on the beautiful form of her enemy. Then she knelt down and sought with her dagger's point for her rival's heart. She placed both hands on the hilt and pressed upon it with all her strength. Then she rose to her feet, and leaving Laurella lying cold and stark beneath the pitiless rays of the moon, she threw on her white robe, and quietly left the courtyard.

MADGE MORRIS.

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HIGH PLAY.

A Comedy off the Stage.

BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER LV.

True Without Ties.

"Confound it, I wish I had half his heart," groaned Braetoun, as he went straight to the bar, ordered brandy, drank it at a gulp, and then went up to his room, where he threw himself on a couch; but he had hardly sunk back before the door was thrown open, and a little fellow, whip in hand, in long overcoat which just showed his boots, ran in, threw off his bowler hat, displaying a handsome, boyish face with closely cut hair, and dragging open the long coat, took an amber and black jockey cap from the breast pocket and drew it on, at the same time revealing the amber satin shirt—the Braetoun colours—above his breeches and boots.

"What the devil!" exclaimed Braetoun, springing up excitedly. "Why, boy, will you dare to mount her?"

"Yes, Rod, and win."

"Lucy!" he shouted, falling back on the couch with open mouth.

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For a moment the pretty, fair face was convulsed, and the Cupid boy-like lips quivered; then the features were hard and firm, and, with eyes flashing, she buttoned up the coat, and gave her boot a cut with the whip.

"Quick!" she cried harshly. "There isn't a minute to spare. I heard the plot yesterday—went home with Auntie. She had these—you remember the chorus in the little opera—I made her do the dresses in your colours. I have only just come."

"But—oh, madness! You can't ride her."

"I can, and I will."

"No, no, it's folly, girl."

"It's to save my own, dear, old boy," she cried, with her face twitching again, but only for a moment.

"But you can't ride her, Baby."

"Then who can?"

"The trick—the jockey's dodging."

"Put me on Bella Donna, and I'll be first at the post, or die."

"No; bad as I am, girl, I can't let you do that."

"Rod, you shall now; quick, or I'll go alone. It's your last chance, and——"

"Come on!" he cried; and, wild with excitement, he rushed with her out on to the landing, followed her down the broad stairs to where a fly was waiting, and in two minutes they were at the deserted stable, where Braetoun's hands trembled so that he could hardly unlock the door.

"We shall be too late—too late," he groaned.

"They're never to time," she said. "Ah, my own old pet," she cried, as she ran to the stall, where the mare stood facing them, reined to the rings on the pillars, and a whinnying welcome met her as she began to unbuckle one strap. "Now, Rod, risk it. Clap on the saddle. I'll manage the bridle."

"Too late—too late," he groaned; "we can never do it."

"The saddle," she cried, her own hands busy with the bridle, which hung all ready, and by the time Braetoun had unbuckled the roller, and slipped the cloth from the beautiful satin skin, Lucy was ready to help him by taking the saddle from the wooden horse, and placing it in his hands.

Braetoun, strung up by the brandy and excitement, worked as he had never worked before, the saddle was clapped on, with the mare not so much as wincing, only keeping up the soft whinnying noise, and turning her velvet muzzle to play with the girl's little white hand.

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"We shall never do it, it's the time now."

"We *will* do it," cried Lucy, as the last girth was buckled. "They're always late, and I'm going to win now. Quick, a leg up—no, one moment," and she threw off her coat, stepped before the mare, and, whip in hand, took hold of the bit, raised the muzzle, and looked in the beautiful great gazelle-like eyes of the fierce beast.

"Bella Donna—beautiful lady," she cried, with the tears in her eyes, "for your poor little mistress's sake, make me win."

She kissed the mare's forehead, and the next moment put her dainty foot in Braetoun's hands, to be lightly thrown into the saddle.

"Now," she cried, "for the sake of our good old times."

"For the sake of the old times," he groaned; and taking the rein, he led out the mare and ran by her side towards the saddling paddock.

As they approached the hotel, a little crowd of people was passing out to make for the course close at hand—for, consequent upon the usual want of punctuality, there was ample time—and just as one of the party was loudly cursing his luck, and swearing Braetoun had sold the race, another caught sight of the graceful mare approaching, with the peculiar colours of her jockey.

He threw his hat in the air with a wild yell of delight.

"Bella Donna!" he roared, and there was a shout, which was taken up by voice after voice, running right into the saddling paddock, so that as Braetoun, with his face scarlet, ran up with the mare, they were greeted with a tremendous burst of cheering, and a heavy-looking man and a boy, the former showing a broad weal across his face, elbowed their way to the front and tried to get to the mare.

"Mind, Rod, look out!" whispered Lucy.

The warning was not needed, for, as Braetoun caught sight of the pair he shouted:

"Fair play! Keep those two hounds back. They tried to sell the race."

A fierce yell of execration burst out, and the crowd closed round Vinnis and his son, who were hustled out of the paddock in spite of their frantic appeals and the father's declaration that Braetoun was to blame.

Those in charge of the other horses looked on aghast, and then took comfort as they stared at the jockey on Bella Donna's back.

"Pitch him into the middle of next week before we start," said one of the other jockeys with a grin; and then he stared to see how patient the mare was while the preliminaries were gone through, and Lucy carried herself as if to the manner born.

"Why, where did you pick up that boy, Braetoun?" cried one.

"Keep back, please," he said sternly. "You know what the mare is. She may lash out."

"I tell you what it is," said one old race-goer; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself to put the poor lad upon such a she-devil. The boy will never come back alive."

The behaviour of the mare seemed to endorse his words, for, growing excited now by the people about, she began to fidget, laying down her ears, rolling her eyes and showing the whites, while her teeth were bared, ready to lay hold of anyone near.

But each time she seemed at her worst Lucy bent right forward over her neck, and patted and talked to her in her sweet, low, cooing voice, with the result that the mare whinnied and calmed down.

"Bravo, my lad!" cried the gentleman who had cheered as he came out of the hotel. "You'll win. There, my lad, you come to me afterwards, and I'll give you a hundred pounds."

Lucy nodded and smiled, and Braetoun led the mare away toward the course.

"Sits her as if he had grown there," cried the last speaker. "Hang the boy! he's good-looking enough for a girl."

For a moment or two Braetoun felt that it must all be a dream, and that in this dream, with its wondrous mingling of impossibilities, Cyrus Daines had found and conjured Lucy into the good genius who was to save him from utter abject ruin.

But no, it was real enough, and he was leading the mare, which ambled along gently with her rider sitting easily and as it were upon the softest springs. The cheers too, which kept on greeting them were real enough, and at last the misty sensation of unreality settled down into the stern matter-of-fact.

And now, with his heart beating in low, heavy throbs, a feeling of icy horror began to creep through his veins, chilling him, and freezing up the power of thinking of anything but a few stern facts, the essence of which settled down into the bitter question:

Had he not done this poor, true-hearted little creature sufficient injury without sending her to a horrible death? for he felt now that he was going to let her attempt the impossible, and that it could only have one end.

They were in the course now, and he was walking so near that he had but to raise his head and look up sidewise to meet her eyes. But he dared not do that; he could only walk on, with the afternoon sun pouring down hot and bright, and casting their shadows as they went on with the crowd on either side of the course cheering madly at the sight of the favourite, which they had been told would not run. And whenever there was a lull, Bella Donna's backers started the cheering again, while handkerchiefs and race cards were fluttering in the grand stand, and hundreds of glasses were following every pace.

"I can't do it—I can't do it," groaned Braetoun. "It's madness. Poor little lass; she shan't die like that."

He checked the mare, and she began to resent it, shaking her head and making so fierce a plunge that she jerked the rein out of his hand, but Lucy sat firmly in her saddle, yielding to the mare's bound, which brought her a little in front of Braetoun, and in an instant his hand was on her arm.

"No, no," he whispered hoarsely, "curse the money, the mare, the whole world. I've been a brute to you, Baby, but I can't save myself in such a way as this. Come back; you shall not ride."

She bent down a little till her lips were close to his ear.

"God bless you for that," she whispered; "then you do care for me a little still. Rod, dear, I'm going to win."

He raised his hand to seize the rein, but at the slight pressure of her rider's heels, the mare made a tremendous bound forward, and away she went, to follow the example of the others taking their preliminary canter, gliding over the yielding turf like a swallow, and apparently with as little effort.

"Ah!" groaned Braetoun. "Once more too late."

"Why, Braetoun, old fellow," said a member of his club, "you look as if you'd seen a ghost. Hold up. You'll win now. We've been cursing you up hill and down dale for selling us. Wherever did you pick up that little jock?"

"Had an interview with Mephistopheles," said another, smiling, "sold himself, body and soul, so that he might win this race."

"Right! Quite right," cried Braetoun, with a laugh which sent a chill through his companions. "That's what I have done, and I'm going to win."

"You are, thank goodness," cried the first speaker. "By George, look at that! Well done, little one. Look at the handsome little imp. He rides her like a fairy."

For Bella Donna swept by with her hoofs hardly seeming to touch the ground, and Braetoun hurried on to try and get a word with Lucy before the start.

"Racing's exciting," said one of Braetoun's friends to the other; "but hang me if it doesn't seem something far above that to old Roddy. He looks as if he were going to have a fit."

But before Braetoun had gone many steps he heard his

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name pronounced, and caught sight of Daines standing on the step of a carriage, gesticulating wildly to him.

He slipped aside, for he was in a state of exaltation in which he was swayed by any impulse.

"Then it's all right; you found him?" cried Daines.

"Yes," said Braetoun, looking at him strangely; "it's all right—I've found him."

There was no time for more. He had to find a place by the winning post, the desire being gone which would have taken him after the horses to the starting point, and a peculiar sensation of weakness, the reaction after the wild excitement of the last hour or so, paralysed his limbs.

Ghastly white now, he stood holding on by a rail, listening to the roar of voices and the wild booming of a bell; and once more feeling as if in a dream, he stood waiting for what seemed to be an hour, while someone high above him, armed with a pair of race-glasses, spoke aloud in a clear, distinct voice, for the benefit of a man with a note-book and pencil.

"Getting them all together. Eight," said the man. "Good line. Bella Donna breaks away. Gone right off backward. Coming back. Another off—forward this time. Lord Granger's filly. Got them together again. Splendid line. Flag falls. No, no, false start. Bella Donna again. Hundred yards. Made them all restive. Blue with red stripe rearing and nearly losing her rider. See card. All right. Mr. Davenport's mare. Good line again. No; all in disorder. Won't start them off. Ah, quickly and cleverly done. Flag down as soon as amber gets in place. They're off."

A dull, low murmur of excitement drowned the greater part of what was said afterwards, that peculiar breathing of a vast crowd at the full pitch of excitement; but as he clutched that rail, the words which related to his mare came with metallic clearness to Braetoun's ears and he heard that she was for some time running nearly last, and he felt that it was all over, that Lucy in her utter ignorance of racing could not by any possibility win. But it did not matter, so long as she came in safe that would be sufficient. He wanted no more. Only let her come in safe.

He could not pray, or in those brief moments, with every nerve strained to maddening, breaking point, he would have breathed an appeal for the poor girl's safety.

It was all in those maddening minutes, and he closed his eyes as the man above him, seeing what would have been hidden from him by his position had he striven to follow the race, went on dictating his brief notes.

"Tittup, Davenport's filly. Fair Amy making the running; rest nowhere; with Bella Donna as whipper-in. Unchanged. Coming round the corner. Fair Amy falls back; Tittup and the filly have it all their own way. Bella Donna drawing even with last horse. Boy can't manage her. Losing her chance for third. The filly drawing a head; Tittup nearly sick. No. Cleverly ridden. She closes up again, and favorite nearly clear of the ruck behind. Good promise for third. On the straight. Good race. Bella Donna's jockey settling down for the run home, coming on hand over hand. Good third. Tittup first. Bella Donna challenging the filly for second place. Good race level; clear by a head; challenges Tittup."

What more he said was drowned in the wild roar of excitement, and Braetoun strained forward, wild-eyed and staring now, to watch the finish of one of the most exciting races of the season, as, still so far behind that all chance of success seemed impossible, Bello Donna's rider could be seen almost motionless as she stood in her stirrups, while the mare literally skimmed over the turf as if madly desirous of passing the filly, whose jockey, after a glance behind, was urging her on with whip and spur, working his reins and doing everything he knew to reach the post first.

The race seemed certain, and the exciting roar was for Bella Donna as she strove her best, a full length behind, when close home; but a few bounds and she was drawing up—half a length, a neck, a head, behind; and then, as if warming more and more to the task in hand, she literally shot past her adversary, faster, faster, faster, and in the midst of the wild excitement, Braetoun, with starting eyes, had a glimpse of the amber satin, as the mare swept close by him like a flash, and Tittup thundered by, more than a length behind.

CHAPTER LVI.

With her Heart's Blood.

Lucy's struggle seemed to be yet to come, for the mare swept in full career; but a minute later she had obeyed the steady pull upon her bit, and turned, to come gently back, Braetoun, trembling like a leaf, hurrying to meet her, take the reins, and, surrounded by an excited crowd, lead her to the scales.

But before they reached the weighing place there was a rush made by a wizen-faced jockey in long coat, evidently with some sinister intent. Whatever it was, though, was checked by one of the mounted police who formed the winner's escort. The constable reached down from his horse, caught the lad by the collar, and turned him back while the rider passed into safety.

"Have—have I really won?" panted the girl, as she bent down to speak to Braetoun.

"Won? Yes," he whispered back. "Oh, my own brave, true heart! But," he cried excitedly, "you're bleeding! What is it? Did she throw up her head and strike your face?"

"Oh, no: nothing, nothing," she said, with a little laugh, as she sprang lightly from the saddle, threw it over her arm as soon as it was free, took her seat in the scales, was judged all right, and then as she sprang up she caught at Braetoun's arm with a peculiar pallor gathering in her face.

"Quick! to the hotel!" she whispered; "take me away from here. Auntie!"

Friends were gathering round; men were cheering the successful jockey, and scores were eager to shake hands; but horror-stricken now, Braetoun shouted to the people to stand back, and hurried his companion to where he could find a cab, into which he helped her, sprang on to the footboard, and shouted to the driver to take them to the hotel.

It was quickly done, but an excited crowd was in full pursuit, and they had hard work to reach the place first.

The news was there before them, and a burst of cheers from the people in front of the house greeted them, as Braetoun sprang out, and Lucy followed lightly, but only to sink into his arms, fainting, with the blood trickling in a scarlet thread from her lips.

"Here! a chair," cried Braetoun. "Now carry—" he nearly said to his own room. "Send up some champagne."

There was no difficulty in finding the right room, for Aunt Duncan, with her red face mottled with white, stood at the head of the stairs, and seizing Lucy's hand wildly as soon as it was within reach, guided them into her apartment, where the insensible little figure, with the gay satin shirt now stained with blood, was carefully laid upon a couch, but only to open her eyes, staring wildly and fighting for breath till she was once more in an erect position.

"What have you done—what have you done?" cried Aunt Duncan wildly.

"The mare must have thrown up her head—lips or tongue cut. Quick, a glass of water! Ah!" cried Braetoun wildly, as the awful truth struck home like a flash. "Here one of you there—the nearest doctor!—run!"

The man who had helped to carry the chair ran off, nearly striking against a slight-looking figure which had just reached the door.

It was being closed in his face, but he forced his way in.

"Rod, I congratulate——Lucy! Oh, my God!"

Daines rushed to the couch, to fall upon his knees and catch one of the little hands in his. Then snatching his handkerchief from his breast, he tenderly wiped the tiny trickling stream from the quivering lips before him.

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"A doctor! quick, a doctor!" he panted. "Oh, send again. He is so long."

"Never mind," said Lucy, with a piteous little laugh, as he held the handkerchief again and again to her lips. "It doesn't matter. I've won—I've won.—Take care of her, Rod, for my sake.—They got before me so. They wouldn't let me pass—but—but—I did it at last."

"Here, drink this," said Bractoun, snatching a champagne glass from a waiter who had brought it to the door, but she shook her head.

"No, not now," she said in a strange, choking voice; and she turned to Daines and smiled, as he half supported her. "Thank you—so good to me—always, but this is best."

She turned from him and gazed at Braetoun—one long earnest look, and then struggling wildly she threw herself round to get her right arm round the neck of the sobbing woman kneeling by her on the other side of the couch. There was another effort to raise her lips for a farewell kiss but the exertion hastened the end. One hoarse choking cry accompanied by a horrible gush of blood, and Braetoun stood staring down at her as if turned to stone.

Just then the door was opened, and the doctor summoned entered the room, made his way quickly to the couch, and was about to tear open the gaudy amber shirt, but with a wild cry Daines forced him back.

"No, no," he cried; "don't touch her now. She is dead—she is dead."

The doctor bowed his head as he gazed curiously down at the light, graceful figure with its small waist and swelling hips, before saying softly:

"Yes, I can do nothing here. Evidently the rupture of an aneurism. No human skill could have saved her life."

As the words left his lips there was a deafening cheer from the front of the house. As it ceased a stentorian voice roared, with the words coming plainly through the open window:

"Bella Donna's rider—bring him out!"

Another burst of cheers followed, and a discordant band brayed out the first few bars of "See, the Conquering Hero Comes."

Daines had gone quickly to the open window, and softly drew down the blind, just as the landlord of the hotel was hurriedly explaining what had befallen the conquering hero, and the last notes died away in the awful silence which fell, while as soon as the blind touched the window-sill, Daines standing there with his back to the rest, slowly raised the blood-stained handkerchief he held to his lips, and hid it carefully in his breast.

* * * * *

It was in an over-crowded first-class carriage that evening, on the way to London, and the speaker, a blatant, over-dressed personage of the horsey type. There had been a good deal of canvassing of the day's event, and the individual in question had listened with undisguised contempt.

"Don't tell me," he said—"a gal? No gal could have ridden and won that race. But I tell you what is a fact. Lord Bractoun wins to the tune of thirty thou., so he ought to do something for the boy's mother, who was down to see him ride."

"Then you are sure it was a boy?" said another occupant of the carriage.

"Swear it," was the reply, and a thin white hand was laid slowly on the arm of a gentleman at the side, but the latter made no sign; he only turned his head to gaze into the darkness of the night, as if to see the hedges and trees seeming to fly by as the express train tore along.

But Roderick Bractoun saw neither tree nor hedge, only that little lithe figure bending over Bella Donna's neck, her large eyes gazing straight ahead as if into futurity, as she swept by him like a meteor across his path of life—saw only passionate, loving, true-hearted Lucy Lee, winning the race of her misdirected little life—in death.

"My God!" he groaned to himself; "and for such a wretch as I."

CHAPTER LVII.

The Gamester's Settling Day.

Six months had passed away, during which Murray had seen nothing of the Bractouns; but much of the time had been taken up in his own struggle back to health. Then one morning Emsworth called at Wimpole Street during a visit to London. For as soon as the old man had somewhat recovered from the stroke which prostrated him he had taken Murray's advice, jumping at it, so to speak, to get Olive beyond her husband's reach, and gone on the Continent.

"Not that it was necessary," said Emsworth on this occasion. "It has been the best trait I have seen in his character; he has never attempted to follow her, though if he had I'd have set every law at defiance, and carried her off from place to place. By my will they should never have come together again. It's all very well to talk about forgiveness, Murray, but you must give up after the seventy times seven."

"But about your health?" said Murray hastily.

"Oh, I'm all right—for an old man. But as I was saying, he has never attempted to follow her, and after all, wild scamp as he was over money matters, he has never touched her income since."

Murray turned half away, and the old man went on chatting, doubtless to the great annoyance of waiting patients.

"The old lady isn't so particular, though," said Emsworth, with a chuckle. "She sends me very pitiful begging letters from time to time, unknown to Bractoun, I'll swear. She says he is quite penniless, and that she finds it hard work to keep up appearances, and to pay her expenses and the doctors at the watering places where she takes her son for his health. But they don't hurt," said the old man, with a queer look. "I'll send her anything she likes, if she'll only keep him away. Seen him lately?"

"I? No," said Murray sharply.

"He's in a bad state, I suppose, poor fellow. He's doing penance for his past, and no mistake. Well, I'm delighted to see you again. I was obliged to come to town on business, but I go back to Florence directly. Now, let you and me have a quiet dinner somewhere together. No? Well, if I must excuse you, I must. But you don't look well, Murray. Why don't the physician heal himself? Shoemaker's wife, eh? Why a month in Italy would do you good. I'd ask you to come and join us, and I've proposed it twice to Olive, but it quite upset her, and she begged me not to ask you. She won't see anyone, or go anywhere; keeps to a secluded life with me, and, 'pon my soul, Murray, I'm only too glad. Selfish, of course, but it's perfect bliss to me to have the poor darling with me once more. She frets, of course, but I don't believe she would ever go to him again. There, I'm taking up your time. Good-bye, my dear boy. I hope some day to settle down in town again, and that time will have softened my poor girl's trouble. Then we shall be able to see more of you, as in the pleasant old days."

Murray saw Emsworth twice in the succeeding eighteen months, and from what the old man told him, their life abroad was quite unchanged, Olive shrinking always when he suggested a return to town.

It was six months since he had heard anything of them or of Bractoun. He saw Daines from time to time, but Bractoun's name was never mentioned. Then one morning he was startled from his ordinary course of life, unmoved as he was in his constant struggle to give health to the hundreds who flocked to the popular physician, for Rancer brought in a message that had been delivered by a commissionaire.

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Murray opened the envelope, and turned a little paler than usual, as he found a visiting card within—Braetoun's—and scribbled upon it in pencil, over the address in Montague Street:

"Come and see me for the last time—dying."

The card dropped from Murray's hand, and he sat with his hands resting upon the table, gazing down at vacancy.

"Any answer, sir?" said Rancer at last.

"Eh?" cried Murray, starting. "Yes, say I will come on at once."

At once was none too soon, for the face which confronted him upon being taken to the invalid's room by Lady Braetoun, who still looked artfully young, told its own tale.

"He has been wanting to see you so very much for a year past, Dr. Murray," she said; "but he would not send till this morning. Now do—do prescribe for him as you used to. No one ever did him so much good as you, and I've spent quite a fortune upon him, going from doctor to doctor during the past few months."

"Yes, mother," said Braetoun, with a tinge of sarcasm in his words, "I have been a bad expense to you. Now please go, and Allan Murray will soon set me straight."

"Ah, that's right. He always was so clever, ever since you were boys together at Eton, and you used to bring him home. There, I'll leave you and come back soon. Why, he looks brighter already with your coming."

"Eton? Yes, old Eton," sighed Braetoun; "and it only seems like yesterday. But I'm glad you've come, Allan, old man."

Murray looked at him sternly, with the last meeting forming a background to the wasted face before him.

"She doesn't know—poor dear old butterfly. Loves me her way."

"Do you wish me to try and treat your case?" said Murray slowly.

Braetoun laughed.

"The creaking door that has hung so long on its rusty hinges—to oil them again? You know," said Braetoun, with a smile. "I've fought it off for the last two years, for I wanted to live a bit longer, and you know, too, how careful I must have been. I have, since little Lucy died."

He was silent for a few moments, and then went on slowly:

"I put it off to the last, and then I sent. I wanted to say something, before I ask you to put aside the past ten years, and shake hands as if we were boys once more.—Allan, old man, I know."

He paused again, and passed his thin white hand over his prematurely wrinkled forehead.

"Life's a long mistake to some of us who have no ballast—eh? There, this is beating about the bush. I'll say what I wanted to say—it was only this, solemnly, before I lie back for the long sleep."

He groaned again, and then with his eyes fixed steadfastly upon his old schoolfellow:

"Murray, I sent for you to hear my last words—the words of a man who for the past two years has suffered Heaven only knows what agony of mind and body—and now this is what, with clear vision of the past, I believe—that you were always to me a true and faithful friend, and that my wife, Olive, was as pure a woman as ever breathed. Will you grip my hand again—once before I go?"

Murray's hand grasped that which was feebly raised; catching it before it fell back upon the couch, and Braetoun smiled, and for a few moments he looked once more to his old companion the bright, handsome, reckless lad of the Eton days.

"At last!"

Five minutes later Lady Braetoun softly opened the door.

"Now you two have certainly had quite long enough to——"

"Hush!" said Murray softly, as he laid down the hand from which the last pulsation had fled. "Lady Braetoun he is at rest."

CHAPTER LVIII.

At Last.

Two years later, Isaac Emsworth was back in Eaton Place, and not alone.

It was a bright summer evening, and Murray had been dining there. He had attended the old man several times since his return.

"Not that there's much the matter, my dear boy," he said, "but seventy isn't forty, you know, and when I'm a little extra wrong, if it's only a chat with you, you don't know how much better it makes me feel."

But upon this particular occasion the conversation had turned upon another topic than Emsworth's health, and in conclusion the old man had said, with no little emotion:

"Heaven knows, my boy, nothing would make my journey to the end easier, and set me more at rest. It has been my dream ever since she has been free, but I made such a mess of it before that I said I would never make a sign, and you know I never did. And I won't stir now—but in Heaven's name, ask her, and see what she will say."

Murray rose from the table where they had been sitting over the untouched wine, and went slowly up to the drawing-room, where Olive was seated thoughtfully alone.

She started from her seat, trembling, as she saw him enter, and in the dim, soft light of the summer evening their eyes met—his, in one long, questioning look—hers, as they dimmed and grew suffused, as they had never looked before in his; and when he raised his hand toward her, the silent answer came, hers fell softly within the strong, firm grip.

"Ah!" ejaculated Isaac Emsworth, when an hour later they went to where he sat, utterly tired out—"at last."

THE END.

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Permanently cured in a few days by a simple, inexpensive self-treatment. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. A. M. CURTIS, York Chambers, Adelphi, London, W.C.

BLACKHEADS

or "Maggots," Pimples, Blotches, etc., immediately and permanently removed by my infallible SKIN CLEANSING LOTION. Hundreds of testimonials. Post free with directions 1/- and 2/6. AUSTIN LENNOX, Skin Specialist, 1, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street, E.C.

XMAS PRESENTS

Send 1/6 in stamps to the "Miyakodori," 196, Brompton Road, and you will receive by return of post, free in the United Kingdom, a pretty, hand-carved wood box, novel Japanese toy, etc.

For 1/-: pretty Japanese picture, hand-painted fan, novel toy, etc.

Order early to avoid Disappointment.

EVERY 100th ORDER WILL RECEIVE A SPECIAL PRIZE.

ADDRESS: THE "MIYAKODORI," 196, Brompton Rd., London, S.W.

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PROFITS PAID DURING 1895.

Jan. 2, £8 per cent., Feb. 1, £6, Mar. 1, £5, April 1, £8, May 1, £7, June 2, £10, July 1, £9, Aug. 1, £9, Sept. 2, £8, Oct. 1, £8, Nov. 1, £7, Dec. 2, £7.

Total for 12 months £92 per cent., an average of nearly £8 PER CENT. PER MONTH.

PROFITS PAID DURING 1896.

Jan. 2, £6 per cent., Feb. 1, £7, Mar. 2, £6, April 1, £6, May 1, £6, June 1, £5, July 1, £5, Aug. 1, £5, Sept. 1, £5, Oct. 1, £5, Nov. 2, £6.

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with *full, perfect, natural Bust*, obtained by a simple, inexpensive self-treatment. Success guaranteed. Highly approved and recommended by the Medical Profession. For testimonials, press opinions, and free particulars, send stamped envelope in confidence to Madame "B. J.," Oriental Toilet Co., 87, Strand, London.

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CURED INSTANTLY BY

BUNTER'S NERVINE

Prevents Decay. Saves Extraction. Sleepless Nights Prevented. Neuralgic Headache and all Nerve Pains Removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 1½d.

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On receipt of stamped addressed envelope a lady will send to those afflicted with Superfluous Hairs, free particulars of a simple remedy which *permanently* removed a large growth from her sister's face without injuring the skin. Address, in confidence, Miss E. R. DALE, 26, Belvedere Rd., Lambeth, London.

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If you require a reliable remedy for the relief of superfluous fat, send for a box of my "H.D." Pills. No starvation required; you may eat and drink what you like, yet I guarantee to either sex a permanent reduction of 5lb. to 7lb. weekly. They are a harmless vegetable preparation; successful in the most stubborn cases, and improve health and figure. Their action is rapid, certain, safe, tasteless, and highly recommended. Prices, 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d., and 11s., post free, plain wrapper. PROFESSOR F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

ATLAS LOCKSTITCH MACHINE.

Works by hand or treadle. Guaranteed 4 years. Equal in quality and size to any machine. To ensure satisfaction, we will send machine on receipt of 5/- P.O. for ONE MONTH'S TRIAL. Balance can be paid 5/- Monthly. Call or write for designs and Samples of work. 39/-

THE ATLAS SEWING MACHINE CO., 188B, High St., Camden Town, London, N.W.; 63, Seven Sisters Rd., N.; 14, High Rd., Kilburn.

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By a simple inexpensive self-treatment, effecting a rapid and permanent reduction without change in diet. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. G. A. BOYD, 14, York Buildings, Charing Cross, London.

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The New Patent SOUND DISCS

Completely overcome DEAFNESS and HEAD NOISES, no matter of how long standing. Are the same to the ears as glasses are to the eyes. Invisible. Comfortable. Worn months without removal. Explanatory Pamphlet Free.

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"OH, YES! REVENUES from ECONOMY are ENORMOUS."

The Richest Provision in Knowledge made absolutely easy for the Accumulation of this income. Write to Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, who will provide you with full information, posting you free (if, when writing, you mention this Paper) a large, amazingly interesting, valuable, instructive, and detailed illustrated "Pioneer" Reduction Catalogue, showing you what you can save, what to buy and where to buy Carpets, Mats, and Hearthrugs of every manufacture, including Wilton, Plush, Brussels, Velvet, Antique, Foreign, and Furs, also Queen's Royal Household, Prudential, Eclipse and Alarm Carpets and Hearthrugs (Regd.). Also Blankets, Curtains, Sheetings, etc., and a thousand other articles wanted in every household. (Copyright.)

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Admittedly the Cheapest in the World. *Woven without seam Altogether superior quality, with handsome border to correspond. A marvel for excellence and beauty. Thousands of Repeat Orders and Testimonials received, giving the highest satisfaction. When Ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.*

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6ft. by 12ft.		12/6
9ft. by 9ft.		13/6
9ft. by 10½ft.		15/6
9ft. by 12ft.		17/6
9ft. by 13½ft.		19/6

		Sale Price.
10½ft. by 12ft.		20/6
12ft. by 12ft.		22/6
9ft. by 15ft.		21/6
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12ft. by 15ft.		28/6
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A Queen Royal Hearthrug, 6ft. by 3ft., to match, 2/- extra.

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Extraordinarily Heavy, very Best Quality, Newest and Choicest Designs. In Old Gold, Sultan, Terra Cotta, Crimson, Sky, Navy, and the latest colours. With handsome border to correspond. Guaranteed to wear for years and give every satisfaction. The sizes and prices as follows (all ready for putting down):

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4½ft. by 7ft.,	11/-	VELVET PILE BRUSSELS CARPET SQUARES.	9ft. by 12ft.,	38/-
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A Velvet Pile Rug, 6ft. by 3ft., to match, 5/6 extra.

SPECIAL OFFER.—Three Rugs, 16s.; Six, 31s.

AH! AH! THE MILDNESS OF THE SEASON HAS DONE THIS.

100,000 Ladies' Luxuriously Handsome, Rich Dark Brown

OPOSSUM FUR NECKLETS

With Life Imitation, Natural Head combined; a most elegant and soft fur, quite equalling in style anything offered at 15/6 each, and for durability not to be surpassed. Similar to illustration.

"SHORT STORIES" SPECIAL NECKLET COUPON. 12/12/96.
On receipt of this Coupon and P.O.O. or Stamps for amount, we guarantee to send goods as above (post free this week only) to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. Cash returned in full if not satisfied. (Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

POST FREE **4/6** WORTH TREBLE.

Cheques and P.O.'s payable to—
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Woodsley Road, Leeds. Telegraphic Address: "Eclipse, Leeds." Telephone No. 948.

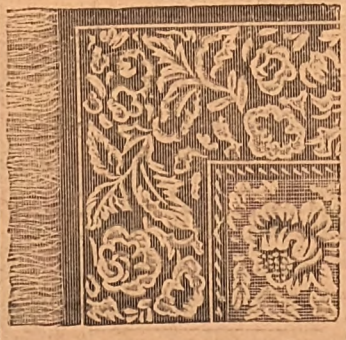
OUR NEW VENTURE.—Yes, Two different Pattern Hearthrugs or Carpets for the Price of One! *(Copyright.)*

In the High Court of Justice (Chancery Division), HODGSON v. WEBB BROTHERS.—On the 18th day of July, 1890, his lordship, Mr. Justice Chitty, granted an interim injunction, restraining Messrs. Webb Brothers, of Hackney Wick, from infringing Mr. Fredk. Hodgson's Trade Mark, "Eclipse," No. 93,774 (Leeds).

EXTRAORDINARY REDUCTIONS.

100,000 "ECLIPSE" CARPETS (Regd.)

GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.



This Gigantic Offer is a Special Contract, made with readers of *Short Stories* only. We will forward direct from the looms to any address on receipt of amount, A GENUINE WOVEN, SEAMLESS, REVERSIBLE CARPET, in our New (Reg.) Waterlily and Persian designs, the largest ever sold at the price, suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Bordered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any Middle Profits. Remember these are Woven, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool.

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Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double above prices. An "Eclipse" Rug sent with Carpet 1/- extra.

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Two Carpets and Two Rugs 8/-, or Four Carpets and Four Rugs 15/6.

P.S.—When this Design (registered) is wanted in Carpets or Hearthrugs, as above, kindly quote No. 268,493.

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REVERSIBLE CARPETS

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Reversible, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 12 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine on one side the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian, and on the reverse the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

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6ft. by 9ft.	... ...	4/9	REDUCED SALE PRICE.	9ft. by 15ft.	... ...	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft.	... ...	5/11		12ft. by 12ft.	... ...	12/9
9ft. by 9ft.	... ...	7/6		12ft. by 13½ft.	... ...	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft.	... ...	8/6		12ft. by 15ft.	... ...	15/9
9ft. by 12ft.	... ...	9/6		12ft. by 18ft.	... ...	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft.	... ...	11/6		12ft. by 21ft.	... ...	22/6

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On receipt of this Coupon and P.O. or Stamps for amount, we guarantee to send any goods as above to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. (Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.
Cash returned in full if not satisfied.

F. HODGSON & SON, Manufacturers, Importers and Merchants, WOODSLEY RD., LEEDS.

Telegraphic Address: "ECLIPSE, LEEDS," National Telephone No. 948.
N.B.—Foreign Orders executed and packed free, and shipped at lowest rates.

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 416. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 19TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

"WORTH A GUINEA A BOX."

BEECHAM'S PILLS

FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,

SUCH AS

Sick Headache, Constipation,

Weak Stomach, Impaired Digestion,

Disordered Liver & Female Ailments.

ANNUAL SALE SIX MILLION BOXES.

In Boxes, 9½d., 1s. 1½d., and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

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Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

"No flaw in its claim to be ABSOLUTELY PURE."
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FRY'S

Pure Concentrated

COCOA

Awarded Highest Honours. | **"Strongest and Best."** *HEALTH.*

Over 200 Gold Medals and Diplomas awarded to the Firm.

JONES' WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS BOX PARCEL OF NOVELTIES.

1.—SUPERB PACKET OF CHRISTMAS CARDS.

Contains 12 cards of latest and choicest designs and best execution, by the celebrated firm of Raphael Tuck & Son. Some are 1d. cards, some 2d., some 3d., and some 6d. A packet that you would cheerfully give 2s. 6d. for in a shop. 1s. 3d. post free.

2.—HANDSOME POCKET KNIFE

(imitation ivory or buffalo horn handle). An attractive present for a gentleman or a boy, and one that he would value all his life. Price only 1s. 9d. post free.

3.—HIGH-POWER MICROSCOPE,

nickel plated, magnifies 3,000 volumes. Shows animalculæ in water, eels in old vinegar, &c. Post free 1s. 2d.

4.—FULL-SIZED ALBERT.

These chains are of beautiful and standard curb design, are VERY HEAVY, solid Euro SILVER, guaranteed to wear white throughout. Give universal satisfaction, and cannot be told from Sterling Silver. Price only 1s. 6d. post free.

5.—THE COMPLETE GAME OF LUDO.

The latest game for Winter evenings, affording amusement for young and old. Just imported from the States of America. Consists of strong Folding Board covered in Leatherette, with Dice Cup and quantity of Men for four players. Only 1s., postage 3d. extra.

6.—MINIATURE CARVED IVORINE OPERA-GLASS.

Representing the Big Wheel at Earl's Court, with powerful Magnifying Glass, complete. 1s. 2d. post free.

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Of 24 Autotype Photographic Views of well-known Sights in London, including Tower, Abbey, Monuments, &c. All bound together in beautiful covers. Only 9d., postage 2d. extra.

8.—WALLET and Pocket Memo Book combined.

Imitation of the finest Russian Leather. 6in. by 4in. Just the thing to present to a gentleman who has bank notes to keep. Post free 1s. 6d.

LAST GRAND OFFER.

On receipt of only 2s. 9d. (stamps or P.O.) we will send our wonderful CHRISTMAS PARCEL, containing ALL THE ABOVE: the superb packet of Christmas Cards, the beautiful and valuable Knife, the High-power Microscope, the Albert, the Game of Ludo, the Miniature Opera-glass, the Album, and the Wallet. Value as above is over 10s. How can we do it? Because it is well known that by doing business on an enormous scale it can be done at less than one-fourth the prices demanded by shopkeepers. Send 2s. 9d. and receive the Parcel by return. Money returned if not satisfied. Two Parcels, 5s. 3d.; three parcels, 7s. 6d. All parcels sent, carriage paid, same day as money is received.

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Grand Catalogue of Conjuring and Electrical Apparatus, Magic Lanterns, Engines, Skates, Toys, and latest Novelties, 60 Pages, 1,000 Illustrations. 1d. stamp for postage.

"I USED IT."

MOUSTACHES

Heavy and Handsome, Speedily Produced.

BALD PATCHES ERADICATED BY USING ESAULINE.

TESTIMONIALS DAILY.

POST FREE (secretly packed) in British Isles,

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FRENCH COFFEE.

Delicious for Breakfast or After Dinner.

In making, use rather less quantity, it being so much stronger than ordinary Coffee.

SOLD EVERYWHERE.

MASON'S EXTRACT OF HERBS

For the Immediate Production of

BOTANIC BEER.

A Nine-gallon Cask of Alcoholic Beer from a Brewery will cost you 10/6, but Eight Gallons of Beer made from

Mason's EXTRACT of HERBS

Can be obtained for 6d., plus a pound or two of Sugar and a little Yeast.

THE FINEST BEVERAGE IN THE WORLD.

Inventors and Manufacturers:

Newball & Mason,

HYSON GREEN WORKS,

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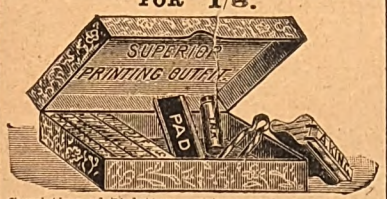
If unable to obtain it in your neighbourhood, send 9 stamps for sample bottle; or samples of both Wine Essence and Extract of Herbs, post free for 15 stamps.

A SUPERIOR PRINTING OUTFIT FOR 1/8.



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or "Maggots," Pimples, Blotches, etc., immediately and permanently removed by my infallible SKIN CLEANSING LOTION. Hundreds of testimonials. Post free with directions 1/- and 2/6. AUSTIN LENNOX, Skin Specialist, 1, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street, E.C.

Dr. Mackenzie's ARSENICAL TOILET SOAP.

The greatest beautifier in the World. Produces a lovely skin and complexion, and cures spots, pimples, redness, and freckles. The finest and purest soap made. For **Eczema** and all irritations it is the most emollient and soothing. Absolutely harmless. But beware of the many worthless imitations. Have Dr. Mackenzie's or none. At all Chemists and Stores, 6d. and 1s. a tablet.

Madame Adelina Patti writes from Craig-y-Nos Castle: "I find Dr. Mackenzie's Arsenical Toilet Soap most excellent."

XMAS PRESENTS

Save 50 per cent.

HIGH-CLASS FRENCH AND OTHER PERFUMERY IN FANCY AND CUT-CLASS BOTTLES.

Prices, post free, without boxes - - 1/6, 2/-, 2/6, 3/-
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or call and choose for yourself.

FELIX PAVIA, 136, Fenchurch St., LONDON.

S.S. S.S.

PEARSON'S

£100

COUPON.

No. 51

Dec. 19, 1896.

S.S. S.S.

HAIR DESTROYED.

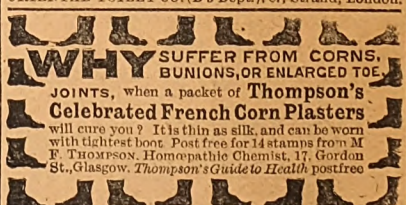
A doctor's widow knows of a simple, inexpensive remedy that permanently destroys the roots, and will forward particulars free to all those afflicted sending stamped envelope. Address Mrs. B. D. WOOD, 4, DUKE STREET, VILLIERS STREET, LONDON, W.

BLUSHING

Permanently cured. A Pamphlet giving sound practical advice and particulars of a successful treatment for a rapid, simple, and inexpensive home cure, forwarded free to all upon receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—Prof. B. L. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

ARE YOU LITTLE?

If so, wear the "A D" Invisible Elevators (Regd.). Will increase your height up to four inches; the only approved means; detection impossible; simple, inexpensive. Send stamped envelope for particulars to the ORIENTAL TOILET CO. (B 5 Dept.), 87, Strand, London.



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The New Patent **SOUND DISCS**

Completely overcome DEAFNESS and HEAD NOISES, no matter of how long standing. Are the same to the ears as glasses are to the eyes. Invisible. Comfortable. Worn months without removal. Explanatory Pamphlet Free.

The L. R. WALES CO., 62 & 63, New Bond St., London, W.

A SUM of from 10s. to 20s. per week offered for spare time to either sex, everywhere; work can be done evenings.—Send addressed envelope to Box 60, Eclipse Works, 92A, Aldersgate Street, London.

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No. 416.] For the Week ending December 19th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

A NEAT SWINDLE.

"MADAME vill pardon, but ze manager zay dis note ees bad, vot you call 'flash.'"

"Bad! Nonsense, I've just received it from the bank. Let me see it."

A dainty, nervous little hand snatches the note from the greasy Italian fingers. It is spread out on the table amidst the crumbs, and twisted and turned in every conceivable way.

A tear drops upon it.

"How much is my bill?"

"Four shilling an' tree pence."

"I have no other money than this note. My name is May Armitage, I live at 31, Thurston Gardens. I will send you the money."

The waiter's shoulders shrug meaningly.

"Oh, I see you want me to leave one of my rings. Very well."

Forthwith, an unoffending finger receives sundry violent tugs, and is only saved from laceration by the opportune arrival of a friend.

"Is anything the matter, Miss Armitage?"

"Oh, Mr. Hamilton, I am so glad to see you. The waiter here says this note is bad, and it is all the money I have. I was just going to leave one of my rings."

"Dear me, what a horrid predicament to be in. May I see the note? Hum! Yes, it is a bad one sure enough. We will see to this anon. Waiter, how much is this lady's bill?"

"Four an' tree pence, sare."

"Here's half-a-sovereign—never mind the change."

"Will you let me prescribe a glass of wine, Miss Armitage? You want it, I'm sure."

"No thanks. If you will see me to a cab my spirits will soon revive in the open air; but I was awfully frightened. I made sure they would take me to prison."

"Hardly"—smiling. "But tell me. Where did you get this note—do you remember?"

"Yes. I cashed a cheque at Coutts' a few minutes before I came in here."

"Strange. Well, come along, I will see you into a cab, and then go and interview the bank people."

"You are very, very good, Mr. Hamilton. Really, I don't know what I should have done if——."

"If I hadn't turned up at the critical moment like the hero in a novel."

Two men sitting at an adjoining table had been intently watching this little drama, but not until the waiter had re-arranged the table did a single word pass between them.

"Very neat, wasn't it?"

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"Yes. I suppose it was. She was a handsome girl."

"Good generalship having your retreat covered."

"What retreat?"

"Why, it was clear as daylight. The man held back, in case the game got spotted. Friend of the lady—bah!"

"The girl is perfectly innocent. The waiter changed the note."

"Did you see him do it?"

"No."

"Then how do you know he did it?"

"The note the lady gave him was *folded*. The one he brought back was only *crumpled* a bit."

"You're a smart chap, Harris, but why didn't you arrest him?"

"I preferred waiting for developments. There's more behind this than we know. I don't think it was entirely an accident that gentleman's coming on the scene at the right moment. You go to Coutts' and get the number of the note. Then keep an eye on the waiter—shadow him home."

At ten o'clock that same night Detective-Inspector Harris was informed that the bird had flown—in other words that the waiter had vanished during the officer's visit to the bank.

"Never mind, Smith—we ought to have arrested him there and then, but I thought it was something more than a mere sleight-of-hand trick."

Detective-Inspector Harris was something of a philosopher.

* * * * *

The Armitages, father and daughter, were discussing supper and spurious bank-notes. Although not a business man, Mr. Armitage knew his way about, and nothing could dissuade his mind from the certainty that the waiter had changed the note. His daughter was just as positive the note the waiter returned was the original one, but paterfamilias knew better; and quite a heated argument followed. Neither would give way a jot, and Papa Armitage allowed such oddities of expression as "pish," "bosh," etc., to occasionally escape, and no doubt, he being of an excitable nature, these would have soon given way to stronger terms had not a servant entered the room with a letter.

"What's this?" testily.

"A man brought it and he's waiting for an answer."

Mr. Armitage tore open the envelope and read the note.

"Great Cæsar! May, this is shocking."

"Whatever is it, father?"

"Why, Hamilton has been caught somehow with that bad note, and is in trouble about it."

"Where is he? Oh, how dreadful this all is. I wish I hadn't gone to that place." Then to the servant: "Who is it?"

"I don't know."

"Send the man in here, and get my boots, and order a cab," said Mr. Armitage.

The messenger was ushered in. He was a typical representative of the criminal class, and had that hunted, cunning look, the stamp of *his* genius.

"Where is this gentleman?"

"I'll take you to him, but I carn't give the show away."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, if I tells you where 'e are"—jerking a thumb over his shoulders—"you'd blow the gaff. No, I'll take you there all on the square, mister."

"I had better go, my dear."

"Oh, father, I am so frightened. Do take a policeman with you."

"Wouldn't do, miss. Yer pa and the gen'l'man al' be 'ome in 'arf-an-hour, miss, an' no 'arm shall come to them. Just you leave that to me, miss."

The cab was dismissed at Tottenham Court Road corner, and Mr. Armitage was then led by this mysterious guide through side-streets and alleys, along dark passages—in short, Mr. Armitage knew he was being taken a roundabout way as a blind. It was a waste of strategy, for once off the main thoroughfare Mr. Armitage was lost as to his whereabouts.

This procession of two finally stopped. After some preconcerted signals had been exchanged between Mr. Armitage's escort and those within the grimy-looking house, Mr. Armitage was invited to enter. The room into which he was ushered was in marked contrast to the exterior of the building, for though it was large, and one end furnished with gambling materials, the other had some claim to be termed luxurious.

Hamilton was seated in one corner, and rose as Mr. Armitage entered.

"My dear Hamilton, I am sorry about this; I feel that it is partly my——"

"My hands are tied, Mr. Armitage."

"What do you mean?"

Addressing a yellow-skinned, frock-coated individual, who stood close to Hamilton.

"The gent. turned rusty a bit, and we had to clap on the curb—ha, ha!"

"How did this happen, Hamilton?"

"I'm ashamed of myself, sir, but will tell you all. I met one or two old friends this evening and I drank more wine than usual. When I left them I met this man—whom I had never seen before—we had drinks and finally I came in here and played baccarat. I lost, and what with the excitement of the game and the wine, I forgot all about that bad note, and—well, discovered that I was among a lot of sharps."

"Steady, sir, I think our money will bear a better scrutiny than yours."

"Well, I suppose you want the money made good. How much is it?"

"One hundred pounds—cash."

"One hundred pounds? Have you lost all that, Hamilton?"

"Allow me to explain, my dear sir; but won't you take a seat?"

"No, I won't."

"As you please, of course. Now the case stands thus: this gentleman has lost about forty or fifty pounds only, but after what has happened it is quite certain that my establishment——"

"Gambling hell."

The cynical coolness of this man was slowly but surely rousing the ire of Mr. Armitage.

"As you are going to pay the piper, my dear sir, you shall select the—eh, music—I will therefore call it a gambling hell, as you like the sound better, and it, as I was saying, will have to close—or to be more correct, not open again, but I must live. Ah, yes, I know what you want to say, my dear sir, and what if I do live by my wits? I don't try and pass spurious bank-notes, but try to work on the square—so I must have a hundred or hand this nobleman over to the police."

Then sitting down, the gentleman calmly rolled a cigarette, lit it, and seemed on good terms with himself.

"Can he do this, Hamilton?"

"I'm afraid he can, sir, so, as they won't accept my cheque, would you mind drawing one out for the amount, and I will give you mine for it?"

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"Certainly, my boy—hi, fellow, bring some ink and a pen."

"You dear, innocent old gentleman, do you think I am such a fool as to accept a cheque? Not if you made it out for ten thousand. I must have hard cash, or good—mind good—notes."

"And—do—you think I go about with a hundred pounds in my pockets?"

"Perhaps not. You could raise it among your friends, though."

"Why, bless me, it is after midnight—the thing is impossible."

"It is late, I'll admit. See here, you seem a decent old bird, will you give me your word as a gentleman that your cheque will be duly honoured?"

"I will."

"Then I don't mind obliging you, but mind, any hanky panky will mean skilly for this, eh?—nobleman, I think I called you, sir!"

Half-an-hour after handing over the cheque, Mr. Armitage and Hamilton were comfortably settled in the dining-room at 31, Thurston Gardens. Miss Armitage, satisfied that her father had safely returned, and had got the prisoner duly bailed, discreetly retired.

The two men talked for some time, and then lapsed into silence—a silence that became irksome to both, yet neither cared to carry on the desultory conversation that talking meant. Finally Hamilton rose to go.

"And now, Mr. Armitage, before I go, let me get out of your debt as far as money is concerned. I can pay you back your loan, but your kindness will always be a debt."

Hamilton produced a cheque-book, and looked round the room for some ink.

"Just put that away, my boy. I don't know, and don't want to pry into your private affairs, but I dare say I can afford to lose the money better than you can, and if it hadn't been for your kindness to my girl this afternoon—this would never have happened. Now just slip off home, and let it be a warning to you to avoid gambling, and indulging in too much wine."

"It is very kind, indeed, of you, sir, and I thank you also for the gentle admonition, but as this is a debt of honour, I must insist upon your taking it back."

"Stuff and nonsense—come, be off and don't let me hear any more of this. Come and lunch with us to-morrow—to-morrow, why it's to-day—one thirty prompt—don't forget."

"Very well, sir, we will postpone the discussion until then."

* * * * *

The house in Fitzroy Street was the scene of an animated discussion early the next morning.

Three highly respectable gentlemen were what they called sharing the spoil. They were Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Martin—he of the saffron-hued countenance—and Maloney, the Italian waiter.

"You two can do and go where you like. I want half."

"Cool, Hammy, very. What about the expenses Tony and I have incurred?"

"And who risked the whole thing by swopping the note I'd like to know, not to mention the chance of Holloway?"

"I give you both credit for the work you have done, but mine has been the master mind. I formulated the scheme, worked it out to detail, and provided you and Tony with the necessary information. I kept you posted in that girl's movements, and——"

"Dry up, Hammy. Let's take equal share of the ex's and then you take two-thirds of the remainder. You see it cost a clear forty quid squaring those waiters at the café."

"You or Tony have that other tenner?"

"Oh, yes, my cherub, with the number—worse than stopped."

"Well, settle your own affairs yourselves; I must have my half now. I'm lunching with the Armitages in an hour's time and must be off."

"Strike me putrid, Hammy, but you're an' out-and-outer. What's the game now? Can we assist?"

"Not this time, I'm going in for the girl."

"By all that's blue if that isn't the coolest thing I've ever run across. Finger out his flimsies, Tony, he won't forget his pals when he's spliced."

And Mr. Hamilton left Fitzroy Street *en route* for his victim's house.

* * * * *

"Father will be down directly, Mr. Hamilton, he is with a very old friend of his—talking over old times, I suppose."

"I am glad of the opportunity, Miss May, to tell you how repentant I am for last night's affair. Indeed, were it not that your father absolutely refused to accept the money he lent me, I wouldn't have had the audacity to come here."

"Ah, but whose fault was it you had that bad note?"

"Quite so, my dear Miss May, but I oughn't to have taken so much wine, and I certainly should not have gone to that gambling place. If I could have been run in—I mean suspected of trying to pass bad money at some legitimate place, and had been taken to a police station, it would have made me quite happy."

"Really?"

"Yes, I should have felt what a football player would call 'nearer the goal.'"

Such a sweet blush.

"Ah! here is last night's victim of the note, Harrison. Let me introduce you?"

"Hamilton—General Harrison—a very old friend of mine."

Dead pause.

"Have you two met before?"

"I think I have had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Hamilton more than once. So you think this man the victim, do you? Armitage, he is the biggest scoundrel unhung."

"Come, come, Harrison, you are mistaken, surely."

"We'll soon see. Take off that wig. Take off that wig, I say."

Behold Mr. Hamilton with a semi-shaven head.

"Now send for the police. You hesitate, Armitage?"

"Look here, my man, you see the game's up; did you share in last night's business?"

"I did"—reluctantly.

"Well," gasped Mr. Armitage, "talk about the brigands of Italy—they are fools, simply fools. I should like to know how this has been so cleverly worked out though."

And he did.

Martin and Antonio Maloney made good their escape, but Hamilton (with scores of aliases), through his audacity, failed to reach the desired goal, but was successfully incarcerated.

Inspector Harris missed a golden opportunity of distinguishing himself.

C. England Cowan.

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THE PROPHECY.

I don't remember what day of August in the year 1816 it was that there came to the doors of the Captain-General of Granada a certain ragged and uncouth gipsy, seventy years of age, by trade a sheep-bearer, by name Heredia, astride of a lean and shambling black donkey whose whole equipment consisted of a halter about its neck!

The man, immediately on dismounting, said: "I want to see the Captain-General."

Needless to say, such presumption awoke in turn the resistance of the sentinel, the laugh of the orderlies, and the doubt and hesitancy of the aides-de-camp, before he was brought to the notice of the Most Excellent Señor Don Eugenio Portcarrero, then Captain-General of the ancient kingdom of Granada; but as that dignitary was a man of kindly disposition, and already knew of Heredia, renowned for his tricks, his bargains, and his love for his neighbour's goods, order was given to let the gipsy enter.

Once within the office, he fell on his knees, exclaiming: "Blessed be Mary, Most Holy, and long life to your Honour, ruler of this little world."

"Get up and leave off ceremony and tell me what you have to say," replied the Count with seeming severity.

Heredia at once drew a long face, and said: "Well, my lord, I have come that the thousand *reals* may be given me."

"What thousand *reals?*"

"Those offered a few days ago by proclamation to anyone bringing information about Parrón."

"Indeed! You knew him then?"

"No, sir."

"Well?"

"I know him now."

"How?"

"Very simply! I tracked him, I saw him, I bring the information, I claim the reward."

"Are you sure you have *seen* him?" said the Captain-General, with an interest that overcame his doubts.

The gipsy burst out laughing, and said: "It's very evident that your Honour thinks 'this gipsy is like them all, and wants to cheat me.' May God never forgive me if I lie! I *saw* Parrón yesterday."

"But do you realise the importance of what you are saying? Do you know that for years we have pursued this monster, this bandit, whom nobody has ever seen and lived? Do you know that every day, in different parts of the *sierra* he robs wayfarers and then shoots them, for, as he says, dead men tell no tales; and by this means only has he escaped being brought to justice? Finally, do you know that *to see Parrón means death?*"

The gipsy laughed again, and said: "Doesn't your Honour know that what a gipsy cannot do no one on earth can? Does anyone know when our laughing or crying is real? Does your Honour know a fox as tricky as we are? I repeat, General, that not only have I seen Parrón, but I have talked with him."

"Where?"

"On the road to Tózar."

"Give me proof."

"Listen, your Honour! Yesterday morning, eight days since, my donkey and I fell into the hands of some robbers. They bound me fast, and led me through some bewildering hollows till we came to the clearing where the bandits camped; a cruel suspicion laid hold on me. 'Can these be Parrón's people?' I was constantly asking myself; 'if so, there's no remedy, for this devil has decreed that eyes that have seen his face shall never see another.'

"While I was thus cogitating there approached me a man, strangely but elegantly dressed, who, slapping me on the shoulder, said: 'Friend! I am Parrón!'

"To hear this and fall backwards was one and the same thing. The bandit burst out laughing. I arose, trembling, fell on my knees, and cried out in every tone of voice I could muster: 'Blessed be thy soul, king of men! Who would not have known thee by the princely bearing God has given thee! May there be mothers to bear more such sons! Let me kiss you, my son! May this little gipsy die in torment if he was not wishing to meet you and tell your fortune, and kiss your lordly hands. Behold me at your service. Do you want to know how to trade dead donkeys for live ones? Do you want to sell your old horses for the price of young ones? Do you want to teach French to a mule?'"

The Count Montijo could not suppress a laugh. Then he asked: "And what said Parrón to all this? What did he do?"

"The same as your Honour; he laughed with all his might."

"And you?"

"I, my lord, laughed, too, while tears as big as oranges ran down my cheeks."

"Proceed!"

"Presently he held out his hand to me, and said: 'Friend, you are the only man of talent that has fallen in my power; all the others have had the bad taste to annoy me by weeping and wailing and the like nonsense, which puts me into a bad humour; you alone have made me laugh, and if it were not for these tears——'

"'What? Your Honour, they are for joy!'

"'I believe it, you poor fool. It's the first time for six or seven years that I have laughed; truth is, I haven't wept either. But let us hasten. Eh, boys?'

"For Parrón to say this, and for me to be surrounded by a ring of blunderbusses was quicker than a wink. 'Have mercy on me!' I began to screech.

"'Halt!' cried Parrón. 'We are not ready for this yet. I called you to find out what you took from this man.'

"'A donkey with his hide on.'

"'And money?'

"'Three *duros* and seventy *reals*.'

"'Now then, leave us alone,' and they all withdrew.

"'Now tell me my fortune,' said the robber, extending his hand to me. I took hold of it and thought a moment. I knew I was in a position to speak freely, so I said to him, with all the conviction of my heart: 'Parrón,

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sooner or later, whether you take my life or leave it to me, you will die on the gallows!'

"'I know that already,' answered the bandit with perfect calmness. 'Tell me *when!*'

"I began to consider. This man, said I to myself, is going to free me; to-morrow I'll be in Granada, and preach; the next day they'll take him; then the trial will begin. 'Do you ask *when?*' I said aloud. 'Then take notice, it will be during next month.'

"Parrón shuddered and so did I, fearing my love of fortune-telling would be my death.

"'Look you, gipsy,' replied Parrón very deliberately, 'you will remain in my power, and if by the end of next month they do not hang me, I will hang you, as sure as they hanged my father. If I die by that time you will go free.'

"'Much obliged,' said I to myself, 'to pardon me after death,' and I repented for having made the time so short. We stayed at the aforesaid camp, and I was locked up in a cave, while Parrón mounted his mare, and took the track through the bushes."

"All right," said the Count, "I understand; Parrón is dead; you are free; and therefore you know his whereabouts."

"Quite the contrary, my General! Parrón is alive! And now comes the blackest part of my story.

"A week passed without the Captain coming to see us, and, as far as I could make out, he had not shown himself in the neighbourhood since the evening I told his fortune; a thing not at all extraordinary, as my guards told me. For, do you know, the chief goes away alone occasionally, and doesn't return till it suits him. The fact is, we know nothing whatever of him during these long absences. About this time, by force of entreaty, and having told the fortunes of the band, prognosticating freedom from hanging and comfortable old age for all, I had succeeded in getting them to take me out during the evenings, and bind me to a tree, for I was smothering with heat in the cell. Needless to say, there was a pair of them continually at my side.

"One evening, about six o'clock, the robbers who had been on 'duty' by command of Parrón's lieutenant, returned to camp, bringing with them a miserable reaper forty to fifty years old, manacled, and crying fit to break one's heart. 'Give me back my twenty *duros!*' he said. 'Ah, if you only knew what it cost me to earn them! A whole summer's reaping in the sun! A whole summer away from my wife and children! And so I scraped together by my toil and self-denial this sum, that we might live this winter, and that on reaching home I might embrace them, and pay the debts the unfortunate ones have contracted, so that they might live. Ought I to lose this money, which is a fortune to me? Pity, gentlemen! Give me my twenty *duros*, for the sake of the most Holy Mary of Sorrows.'

"A mocking laugh answered the plaints of the old man. Bound as I was to the tree, I shook with terror! For gipsies, too, have families.

"'Don't be a fool!' finally said a bandit, going to the reaper. 'You do wrong in thinking of money when more important matters should occupy your thoughts.'

"'How?' said the reaper, not supposing there could be a greater misfortune than his children going without bread.

"'You are in Parrón's hands.'

"'Parrón? I don't know him—never heard of him. I come a long way; I belong to Alicante, and was reaping in Sevilla.'

"'But, my friend, Parrón means *death!* Everyone that falls into our hands must die; therefore, make your will in two minutes, and your peace with God in the next two. Make ready! Aim! You have four minutes.'

"'I am going to improve them. Hear me, for pity's sake.'

"'Speak.'

"'I have six children and one unfortunate—*widow*, I will say, since I must die; for I read in your eyes that you are worse than wild beasts—yes, worse—for beasts of the same species do not destroy each other. Oh, pardon! I know not what I say. Gentlemen, some one of you must be a father! Is there not a father—is there not a father among you? Do you know what it is to have children starving all the winter? Do you know what it is for a mother to see the children of her blood die, crying: "I am hungry; I am cold?" Gentlemen, I don't want to live without them; for what would life be to me?—a chain of toil and privation. But I must live for my children's sake—oh, my children, children, of my heart!'

"The father dragged himself along the ground and turned his face to the robbers. Such a face! It seemed like one of those saints that King Nero threw to the lions, as the preachers say. The robbers felt something stir within their breasts; then they looked at one another, and, seeing all were of one accord, one made bold to say——"

"What said he?" asked the Captain-General, deeply affected by the story.

"He said: 'Comrades, what we are about to do must never be known to Parrón.'

"'Never! Never!' muttered the rest of the bandits.

"'Go thy way, good man,' said another, almost weeping, and I made signs to the reaper that he should instantly go.

"'Quick! March!' they said, and all turned their backs. The reaper held out his hand beseechingly.

"'Aren't you satisfied?' growled one. 'Do you want your money besides? Go! go! Do not try our patience!'

"The poor father went away weeping, and soon was out of sight.

"Perhaps a half-hour later, and which was taken up by the bandits swearing one another not to tell the Captain they had freed a man, there suddenly appeared Parrón, leading the reaper alongside his mare.

"The bandits fell back astounded. Parrón dismounted leisurely, unslung his two-barrelled carbine, and aiming at his comrades, said: 'Fools! Idiots! I know not why I do not shoot every one of you! Quick! give back to this man the twenty *duros* you took from him!' The robbers produced the money and gave it to the reaper, who cast himself at the feet of the bandit chief who had so kind a heart.

"Parrón said to him: 'By the peace of Heaven! without your directions I never should have found them. Now, you see you mistrusted me without cause. I have fulfilled my promise—you have your twenty *duros*. Now be off!'

"The reaper kissed him again and again, and departed full of joy; but he had gone hardly fifty paces when his benefactor called him anew, and the poor man hastened to retrace his steps.

"'What is your command?' said he, anxious to do a service to him who had restored happiness to his family.

"'Do you know Parrón?' asked the man himself.

"'I know him not.'

"'You mistake,' said the chief, 'I am he!'

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"The reaper stood stupefied. Parrón brought his carbine to his cheek and fired both barrels at the reaper, who fell rolling on the ground.

"'May you be accursed,' were the only words he spoke. During the terror that blinded me I felt the tree to which I was bound quiver slightly, and that my bonds were loose. One of the balls after having wounded the reaper, hit the cord which held me fast, and cut it. I concealed my freedom and waited a chance for escape. Meantime Parrón, pointing to the reaper, said to his men: 'Now you can rob him. You pack of idiots! You lot of fools! To free this man that he might go as he did, howling along the highway! Fortunately it was I that met him, and learnt what had happened, for had it been the soldiers, he would have shown them the way to this camp, same as he did to me, and we would all have been in prison by this. See the result of robbing and not killing; but enough of preaching, bury this body before it rot.'

"While the robbers were digging a grave, Parrón was feeding, with his back to me. Little by little I moved from the tree, and slipped down a hollow near by. It was already night, and shielded by the darkness, I set out with all haste. By the starlight I found my donkey who was quietly feeding, tied to an ash-tree. I mounted him and never stopped till I got here. Therefore, my lord, give me the thousand *reals*, and I will put you on Parrón's track, who, by-the-bye, has kept my three-and-a-half *duros*."

The gipsy, having given a description of the bandit, afterwards received the promised reward, and departed from the General's office, leaving the Count and a person then present, from whom I had these details, utterly confounded. It remains to be seen whether Heredia guessed aright when he foretold Parrón's destiny.

Fifteen days after the scene we have just described took place, about nine in the morning, a large crowd of idlers attended the assembling of two companies of soldiers in the streets of San Juan de Dios and part of that of San Felipe, in the aforesaid capital city, who, about a half-hour later, were to set out in quest of Parrón, the description of his hiding-place, his person, and his comrades having been finally approved by the Count of Montijo. The interest and excitement of the public was extraordinary, and none the less so was the soberness with which the soldiers took leave of families and friends before starting on so important an expedition: such fear had Parrón aroused throughout the whole kingdom of Granada.

"Seems we are ready to fall in," said one soldier to his comrade. "But I don't see Cabo-Lopéz."

"That's strange, too, for he was always on hand first of any when there was talk of hunting Parrón. He hated him with all his heart."

"So, don't you know what has happened?" said a third one, joining in the talk.

"Hello! this must be our new man. How do you like our company?"

"Very well, indeed," answered the one inquired of, a man of pale complexion and fine shape, which was partly hidden by the uniform.

"What were you saying?" asked the first.

"Ah, yes. Cabo-Lopéz is dead," replied the pale-faced one.

"Manuel! What are you talking about? This can't be. I, myself, saw Lopéz this morning, surely as I see you now."

Manuel said: "Half-an-hour ago Parrón killed him."

"Parrón! Where?"

"Right here in Granada. They found Lopéz's dead body on the Dog's Hill."

All kept silent except Manuel, who began to whistle a patriotic air.

"Eleven men gone in six days," said a sergeant. "Parrón means to exterminate us! But how comes it that he is in Granada? Aren't we going to look in the Sierra-de-Loja?"

Manuel ceased whistling, and said with his usual recklessness: "An old woman who saw the deed says that since he killed Lopéz, she hopes, if we look for him, we may have the pleasure of seeing him."

"Comrade! aren't you pretty bold to speak of Parrón with such contempt?"

"Well, is Parrón more than a man?" asked Manuel with a shrug.

Just then "Fall in!" was shouted by various tongues. The two companies formed and roll call was begun.

Now it happened that at that moment Heredia was going by, and like everyone else, stopped to admire the soldiers.

It seemed as if Manuel, the new soldier, gave a start, and fell back a little so as to hide behind his comrades, when Heredia caught sight of him, gave a yell, and, jumping as if he had stepped on a viper, started to run up San Yeronimos Street.

Manuel raised his musket and aimed at the gipsy, but another soldier was quick enough to strike the gun up, and the shot was spent in the air.

"He's crazy! Manuel has gone mad! A soldier has lost his wits!" was shouted in succession by the lookers-on, and officers, sergeants, and privates fell on the man, who was struggling to escape, and whom, after they had subdued him, they plied with questions, accusations and insults which drew from him no response whatever. Meantime, Heredia had been seized by some passers-by, who, seeing him running and hearing the musket shot, took him for a malefactor.

"Lead me to the Captain-General," said the gipsy; "I must speak to the Count of Montijo—Count of Montijo, indeed!"

"Who have you killed?" asked his captors. "Here comes the guard and they'll know what to do with you."

"I think so, too," said Heredia, "but be careful not to let Parrón kill me."

"What do you mean by Parrón? What's the man talking about?"

"Come and you will see," and, so saying, the gipsy made them take him to the Commandant of the platoon, and, pointing to Manuel, he said: "Commandant, this is Parrón, and I am the gipsy who two weeks ago gave a description of him to the Count of Montijo."

"Parrón! Parrón is taken! A soldier proved to be Parrón!" shouted the crowd.

"No doubt about it," said the Commandant, reading the order given him by the Captain-General. "We certainly have been very stupid; but who would have thought of looking for the robber chief among the very soldiers that were searching for him."

"Fool that I am," Parrón was saying to himself, regarding the gipsy with eyes wonderfully like a lion's. "He is the only man to whom I ever granted life. I deserve what has happened."

The week following Parrón was executed, and so the gipsy's prophecy was literally fulfilled.

Pedro Antonio de Alarcon.

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THE PORTRAIT OF A SINGER

It had been a white morning for Kenyon.

A quick lightness and elation marked his step as he paced to and fro before his easel. His head was high, his grey eyes bright, and his shrill whistle rang joyously through the studio, flooded from the lofty skylight with pale April radiance. His brush dashed at the canvas impetuously, confidently; a hundred little inspirations of the happy moment guiding it to the desired effect. It seemed he could do nothing amiss.

The slim, white-armed girl on the model-throne—an exquisite harmony of singing tones—appeared to glow with some reflection of the painter's face. She had posed in perfection, with but a five-minutes' rest, for two hours. Two hours which seemed like twenty minutes to Kenyon, tramping absorbedly backwards and forwards over the fragments of his cherished meerschaum, an old friend unheedingly sacrificed in a moment's frenzy of delight.

Now and then he warbled contentedly, in a thin falsetto, an air which resembled nothing in particular; and then fell to whistling again, with short intervals of contemplative silence, always succeeded by a simultaneous outburst of paint and vocal jubilation.

It was a morning in a thousand. And there yet remained another good hour of the sitting, with much to be done. When, therefore, the little electric bell at the door suddenly thrilled out sharply, Kenyon only stopped short in the midst of the "Habanera," scowled viciously, and went on with his work. The dead silence which fell upon the room had not the desired effect of routing the unwelcome visitor. After the lapse of a long minute the bell rang again; and this appeal, evoking from within nothing except an imprecation sufficiently deep, but audible, was succeeded by a smart knock on the panel of the door.

Kenyon crossed the room to assure himself that the bolt protected him from forcible invasion; and satisfied that it did, he was about to turn away, when a lady's visiting card was pushed over the lintel. He waited another minute and then, assuming that the owner had departed, went and picked up the card. It read "Baroness Folkner von Tannhausen," and, written in pencil below the name, "begs that Mr. Kenyon will give her a short interview on urgent business."

Whether from gallantry or curiosity or apparent necessity, Kenyon yielded. He shrugged his shoulders, with a look of bored vexation, called to the model, "Rest, Mamie," and when the shimmer of her green robes had disappeared in the little corridor, which separated his living-room from the studio, he unbolted and opened the outer door.

A short woman, dressed in mourning, rustled past him, bending her head slightly in answer to his somewhat ironical bow. Kenyon silently set a chair for her, and she seated herself, putting aside the heavy crape veil from her face.

"Mr. Kenyon," she said, "I hope you'll forgive me for intruding in this way. I know you were busy, but I was so anxious to see you—and I sail to-morrow morning."

She spoke with perfect fluency, but yet with an undefinable accent, which was not German; while her mature and faded charms were of a surprising type: half Spanish, half Oriental. Her manner had a certain authority, which fitted better, perhaps, than her title, but not so well as her gown. It was the self-confidence of a woman accustomed to admiration and applause—hardly that of the "great lady" to whom the title and name, by no means unknown, seemed to point.

Kenyon walked to a small table near by, laid down his palette and brushes, and returned.

"I am at your disposal, madam," he said coldly.

"I wish—I wish to ask you to execute a commission for me—a portrait."

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A slight nervousness here manifested itself in her manner. Her long, black eyes, which, with the straight brows and narrow forehead, were now the sole charm of her face, left Kenyon's and roved restlessly

"I am at your disposal, madam."

over the pale-toned walls, lined half-way up with canvases framed and unframed, in all stages of evolution. Other canvases were stacked at the back of the studio, partly concealed by a large screen of Moorish fretwork, over which had been thrown a heap of gauzy orange-coloured draperies, and the black eyes rested on these.

She went on abruptly: "You painted not long ago, I believe, a portrait of Karl Savary, the singer—is it not so?"

"Yes," said Kenyon, in some surprise.

"What has become of that picture?"

"It is here."

"Here—in this place?"

"Yes, madam."

"How is that—it is not your property?"

"Yes," said Kenyon. He went on, half unwillingly, half amused at this catechism: "You see, the picture was not quite finished at the time of Savary's death. His affairs were left in confusion. His relatives are poor people in Germany—and, in short, the portrait remains with me."

"Is it for sale?—but why do I ask? Mr. Kenyon, what I want is a small copy of that picture. Will you make it for me?"

Kenyon hesitated a few moments, looking curiously at his visitor. Her request had suggested to him an odd train of ideas. Across these suddenly flashed into his mind the remembrance of a face like and unlike this matronly, double-chinned, coarse-fleshed countenance—a young face, with the same glancing eyes and narrow brow, but full of life and colour.

"I have seen you somewhere," he said, with unconscious brusqueness.

She made a quick movement of exasperation, and the colour rose dully in her dark cheeks.

"Very likely. But what difference does that make? You have not answered me."

"I beg your pardon," said Kenyon slowly, realising that her eyes had been on his with an intense eagerness. Plainly she attached no little importance to the request. His first impulse had been to refuse, but after a moment he said slowly:

"I don't know. I am very busy just at present——"

"A month—two months, then? Can I have it in two months?"

"Well—yes. In two months."

She drew a long breath. "And now, may I see the picture? I have heard much of it. I have even seen a photograph of it. It has been exhibited here, yes? But show it to me, please."

She rose to her feet and threw the long veil back over her shoulders. Her eyes were very bright, her whole face almost childishly eager. Despite her years and her stoutness, which the lines of her well-cut gown did not succeed in concealing, she still possessed a certain attraction—the charm of a woman secure of herself, accustomed to please.

Kenyon withdrew his eyes from her with an effort due less to this charm than to the faint-floating ghost of a recollection which teased him with its persistent intangibility. He dragged out from behind the Moorish screen a large canvas, and with some difficulty, due to its unwieldly size, got it across the room and put it into the gilt frame destined for it when complete. The Baroness stood with her back to him. He spoke to her twice. Then suddenly she wheeled about and faced the picture. Her eyes dilated, her lips parted.

"*Dios mio!* It is he!" she murmured.

Her face seemed like a translucent mask behind which some pale radiance flickered in gusts. All at once her eyes brimmed over. Her gloves, which she had stripped off, fell to the floor, and her hands, glittering with immense diamonds, clasped a richly-jewelled cross which flashed from the crape folds of her corsage. After some moments she turned and looked up at Kenyon through her tears as frankly as a child.

"He was a dear friend of mine," she said softly. "He died here, far away from—from his home. You must have seen him often; you must have known him well—to paint him like that. Tell me—tell me something of him."

"Yes, I knew him in a way," said Kenyon absently. "I saw him nearly every day while that was going on," indicating the picture. "And yet I didn't know him well. But"—here he hesitated and his voice softened, "I was with him when he died."

"Ah—h!"

She moved backwards, her eyes still on his, and sank into a chair, and Kenyon, momentarily forgetting his interrupted work and the model waiting behind the screen, sat down near her.

"You know it was pneumonia," he went on. "He had taken a bad cold somehow, and he persisted in working on in spite of the doctors. It was the first big season of Wagner opera here, and the success of it depended on Savary; and, of course, he knew it. He finished the week with a great performance of 'Tannhäuser'—then went home to his hotel and gave

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up. Before morning he was delirious; they had to take him to the hospital. He died there three days later at daybreak."

The Baroness dried her eyes, and twisted her handkerchief in and out of her begemmed fingers.

"And you were with him those two days?"

"Yes. He was delirious nearly all the time. He never knew me."

"And did he suffer much during this terrible illness?"

"Poor fellow—yes."

She shivered, caught her breath, and her lips quivered.

"It was very—good of you, Mr. Kenyon——"

"No. There seemed to be no one else."

"No one else? No one—out of all who loved him? Oh, Heavens!"

She bowed her face in her hands; then, after a little while, looked up, carefully dried her eyes again, and said, with an effort at composure:

"Pardon me for distressing you. It is very bad taste, I know. But tell me one thing more. When he was delirious—he talked a great deal, of course."

"Yes. But most in some German dialect with which I am not familiar. I caught only a word here and there—generally something about his home, or the lake and the linden trees——"

"Ah, yes—poor boy! He was so young and strong—to die like that. His beautiful face, his beautiful voice—gone, gone for ever! But the good God knows best." She bent her head and pressed the diamond cross to her lips. Then she looked up quickly, piercingly, at Kenyon. "Did he speak any name, do you remember? any woman's name?"

"No. He called several times for his mother."

"Poor boy, he has found her now. You are quite sure—no other name?"

"I heard no other," said Kenyon, with a little frown of displeasure.

She turned her head and looked long and silently at the picture.

"I have seen him like that so often," she murmured.

"Dios mio! It is he!" she murmured.

"What a chest—what arms! Golden hair, golden voice—heart of gold! He was a man!"

Suddenly she rose. "Pardon me for taking so much of your time, Mr. Kenyon. I am ashamed of my thoughtlessness. And now—my picture?"

"You shall have it in two months."

"Thank you. I will give you the address of my banker in Berlin. Please send it to him, securely packed, as soon as it is finished." She handed Kenyon a card and a slip of blue paper. "I had brought that cheque with me, but if it is not right——"

"It is quite right, thank you."

She gave a last, long look at the picture, then dropped her veil over her face, thanked Kenyon again, and finally departed.

Kenyon went back to his easel, and the model came out and resumed her pose. But somehow the light and atmosphere—or perhaps the painter's mood—had changed. He was preoccupied and absent. The delicious problem of his colour scheme—pale terra cotta and golden green as a setting for youthful pink flesh and auburn hair—had ceased to promise a near solution. The splendid vision of the early morning had begun to fade into the inevitable light of common day. Yet he worked on conscientiously until the half-past twelve whistle announced the end of the sitting. Very promptly then he laid down his palette, nodded to the model, and began to clean his brushes, whistling pensively the while. By this time he had washed his hands and put on his coat and hat; the girl, too, was ready and they went out together.

On the days when the little Irishwoman sat to Kenyon—and these were frequent, for she was a favourite model (the head and hands and the draped figure)—the two were accustomed to lunch in company at a small French restaurant on—or, rather under—the dingy little square. This establishment consisted of a single basement room, low ceiled, and lit perpetually by sparse, unshaded gas-jets, which flared strongly at intervals, leaving the greater part of the place in darkness. But it was clean and cheap, had a

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reputation among the Bohemians of the quarter for old cheese, crusty bread, and fresh salads, and was accordingly frequented by many who might have afforded a more pretentious *ménage*.

Kenyon, habited to the place, had his special seat at a small table in a corner, where it was his pleasure, while imbibing the foaming beer or the mild red wines, to lie in wait for savage effects of light and shade, which he always thought he would utilise, but never did.

To-day he was in an unresponsive mood. He drank his hock and ate his bread and cheese, half listening to his companion's brisk chatter, putting in a word now and then, or smiling at some flash of her mischievous wit, but oftener ignoring her altogether. When he had finished his frugal meal, he fished out a short, black pipe from his inner pocket, and proceeded to add his quota to the coil of blue smoke that undulated along the ceiling. After a long silence, he said abruptly, shutting his teeth on the stem of his pipe:

"Bother the woman! I wish I knew where I've seen her!"

"Seen who? The lady in mourning, you mean? I'll tell you, if you like," said the girl readily.

"Pooh! You don't know her, do you?"

"Never saw her till I looked through the crack of the door this morning. But I'll bet I can tell where *you* saw her. On the stage."

"By jove! I believe you're right!" exclaimed Kenyon instantly. "I wonder," he added meditatively.

"Yes, a singer—or dancer. Retired, of course, and rich—probably married," she added, nodding her head sagely.

"Look here, Mamie, I'll tell you a story," began Kenyon, smiling whimsically. Then he stopped suddenly and said to himself, "No, I won't either. I'll tell it to *her*," and added, aloud, "some other day."

With that he got up unceremoniously, and after paying toll to fat Madame Lefebevre at the desk, went out, followed by the model's twinkling glance.

Perhaps it was the idea of Constance which drove Kenyon out of that tobacco and garlic-scented atmosphere away from the red-haired girl sitting with her elbows on the table and her narrow eyes blinking in the glare of the gas. In there it seemed somehow a profanation to think of her. He strolled on round the little square, pipe in mouth, his hat pulled down over his eyes and his hands plunged deep into the pockets of his loose overcoat. It was an unfashionable neighbourhood, and he attracted no more than a passing glance from the noisy children crowding the pavement. He noted abstractedly that the thin branches of the few lime-trees were studded with swelling buds, and that a faint green was suffusing the dusty plots where the fat sparrows wrangled; and recollected suddenly that the morrow would be Easter Sunday. A faint brooding smile lit his dreamy eyes as a radiant figure all in palest grey, grey-eyed and bright-haired, dawned on his inward vision. The incident of the morning had by this time quite faded from his mind. He was thinking now of the woman whom his love and reverence set apart from all other women. He was thinking that he was to see her that same afternoon.

He went back to his rooms, spent two hours over an edition of "Maurice de Guérin," which he was interleaving with drawings; then dressed and, stopping at a florist's on his way, started for Kensington.

* * * * *

The ladies were at home, the butler told him, and after a brief delay he was shown into the "morning-room," a small apartment separated from the library by Indian hangings, and opening into a miniature

He strolled on round the little square.

conservatory. The little nook, with its tempered light and soft blending of dull pinks and greens, had the air of an hothouse, and the slender girl on the divan among the gold cushions was like a lily grown under glass.

"But you are going out!" exclaimed Kenyon disappointedly, releasing her long, gloved fingers.

"Yes—to drive, and afterwards to a tea or two," said Constance, smiling. "Aunt Jem insists on my driving an hour every day—to bring back my colour, she says. As though I had ever had colour!"

"Then I won't repine," said Kenyon, taking a chair near her and dropping his violets in her lap, "for you certainly look paler than I like. Aren't you dissipating too much?"

"Dissipating—not much!"

"You know you're scarcely strong yet. If you don't look out you'll be packed off for another sea voyage."

Constance laughed and turned the question.

The acquaintance between these two was of little more than a year's duration, the latter three months of which time Constance had spent in Provence and Southern Spain. But before her sudden departure at the beginning of the season, this acquaintance had pro-

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gressed so far that there was—at least on Kenyon's side—no question of allowing it to drop, and it had been continued through those three months by letter. It may have been due to the interest and charm which Kenyon was able to infuse into his share of the correspondence that the two met again not as acquaintances, but as friends at least. For he wrote with his soul in his finger-tips, alive and alert to seek out that other soul to which all his hope addressed itself.

Almost from the very first meeting of all, he had acknowledged to himself—this philosophic dreamer of forty—that henceforth life held something for him beyond philosophy, or dreams, or love as he had known it, or, perhaps, art even, the master and crucible of all. She was so completely what a woman worth winning must be! Her patrician grace, her reserve, her youthful coldness, caprice even, seemed the entire fulfilment of an ideal which must always have lurked somewhere in his heart! He had never even wondered at his own swift and utter subjugation.

It was part of the scheme of things, and so, too, was the promise which had begun to shine for him in her serene eyes. The definite word had not yet been spoken. The lingering on the threshold had its charm, to Kenyon even.

Meantime his position in the house was perfectly assured, if not defined exactly. Mrs. Ferriss, the aunt with whom Constance lived, approved of him, both from the worldly and the personal point of view. Indeed, she had been known privately to declare that were it not for Mr. Ferriss she would have married him herself.

"You shall drive with us this afternoon, if you like," said Constance graciously, fastening the violets into the belt of her gown. "And you may as well go to the Caswells' tea, too. I hope you were intending to go? Just think of the dinners you've eaten in that house!"

"I know, but there won't be any more—dinners, I mean—till next season. However, I'll accept for the drive, with many thanks. And, by-the-way, when are you going to let me paint you in that gown? You promised, you know. And I've been dreaming of it. That grey, with the pink and lavender lights—it looks like a mist with a rainbow caught in it!"

"How poetical—if you could only paint your dream! You should have done it some time in Lent. You might have painted me in this Paris hat, and called the picture 'A Penitent!' But you must be too busy now. We haven't seen you for days. What have you been doing ever since—let me see—Thursday?"

"Oh, pegging away, as usual. I've been working hard on the 'Oread,' and it's coming—I think! Our exhibition opens in two weeks, you know, and I want that to go in. It's going to be the best thing I've done. The colour of the girl in her green gown—it's great!"

"Yes, I dare say. You painters all rave over red-haired girls. But what else shall you send?"

"Oh, a landscape or two—just to show those fellows that I *can* paint a landscape—and the portrait of Savary."

"Savary! I thought—I did not know you had that yet."

"Yes, for the present. I've been touching up some details a bit. I shall give it to the same gallery eventually, I think. It's the best thing I've done so far. You think so, don't you?"

"Well, I hardly know. I didn't see it after it was finished. It promised to be—very good, I remember."

"It has attracted a good deal of attention, principally, of course, because of Savary's sudden death, and because it's the only decent portrait of him. You remember the sensation his death made, don't you? Or was it just after you sailed? No, it was just before, I recollect now. Well, the portrait was nearly finished then; fortunately the figure was complete, or fairly so. People kept coming in and begging to see it. So I sent it to a little exhibition at the 'Paint and Clay,' unfinished as it was. But that was after you went away. I thought, though, that I had shown it to you since you came back!"

"I never saw it but once; no, twice. The first time, you remember, Aunt Jem and I came to the studio."

"I remember. You spoiled the sitting. Savary wouldn't keep his head in pose for looking at you. And then you went to the piano and sang something from *Carmen*, and Savary struck in with the Toreador's song, and then you sang some duet or the other. And I sat on the model throne and twiddled my thumbs. It was good music, though. What a voice he had!"

Constance laughed suddenly. "And I went to your studio again one day. You weren't there, but I made your boy let me in, and I went poking about among your things."

"You did! Well! He never told me!"

Kenyon regarded her with puzzled surprise. She took the violets from her belt and nervously pulled them apart.

"Yes. I always meant to tell you. It was a freak. And I saw the picture again. That was the last time."

There was a short silence.

"Speaking of Savary reminds me," began Kenyon; but paused there at the sibilant rustle of silken petticoats approaching.

"Dear Mr. Kenyon, so glad to see you! You are just in time to drive with us. No, do sit down again; there is no hurry—and don't let me interrupt you. You were talking about a pet enthusiasm of mine, weren't you, Constance, love? I mean Karl Savary. Mr. Kenyon, I had an immense admiration for that man—his voice, his beauty, his genius! His death was a great shock to me. You know he sang here on several of our Sunday evenings when he wouldn't sing at other houses for love or money. The last time was just a week before he died—think of it!"

Mrs. Ferriss sank gently into a chair and nodded her pretty head, crowned with the gayest of French bonnets.

"He was rather a favourite with your charming sex, I think," said Kenyon smoothly. "That is to say, behind the glitter of the footlights; or, perhaps, as the lion of a soirée—a lion with a well-kept mane and a most musical roar, certainly. For I don't suppose you knew him personally?"

"Oh, no, I don't mean that, of course. No doubt in private life he drank too much beer and ate unpleasant things, and was generally unromantic—poor fellow! I never talked with him, really, for he spoke very little English, you know—Constance got on better with him, I believe. But just to sit and look at him! And when he sang—who could be coldly rational with that voice fairly drawing the heart out of your breast——"

"Don't be absurd, Aunt Jem," said Constance rather sharply, decapitating violets.

"Constance, dear, you used to think so yourself. You were very fond of Herr Savary's singing."

"Was I?" said Constance coldly. "Mr. Kenyon,

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you were saying something when Aunt Jem came in. Go on, please."

"Oh," said Kenyon, after a moment, "I remember. It was a rather curious little coincidence that occurred this morning; that is, one incident did. The other happened some time ago."

He went on to describe his visitor of the morning ending with:

"She appears now as a German baroness, but I am quite certain that I recollect her eight or ten years ago as a distinguished ornament of the burlesque stage. She was a Cuban, and a beautiful creature, too. No doubt her title and rank are genuine enough, for I indistinctly remember that she retired from the public eye at the zenith of her fame, and married an admirer who was said to be both rich and noble. Ease and prosperity haven't altogether agreed with her, though. She has lost her beauty. Some three months ago, just after Savary's death, I executed another commission of exactly the same sort—a small copy of this very picture—for a woman, too. Odd, isn't it?"

"Odd—it's fascinating! But, tell us, who was the other woman?"

"I don't know. I never saw her. A messenger boy brought me her note, written on the sort of paper and in the sort of hieroglyphic hand that most women—ladies, I mean—use nowadays. The note was unsigned and undated, and simply asked if I would make such a copy at once, on my own terms. I was to send a reply by the messenger, stating the earliest date when I could complete it. As it happened, I wasn't very busy just at that time, and I despatched an acceptance. A week later came another note in the same way, thanking me, enclosing—no, not a cheque, dear Mrs. Ferriss, but a packet of notes, and asking me to have the picture, when finished, put into an ebony frame, fitted with doors that could be locked. I sent an answer, promising to do so.

"Well, that is about all. I finished the picture. On the appointed day another messenger came and carried it away. And that was the end of it. Another of his flames, I fancy. I cannot understand why women should so humiliate themselves."

Constance was still tearing the violets to pieces and Mrs. Ferriss exclaimed softly:

"How mysterious! I should have tried to find out who she was. But are you sure it was a woman? Of course, though, it must have been. But why the locked doors, do you suppose? Altogether it is a real story—you ought to write it up and print it. I shall always look at your portrait now with a new interest. But it is odd that you never mentioned anything of this to us before, isn't it, Constance? And about you being with that poor young man in his illness, and when he died—he never told us of it, did he, Constance?"

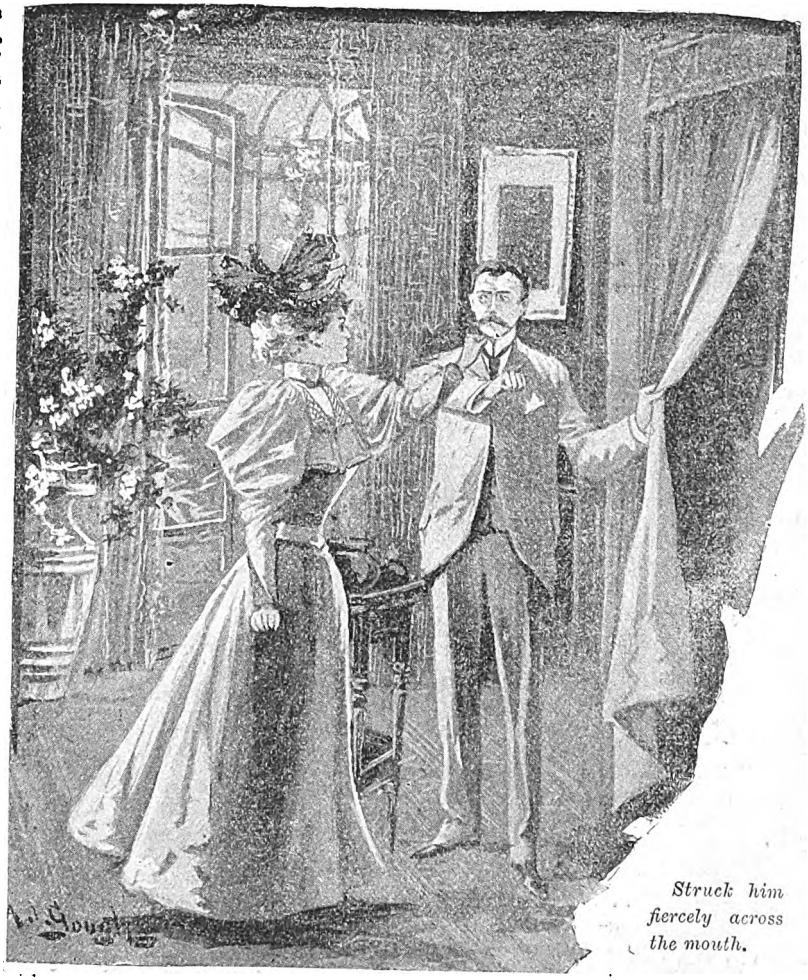
"No, he never told us of it," echoed the girl.

She got up, dropping the violets from her lap, and crossed the room to the fireplace, where a small bed of coals smouldered dimly under a veil of grey ashes.

"And now we must really be going," said Mrs. Ferriss briskly, rising and drawing her velvet wrap about her shoulders.

"I'm afraid I've kept you ——," began Kenyon.

"Indeed you haven't. We are in plenty of time for our drive—a good long one, too, that ought to bring a little colour to this girl's pale cheeks."



Struck him fiercely across the mouth.

Kenyon held the *portière* aside for her, and she called over her shoulder:

"Come, Constance!"

The girl, standing with her back to them, started imperceptibly. There was a little crash, and the fragments of a Sèvres cup tinkled on the tiles of the fireplace.

As she swept past Kenyon out of the room she struck him fiercely across the mouth.

Leith Boyce.

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THE PHANTOM OF BEN SEID.

MY uncle was a soldier, and feared nothing. My uncle was a philosopher, and believed nothing. He listened to priest and parson with equal disgust. He looked upon the church and chapel with equal contempt. He went beyond his school, he was not even a Bhuddist! I have said that my uncle believed nothing. The assertion is too broad; he believed in ruins. In search of them he travelled over Europe, at great expense and with immense discomforts.

In France he heard of an old Moorish castle in Southern Spain, which nobody had "done" in a hundred years. An Englishman had attempted it, but had succumbed for want of beef and surfeit of garlic, and had returned. A Frankfort Jew, in pursuit of an absconding debtor, had penetrated to within a league of it. The hospitable inhabitants had demanded that he should embrace the true religion. The misguided man had refused. He, also, had returned, but without ears! A Frenchman had thought to reach it. He had taken a guide across the mountains, and had not returned.

My uncle was delighted. He paid his bill; he ordered horses; he set out at once for Spain. At the frontiers he dismissed his horses, and took the national conveyance. In crossing the Pyrenees his animal made a false step on the edge of a precipice. As the mule fell out, my uncle fell in. The animal descended several hundred feet, and was broken to a jelly. His rider fell in a narrow path, and was but slightly bruised.

The muleteer, exasperated at the loss of his beast, discharged at my uncle a vituperative epithet. My uncle replied with a threat of the next Alcalde. The muleteer discharged his carbine; the bullet grazed my uncle's head. His reply to this is not recorded, but the next party found, sitting in the path, a muleteer, who had reported that an Inglees had shot him and stolen his mule. This party, being English, felt bound to make reparation. They gave the driver a thrashing and passed on.

My uncle, also, passed on, with as much haste as is possible in Spain, in the direction of Seville. There was no beef, the wine was poor, the bread bad, the chickens tough, the garlic detestable; but the eggs were the best in the world. He subsisted on the latter.

In as short a time as would be required for the grand pilgrimage to Mecca, he arrived at the passes of Seville. He stopped at a wretched inn, and asked for a guide. The innkeeper knew an excellent one. Indeed, he knew the prince of guides. He had conducted many over; he had never conducted any back. The prince of guides was brought. He smelled of garlic and looked villainous, which was natural. He was polite, and named a reasonable sum for his services, which was suspicious.

They set out at once. On entering the pass, my uncle asked to borrow his conductor's musket. The Spaniard declined to lend. My uncle held a pistol to his head, and he consented. Slinging the captured musket to the saddle of his mule, my uncle commanded the conductor to keep six paces to the front; and impressively informed him that if he were attacked from any quarter, he would move the finger pressing against the trigger of the pistol still pointed at his head. For the first time in his life the guide brought his charge in safety to the village across the mountains. For this he demanded extra compensation, and the Alcalde sustained the demand.

I have said that my uncle was a soldier. For all that, being also a philosopher, he preferred diplomacy to war. He had made his entry under unfavourable circumstances. He had been convicted of defrauding a poor robber of his dues. He was an object of suspicion; it was necessary to remove that suspicion.

He informed the Alcalde that he was more learned than the Chief Justice of Salamanca. He informed the Alcalde's fat daughter that she was more beautiful than the fair Florinda of Centa! Neither had ever heard of the illustrious personages to whom they were compared, but the compliment told the same. He represented to the priest that he had been sent by the Cardinal Archbishop of England, who had heard of the piety of the people of the valley and the grace and eloquence of their pastor, with a quantity of treasure for the repair of the church.

Indeed, that his only objection to being robbed had been on account of the loss to religion. His fine was remitted, and the sacrilegious guide driven from the village.

My uncle, happier than the Jew, had no faith to deny; he could, therefore, assume that of the people among whom he found himself, without compunction. He did not even deny his birthplace. He merely represented that England was the principal quarter of Rome, which everybody knew to be the seat of the true religion and a province of Spain. As soon as etiquette would allow, he inquired for the ruins of Ben Seid. Nobody had ever heard of them! My uncle had learnt experience that ruins as well as prophets are not held in honour in their own neighbourhood. He, therefore, engaged the housekeeper's best room at double price, and prepared to discover the Moorish Castle for himself.

It is necessary to go to church. Mass was said too early; he therefore attended vespers. Kneeling in the centre of the church was a lady in a black mantilla. Her form was graceful, her hair superb. My uncle passed along, and knelt beside her. She raised a hand, long and white, and put aside the veil which had concealed her features.

He was entranced. He had never seen such beauty in all his life. He was in love! He gazed upon her with rapture. She blushed and dropped her veil. When she left the place, he followed her. He came up with her at the outskirts of the village. He addressed her. He commenced: "Most beautiful, most adorable——" His foot slipped. He fell upon the ground. When he recovered she had disappeared.

He described her to his host; he did not know her. He described her to the Alcalde; he supposed she might be a gipsy from the mountains, and proposed to arrest her. He carelessly spoke of her, without dwelling on her beauty, to the Alcalde's daughter; she had never heard of her. He anxiously portrayed her to the priest; he had never seen her.

My uncle waited impatiently until the next evening. The lady did not appear. He attended every service for a week; he followed black mantillas, and peeped under long veils, until all the woman supposed him in love with them, and all the men were ready to poniard him. Still no lady.

He was in despair. He determined to fly from Spain and forget his love among the ruins of Tangier.

He hired a mule; he employed a guide; he was to leave the following morning.

Oppressed by baffled love and the smoke of villainous cigarettes, which his muleteer and guide were puffing in the *cabaret*, he went down the street until he came opposite the church; he crossed, entered, and walked up the aisle. Kneeling in the same place where he had seen her first was the lady of the black mantilla!

He picked his way cautiously among the prostrate worshippers until he came near her. At his approach she rose and left the building. Again he followed her. As he came up with her she quickened her pace. He kept beside her. She entered a dark mule path leading to the mountains. They came together into an open space where the moon shone full upon them. The lady stopped. My uncle stopped. She spoke; her voice was low and sweet, the exhalation of a generation of guitars. She said: "Why do you follow me, señor?"

"I love you," said he, "madly, passionately love you."

"It ill becomes a great soldier and a great *hidalgo*," said she, "to make sport of a poor unprotected lady."

"You know me?" said he.

"Who does not know," replied she, with enthusiasm, "the messenger of that most magnificent prelate, who, faithful to his trust, risked his most valuable life in the service of our holy religion?"

My uncle blushed. "But, alas!" continued she, "one may be brave in war and true to the faith, yet false in love."

"Not I!" exclaimed he. "I swear by all the saints that I am true—true in life, true in death!"

"And what would you have?" asked she.

"A word of hope!" exclaimed he; "a——" There came a loud halloo, and a clatter of hoofs down the path.

"Fly!" cried she in terror. "He is coming! He will slay you, he will slay us both!"

"Never!" said my uncle. "I am a soldier! I will protect and defend you."

"It is one against a host," whispered she; "if you love me, fly. Perhaps we may meet again!"

"Name the time and place," said he.

"Oh!" cried she, wringing her hands, "I cannot—I dare not!"

"I dare die with you!" said he firmly.

The jingle of spurs, the clash of swords, and the voices of men sounded close at hand.

"Fly!" cried she wildly; "or we both are undone!"

"Promise me——" began he.

"Anything," interrupted she, "only fly!"

"Meet me——"

"At the church of the Santa Dolorosa."

"When?"

"To-morrow, at midnight." And she glided away.

My uncle was in ecstasies. He was the happiest man in Spain. He returned home. The innkeeper presented his bill; it was extortionate, but my uncle paid it without a murmur. He dismissed the muleteer and guide, but not until he had paid them twice what they asked for conducting him on his journey. He retired, but not to sleep. He remembered that he did not know the situation of the place appointed for the meeting.

He rose at dawn. He paced the dirty courtyard an hour, waiting for the innkeeper to appear. He came at length, bearing some bundles of sticks.

"Where," demanded my uncle, "is the church of the Santa Dolorosa?"

The innkeeper dropped his faggots; he crossed himself; he called upon the Virgin; he ran crying into the house: "Here is a madman, inquiring for the Santa Dolorosa!"

The women set up a screaming, which raised the Alcalde, who lived next door. It raised the Alcalde's daughter, who screamed louder than the others on finding herself *en déshabille* under the gaze of the strange gentleman. Among them all they raised the village, men, women, dogs, and children.

It took an hour to explain that the strange gentleman wanted the Dolorosa. It took another to explain that nobody could tell why he shouldn't want her, except Manuel, the village orator.

It was still another hour before Manuel could be found. It was necessary for him to maintain his reputation. He seated himself upon the ground. His neighbours ranged themselves round. His voice was rich—his period magnificent. He narrated the history of Seville, and the exploits of Ferdinand and the Santa Isabella. He rehearsed innumerable legends, among them the following.

"At the time of the expulsion of the Moors'; there was a castle in the mountains of immense strength, and containing vast treasures. This castle was attacked by a great Christian captain, and taken, but not until its defenders were all slain.

"The victor, among other things, carried away the favourite slave of the infidel owner. She was of the most wondrous beauty, and her captain became greatly enamoured of her. Partly by force and partly by persuasion, he induced her to be baptised, and married her. She was not really converted, but in her heart still remained attached to her old faith, and true to the memory of her slain Moorish lord.

"The Christian captain had committed some sins in the course of his turbulent life which troubled him. He debated with himself whether to go on a pilgrimage or build a church. The former would take him from his wife, so he resolved upon the latter. The stones of the Moorish castle were at hand, and he owned the land by conquest. He therefore built his church among the infidel ruins.

"A church was nothing without a priest. He found the finest one in Seville, and installed him. The priest was young and without expression. He became smitten with his patron's wife. She encouraged him out of hatred to her husband and the true religion. The lord surprised them in the church. He slew them both, and their bodies fell across the altar. He fled, horror-struck, from the place of sacrilege, gave his estate to found a monastery, and went on a pilgrimage from which he never returned.

"The church of Santa Dolorosa went to ruin, but the site was still haunted by the Moorish lady and her para-

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mour, the priest. She was still engaged in the ruin of true believers. She was accustomed to select a man who had rendered some signal service to the church, seduce him by her blandishments, entice him to the Santa Dolorosa, and there induce him to marry her.

"At the conclusion of the rites, performed by the recreant priest, the victim would be set upon by a horde of Moorish fiends, in waiting, and immediately torn in pieces. It was said that her power would continue until she should, by mistake, entangle in her toils an infidel like herself."

My uncle understood nothing of this harangue, except that the church of the Santa Dolorosa was the same as the castle of Ben Seid which he had come to find. He impatiently asked Manuel to conduct him thither. The saints forbade that the orator should know the situation of such a heathen nest. The saints forbade that anybody should know where it was.

My uncle was in a fury. He raved; he threatened; he entreated. The village was in a tumult. At length it was remembered that the shepherd Miguel had come across the church once in searching for his sheep.

Miguel thought he could find the place again. The distance was long; he must be well paid. My uncle expected to pay. It was also at the peril of his soul. My uncle was willing to pay for that, too. Then, the saints willing, he would set out the next day after to-morrow!

They set out, and travelled a long distance. It grew dark. Miguel declared he must return. His cattle were suffering for him. It was evident he dared not approach the Dolorosa by night. He gave my uncle directions for finding the ruins, which he said were but half a league distant, and left him.

My uncle had time to review the situation. He was in a strange part of a strange country. He was not certain but that his guide had misled him. It was possible that he was the victim of a plot. Perhaps he had been decoyed into this lonely place for the purpose of robbery or even murder. Perhaps his inamorata had—at the thought of her, his doubts forsook him. "She is beautiful!" said he. "She is good! She is true!"

He pressed on with alacrity in the direction pointed out by Miguel. His way lay up a ravine, where there flowed a mountain stream. The moon had risen, and threw strange shadows across his path from the rocks that lined the gorge. He shrank back to allow a long line of ghostly friars to pass him! He started at an apparition of armed men across his road!

"I am nervous," said he; and he took a copious draught from his hunting-flask. He walked forward, whistling the air of a wild song.

The time passed rapidly. He drew out his watch; it wanted a quarter to twelve! He must have come a league—nay, he must have come several leagues! He had lost his way! It was as safe to go forward as back. He drank again from his flask, and went on.

Directly he found himself on a small tongue of land, overhung by a dark mountain, and before him, beautiful in the moonlight, rose a group of palm-like Moorish columns. He paused, and for a moment, as he gazed on the stately pillars, their spandrels pierced in gossamer lace-work, the horseshoe-shaped corridors with their wealth, the mosaic decoration, and the gilded roof of Phœnician-like carpentry, starred as a heaven, though broken and defaced, still showing the gorgeous imagination of the Saracen, the exultation of the antiquary overcame every other emotion, and he felt that his toils and dangers were amply compensated by this view of the ruins of Ben Seid.

He was aroused from his contemplation by a rustle at his side, and, turning round, saw the beautiful lady of the black mantilla.

"There is no time to lose," whispered she; "the priest is waiting."

My uncle started. "What priest?" said he.

"Alas!" said she, bursting into tears; "I have thrown aside the delicacy of my sex at the promptings of love, and you despise me."

"What do you mean?" said my uncle.

"I have come," replied she, "to the church of Santa Dolorosa under the protection of a few old servants of my ruined house, and accompanied by a simple priest, who, for favours long since received, has remained my faithful friend, to be united according to the rites of our holy religion with the bravest soldier."

Her feelings overpowered her; she sank sobbing on the ground.

My uncle was in love. He was excited with brandy and the novelty of his situation. He had heard of the ardour of Spanish maidens. He seized the lady by the hand; he raised her up; he protested his devotion; he declared his willingness to follow her anywhere; to do anything she wished.

She conducted him to a part of the edifice in a better state of preservation than the rest and through an arched doorway into a large room only lighted by the moonbeams streaming through the crevices in the walls. At the upper end of this room he could distinguish a knot of persons, and among them the figure of a priest. As they advanced the room seemed filled with shadows wavering in the wind. Then came a sound of music, low and monotonous at first, but bursting out at length into a wild wail.

The lady paused and whispered: "Our marriage hymn."

The priest came forward and said, in a mournful voice: "My son, before entering upon this solemn undertaking, it is necessary that one should confess sins and receive absolution."

A sense of his position flashed across my uncle's mind. The deception in regard to his religion could be kept up no longer. He turned to his companion and said: "I was not educated in the Catholic faith; I am open to conviction; no doubt I shall come to see the truth."

"Who and what are you?" interrupted she in a hoarse whisper.

The shadowy forms grew but more distinct, and seemed pressing forward to hear his answer. The priest shook beneath his cowl!

"I am an Englishman," said my uncle; "I am of no religion."

The lady gave a wild shriek. The shadows were fierce, bearded men, their turbans tossing, and their scimitars flashing in the moonlight. The columns bowed; the building swayed; the floor seemed falling into an abyss.

When my uncle came to himself it was broad daylight. The sun was shining through the broken windows and the birds were singing their morning songs. He held something clasped in his hand. He looked down; it was the skeleton of a lady's hand! The fingers long and taper, and covered with rich jewels! He threw it from him with disgust. For the first time in his life he breathed a prayer. He rose and hurried from the place. He returned to the inn; he recalled his guide; he took his way to the nearest port, and left Spain for ever.

JULES MACDONALD.

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LUCIE'S REVENGE.

"Lucie, you are going too far; I tell you I will not have——"

"*You* will not!"

"You do not wait to hear what I am saying. Yes, I will not have this Englishman dance with you so often. People talk, Lucie. He only comes when you are here—only dances with you; and he looks—ah! how he looks!—as if he had only to command and you——"

Lucie crimsoned. "What do you know of how a gentleman should look? He admires me. He has taste," she replied with impudent frankness, that her pretty face and dainty figure fully justified. "And if he is handsome, am I, then, only to dance with the old and the ugly? 'He looks—ah! how he looks!'" she repeated mockingly. "Not on the ground" (Anatole raised his head and flushed), "but in my eyes, as a man should. He is not afraid to speak—to touch me, and so people talk and you are jealous. You are a fool."

She was so busy with the rose—already half dead—and Anatole's senses were so deadened by misery that neither heard the soft foot-fall that had approached the arbour, or saw the man who had paused before them. As Lucie ceased he spoke: "Our waltz, M'mselle."

They both looked up, and Anatole, seeing the suspicion of a smile on the clean-shaven face, wondered if the intruder had heard. Lucie, caring nothing, laughed, and smiled at him coquettishly as she took his proffered arm. The two men gazed curiously at each other for a second, and then, with the faintest of bows, the Englishman led his partner away into the ball-room.

Anatole remained, staring after them but seeing nothing. Ever since the evening his handsome rival had first seen Lucie at the Moulin Rouge, he feared for the result, and against the lover who is not bold Fate plays with loaded dice. He grew dull and self-conscious—doubtful of himself when most he needed to appear at advantage. So, very quickly his sweetheart became impatient, scornful, even ashamed of her lover, and every time they met the Englishman at the public ball-room Anatole seemed more his foil than ever.

It was useless to try and persuade Lucie not to go to the place again, the attempt would only have resulted in a shower of jests and ridicule more stinging than her sneers. Therefore he had been silent till now—and now he had quarrelled with her, and had seen her carried off in triumph.

At last he roused himself and, leaving the almost deserted grounds, entered the room and seated himself at one of the little tables to wait till the dancing was over.

The merry music, the swing of the dancers, the mirth, the glitter of light on gilding and glass, the gleam of white arms and shoulders—all that makes the Moulin Rouge attractive, merely mocked him, for he could see Lucie in the arms of his rival, laughing, chattering—and worse, listening.

He called for brandy; drank glass after glass. But it did not deaden the pain he felt; it only confused his senses, and made everything appear a hopeless tangle. The last dance drew to an end, and he made his way across to Lucie. She was standing with the Englishman, and he was looking down at her flushed face and laughing blue eyes with an air of possession that was maddening.

Anatole walked over to them slowly, for he knew the unusual drinking was taking effect.

"Lucie, you are coming home?" he asked.

She looked at his glazing eyes, and heavy, heated face with disgust, and then, glancing up at her partner, she met his scornful smile, and bit her lip.

"I am going home," she replied.

But the half-drunken man did not notice the intimation her answer conveyed.

"Come, then," he said, roughly pushing his way between her and the Englishman. But she drew to one side and turned to the latter.

"Will you give me your arm, monsieur?"

The white rose fell from her dress, unnoticed, except by Anatole, and as she passed out of the hall she left it lying in the dust of the floor.

That night she did not go home to her little apartment, and from that day she was seen no more at her usual place in the florist's in the Rue du Bac. Anatole was like a man insane; he could not work, but spent his days in the wine-shop, and his nights wandering about the streets when he was not sleeping off the effects of his drinking bouts. He rapidly went from bad to worse, as still no news came of Lucie or the Englishman.

Months passed, each spent in a series of mad orgies; his savings of years were gradually being spent to keep

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up the dreadful madness that deprived him of power to think of the past. It was killing him, quickly and surely.

One night he reached his lodgings in his usual condition, and, staggering up the stairs, threw open the door of his room and stumbled in. There was little light in the apartment, only the glimmer which came from the lamps below in the street. He threw his cap on the ground and lurched towards the bed.

"Anatole."

He swung round and grasped the bed-post to keep himself from falling. A woman's figure had risen from a chair and was standing facing him. For a moment he thought he had gone mad at last; that misery and his reckless attempts to drown it had turned his brain. It was Lucie. The shock sobered him somewhat.

"What are you doing here?" he cried, and though he strove to make his voice firm, there was an eager tremor in it.

"I have come back to you," she replied.

"And he——?"

"Has left me—is going to marry." And then she broke into a storm of fury and rage. "To marry—you hear? And he swore undying love to me and I believed him; and now—now. Oh! but I will be revenged on him, the traitor, the liar. To marry—left me—*me*—and I—I have come to you, for you will help me to my revenge."

"I? Do you forget the last night at the Moulin Rouge? I help you?"

"Yes—you. You drove me to it, Anatole, with your preaching and your jealousy and your drinking. But you hate this man—you must hate him."

She was right; her words had redoubled his hatred of the Englishman, and in his whirling, half-maddened brain were growing schemes of vengeance.

"You still love him," he cried hoarsely.

"Love! What has love to do with it," she replied fiercely. "And if I do? No, no, I hate him. I could see him dead at my feet and spurn him—so! Love! He has killed love!"

"And you want revenge. Listen; will you swear to marry me if I——"

"Yes, yes, if you——"

"Kill him."

"Kill! No—no," and she shrank back; "not that—not that."

"So you do love him?"

There was no answer, and he went on: "But you would be revenged. How, if he is not to die?"

"I do not know—frighten him—make him afraid to marry this girl."

Anatole laughed scornfully. "Frighten him! Is he a child then? Bah! a woman's plan—a foolish—but—but yes, why not, Santina? You remember last year how Santina killed the traitors to the 'Fils de l'Anarchie'?"

"Yes."

"Then why not——"

"Ah, yes, yes! That is it. But not to kill; you promise me? A glorious revenge—to make him suffer all the agonies of death, and still live to think of it."

Her eyes flashed. A true Parisian of the working class, she loved anything with a touch of melodrama in it—and would not this be dramatic?

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Anatole saw in her vengeful, delighted face no love for him, but what did that matter? She would be his, and the thought after such months of despair, made his brain swim, and sent the blood rushing, hot, through his veins.

* * * *

Lucie was waiting in the Faubourg St. Martin, full of feverish impatience. Past four o'clock, and she saw no sign of the man whom she had come to meet. She was trembling with excitement. She made no attempt to analyse her feelings; had she done so, she would have found Love, Hate, and an instinct that evil would come of this plot, struggling in her breast, and producing emotions that were almost too great for her to bear.

Would he come? She hoped for, and yet dreaded his coming.

At length she turned back in the direction of the Boulevard de la Villette; she could bear the suspense no longer. But she had scarcely gone a dozen yards before she felt a light touch on her shoulder and the well-known English accent fell on her ear—"Lucie."

She turned with a start. "I could not be here sooner," said the Englishman hurriedly; "now what do you want? But we can't talk here, I—I may be seen," and a slight colour rose to his forehead.

The girl let the words pass unnoticed. "Will you come with me to my room?" she asked.

"Yes, but make haste."

She led him down the Rue Dunkerque, and through a multitude of little streets, dirty and dingy. "Where are you taking me?" he asked, as they traversed a narrow lane even filthier than the rest.

"To my apartment," she responded. "You shudder! Well, what can I do? I live where I can afford now."

"But I gave you money, Lucie."

"Yes, only when that is gone what shall I do? I must do as I can and be careful of what I have."

He made no further remark. At length they paused before a dingy *hôtel meublé*, and Lucie entered. The man stood for a moment hesitating and looking up at the dirty, broken *lanterne*, and at the wall of the house, trisected by two great cracks and covered with dirt over the whitewash. Then he lowered his eyes to Lucie, who stood waiting, and with a gesture of disgust followed her up the narrow, ill-lit stairs—up to the very garret. On the top landing she paused and looked down at him as he toiled up, breathing heavily with the unwonted exertion.

"You live near enough the sky," he grumbled.

She could not trust herself to reply, but opened the

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door of her room. At the top of the stairs the Englishman stopped to breathe and wipe his forehead. Every delay was agony to the girl, who stood nerving herself for the moment he should pass the doorway. At last he entered.

"Now, my girl, what is——" But the remaining words died away in a muffled murmur beneath the shawl Lucie flung over his head. He tried to free himself, but Anatole's strong arms were round him, forcing him down into a chair. He felt something tighten round his arms and shoulders. He struggled, but found his efforts useless, and he was compelled to sit quiet while the rope was knotted round him, and a rough gag thrust into his mouth.

Then they freed his head from the hot, suffocating folds of the shawl, and he gazed round. Lucie, pale, panting, half frightened, leant against the door, but opposite him, at the other side of the table, stood Anatole, with a malignant smile on his face.

"It is my turn now," he said. "Monsieur cannot have all the fortune. It is not always safe to take a man's sweetheart away and then cast her off. But yet it is a thousand pities; monsieur has a handsome face; eh?"

The girl's face clouded.

"It is almost a sin to disfigure it, and yet it must be so," Anatole continued.

He walked across to a cupboard, took out a small parcel, and opened it slowly on the table.

"Monsieur remembers the trial of Santina, guillotined for the murder of traitors to the anarchists?

"He does, I see, for he blanches and whitens. Santina's clocks were magnificent and this is one like them. See the little pistol muzzle just showing like a black hole in the face! That is all, and yet when the clock is set from that hole at the appointed hour comes a bullet and death to anyone in its path. See, I place it here. Alas! that handsome face. And now—at six! Monsieur has one hour—barely that—to live, and Lucie and I one hour to get away. We are going to be happy, Lucie and I, and the little 'ping' of the bullet will be our blessing. But fifty minutes now. It will soon be over, only—fifty minutes is a long time to look death in the face. The time passes much quicker at the Moulin Rouge. Come, Lucie."

The prisoner made a mute appeal with his eyes, and the girl paused, but Anatole caught her in his arms, and half carried her from the room. The door shut, the lock fastened with a snap, and the Englishman was left alone with the clock ticking away the remaining minutes.

Half-way down the stairs, Lucie paused, as if in doubt. "You are sure it is harmless?" she asked Anatole, looking into his face searchingly.

"There is nothing but the works in the clock, and a hole cut in the dial. What harm can come of that?"

Still she hesitated. Neither spoke, but both were wavering. Anatole roused himself with an effort.

"To-morrow he marries," he muttered.

Lucie turned as if stung, and resolutely began to descend the stairs.

"And to-night he shall suffer," she said.

A quarter—half-an-hour passed, and above there was silence. Three-quarters—and footsteps and hushed voices sounded from below, and came up the stairs. Lucie was trembling. Anatole as pale as she.

Three minutes to six—they paused outside the door and listened, heard a faint sound within of heavy breathing. Two minutes—one—a slight whizz, and then the little bell struck six. The listeners breathed a sigh of relief, and Anatole flung open the door.

The Englishman's head had fallen on his breast and was slightly moving. The heavy breathing has ceased. "He has fainted!" cried Anatole. "Some water, Lucie."

They bent over him and bathed his face and hands; there was no sign of consciousness. Tremblingly Anatole began to untie the ropes; they were tied tightly and he hurriedly took out his clasp knife and cut them. The body swayed to one side, leaning a dead weight on Lucie's shoulder, and she screamed at the touch. They raised it between them and laid it on the table in fear and dread. They clasped the hands and bathed the head again. At length they ceased. Lucie caught her breath with a gasp and instinctively Anatole crossed himself. With eyes of horror and mutual accusation, they stared at each other across the corpse. Lucie stooped and fearfully pressed her lips to the dead man's—they were still warm. It seemed as if he slept, and she kissed him again and again. Then she silently moved to the door. Anatole was standing in the way and she drew to one side that she might not touch him, and passed with a shudder.

He stood for a moment white as the dead body, his face set and haggard and his eyes dull and hopeless.

He looked down at the silent form on the table.

"All—all," he murmured; "her love—and still her love—her memory even—then this too," and he drew from the breast of his blouse a handful of faded, brown rose leaves, that had once been white, and scattering them in a little shower over the body, he turned and slowly left the apartment.

HONOR LUCELLE.

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Short Stories

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Or, THE ROMANCE OF A LOST CONTINENT.

By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of *"The Winning of Gunhild,"* etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

TRIAL AND SENTENCE.

I LAY quite still when I awoke, looking up into the yet dim air with wondering eyes and a strange feeling of peace and restfulness. Nor could I, for a while, gather my senses to know where I was. Conscious only of calm and rest, I lay and looked up vaguely curious at the red shafts of light creeping over the edges of the walls of darkness that rose above in shadowy massiveness, at the few gaunt cedars that projected over the sky line, at the alternating redness and whiteness of the opposite cliff where the sun shone down, and at the birds of prey that circled overhead now and again swooping, with hoarse cry and rustle of wings, into the gulf below.

Gradually, as I gazed, the light grew stronger, revealing plainly the well-known chasm and throwing the shadows of its angles into deeper black by contrast, and gradually the remembrance of how and wherefore I was there dawned on me.

I started up, but a pain, sharp as a knife and heavy as a load of lead upon my back, caused me to lie down again with an involuntary moan. Something glittering by my side had caught my eyes in that brief space of time, and turning so that I could face it, though with great labour and agony, I saw my cherished sword, my "Sunderer," my mute but steadfast friend, my saviour in a dozen fights, the sharer in my measure of renown; and stretching out my hand I grasped its dear, familiar hilt, the touch seeming to put new life and new curiosity into me, new impatience to be up and doing.

"Ha! my voiceless comrade!" I said to the shining shaft of steel, "now thou art come back to me I feel that we shall yet do much together, as of old."

"Hist! he is awake! You shall speak to him first, Valdo," I heard a voice say, and then the speaker came between me and the daylight, and I saw my trusty follower standing near my feet.

"Art rested now?" asked Valdo, bending down.

"Yes, but cannot rise because of my wound," I answered. "Canst tell me how long I have slept?"

"Nigh on three days, Captain, and soundly, too, I'll swear, since we have dressed the cut in your back twice each day and thou didst not know it! But it seems thou hast found your famous sword."

"How came it here, after falling into the river?" I asked, my mind blundering over memory's dark places.

"Valdo brought it up for thee," said Atris, coming forward, "and the others held the rope he went down by and pulled him up again."

"Thou dost see, Captain, thou had'st done ill to part with us at any time," put in Valdo, "and we would fain thou promised to keep us in thy service ever."

"I promise you with all my heart," I said, looking at the brave, devoted couple. "Next to a woman's love is the love I bear you twain, and, please the gods, you shall ever be my comrades."

"Such friendship is better than a woman's love," growled Valdo, more, I think, to hide his feelings than for any other wish.

"Nay," said Atris, "thou hast never had an Izitla to cherish, or would talk otherwise."

"Go to!" the other answered. "And now, Captain," he said to me, "had we not better stay here till thy hurt is healed? It will cure slowly if thou hast rest, for nothing vital is injured—which is a marvel—and these cliff-dwellers, though barbarians, are a kindly race, and well-disposed to us."

"We will stay," I said, "though it goes against the grain to lie here on one's back when the Queen awaits my return with anxious eyes. Yet I will wait, for it will surely be the speediest in the end."

"Art wise," said Valdo; "but had thou not wished to stay I would have made thee, if I had to tie thee to a tree to do it!" with which gruff expression of goodwill on his part the pair retired to bring me food and drink.

I watched them walk away, and a misty moisture dimmed my eyes. Verily, I was favoured of the spirits in my manhood's prime to have given to me two such faithful friends and a sweetheart Queen; surely I should be recompensed now for the sorrows and sorrow-born sins of my youth. Surely the pattern of the Universe, that is woven in woe here and mirth there, in evil here and goodness there, in ways that pass our understanding, is too mazy a pattern for we mortals to follow out, or even to trace, though never so faintly, the shape of its boldest outlines?

Thirty days we stopped amongst those hospitable cliff-dwellers, sharing the shelter of their cedar-wood houses and their towns of solid masonry; seeing their hoards of treasure secreted in massive houses, built up to and into the rock, of large boulders laid firmly and squarely in sun-dried clay; eating the strange, sweet roots that grew in nooks and crannies on the face of the mighty cliffs; admiring their goodly store of richly coloured pottery, in the shaping of which these savages excel, and never ceasing to wonder at the cat-like ease and quickness with which these dusky dwellers in semi-darkness climbed up and down their frail ladders and rude footways, and ran along their dizzy paths where a slip meant death. And then, my wound being so far healed that I could walk, though still with difficulty, we said farewell to our generous friends, and

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taking the captive governor with us, set out on our long homeward journey.

Although we went more slowly than we came, we found it easier, since we knew our way without hesitation through the grim, iron-bound deserts of the land of ravines, over the level plain between it and the mountainous region, through that howling wilderness of snowy summits and frowning, craggy heights, and on till we came to the great chasm spanned by the tree-bridge, and where we had left 900 men.

They were still there, not having courage either to cross the barrier or to disobey my orders and retreat to the coast, but sorely tempted to do the latter, and on the point of mutiny against their officers.

Paying no heed to their troubles, or to their surprise at seeing us return with Quitzaal, I crossed the suspended trunks, Valdo and Atris coming next, bearing the governor, bound, between them, and the other twenty odd close behind, and making the passage without accident, gave the word to make tracks as swiftly as possible to the sea-shore. I began to long with a consuming desire to clasp my Briseis in my arms and claim my reward, now that I had fulfilled the task set and freed her realm from rebels and enemies.

Without delay we kept on until we came to the valley where the great battle had been fought, and passing by the huge brick pyramid—sole relic, like its former fellows scattered up and down the land, of four hundred years of Atlantian rule—we struck the path of our former march, and, following it, climbed out of the oval basin, across the tableland to the east, and thence descended the seaward slope, through all its gradations of climate from keenest winter to fiercest summer, until, emerging from the forest of the foot-hills, we came to the sandy shore, where the *Ravager* and a score of warships rode idly at anchor.

Orlanis and his sailors greeted us with ringing cheers of joy, for they had thought us lost and were on the verge of despair; and so, without ceremony, dragged us aboard, weighed anchors, and stood out for the eastward in a frenzy of delight. They longed, as I did, to once more reach Atlantis, and I smiled quietly to myself to see the marvellous skill and speed with which the homesick sailors shook out the fluttering sails and loosed the ropes and urged the rowers to their work and cleared the decks for any sort of weather.

And as I smiled I cheered them on, for my heart, too, was in their work, for every rippling wave we touched and overtook was a step nearer to our voyage end. But the Spirit of the Storm, who is one of the lesser gods, has neither care nor thought for human hopes or wishes, and caught our little fleet in a tempest ere we were a day out from the silent shores of Ulmeca.

It was not so strong a gale as I have known, but it blew as though it would never cease in one long roaring blast of wind and spray, coming always from the N.N.E., and keeping our deck swept clear of everything that was not lashed down, for a couple of weeks. The other ships scattered hither and thither before its fury, some foundering, others striving might and main to make headway against the hurricane, and others, like the *Ravager*, flying before it under bare spars and with rigid helm.

Of all the twenty vessels, only six besides my own got back to Atlantis, the others perishing in the storm.

Soon, as we sped onward under the mad impulse of the tempest's breath, we lost sight of all our consorts, and alone on the heaving sea the *Ravager* cut her way with daring eagerness through the pitching and tossing rollers that thundered ever in impotent fury in the front of her sharp-curved prow.

I stood by the helm, of all on board the least troubled, for the song of the sea was in my ears again, and recalled to me those careless, joyous pirate days, when, on the self-same staunch and sturdy craft, I had braved the rigor of a hundred gales, and, alone on the boundless blue, had laughed in the teeth of the fiercest storm that ever lashed the waters into reckless rage.

Yet two sennights of such storm-stress as this was not to my liking, and I welcomed as heartily as the others, when it came, the abating of the tempest and the clearing of the leaden-hued sky.

We had been borne back into the vast gulf of islands to the south of Ulmeca by then, and only managed to hoist a sail and get our ship under command again, when we sighted the dangerous rock that guards the landward passage.

It is a huge stone rising solitary from the water like a sentinel,* and round its stony base the sea lashes ever with a booming roar. As we drew near I noticed a clump of fig trees growing on the single strip of sand, and taking a boat I set off to bring a store of the fruit on board.

At first I gave up the attempt to land there, but finding no other spot where it was possible to get ashore, I made the venture, and though we had to creep on all fours through the boiling surf, where the reef ran into the sea, we at last reached the grove of green, wild fig-trees, and plucked a considerable quantity of the luscious fruit.

Wandering on through the grove, I found that it led up the high rock that towered above the water as high as the height of a hundred full-sized men, to a small cavern, wind-swept and bare, but said nothing of my discovery to the rest.

Then, conveying our loads with difficulty, we crept out to the boats, pulled back to the ship, and set her prow to the eastward, urging her forward by wind and oar as fast as both could hurry her, and, this time favoured by the elements, came duly in sight of the well-loved shores of Atlantis, having been absent for nigh upon a year.

Every soul on board the weather-beaten *Ravager* crowded on her deck at sight of the longed-for land, and right lustily they cheered as the well-known coast burst upon their view. Eagerly they signalled to the wondering people, who flocked to the shore as our ship glided past, and to the fisher-boats we overtook as we got nearer to the capital; and loud and strong rose the wild sweet notes of the Ina-Ana, as the *Ravager*, with Arnon the General at her helm, leading the chorus of the song, swept foaming through the waves into the Bay of Kronos, her oars beating the water with regular strokes, her sails spread full and taut, and the war-torn but triumphant flag of gold, with the sun of fire blazing on it, flying bravely from her mainmast top!

The Magnificent City was all a tumult on the instant we were sighted, and when we had got clear through the fleet of vessels in the harbour, and let down our anchors at the side of the stone pier, it was only by dint of stern appeals and lusty elbowings that we got foot on it, until a troop of soldiers came down and opened us a way to the palace, whither Valdo and Atris with myself and our prisoner repaired at once through the streets lined with the cheering populace.

Near the gates of the Royal abode we were met by Marenso and a company of the guard of honour, and by them ushered through the marble halls to the Audience Chamber, where the Queen awaited us on the Silver Throne amid a motley multitude of fawning courtiers and a bevy of fair ladies of rank and wealth.

Now I thought that the portals of the Gardens of Pleasure were once more open to me, as plaudits and shoutings arose on every hand and I was named by all as the saviour of my country and her greatest son, and most of all because my Briseis thanked me with her sweet, soft voice, giving me her royal hand to kiss before the concentrated gaze of that mighty throng.

"I had begun to fear for thy safety, Arnon," said she, "when Marenso returned without thee, and told of the scanty force left for pursuit of the rebel leader. But now thou art returned I am content."

"I came not because I had not then fulfilled my vow," I answered, looking into her dear face with gladdened eyes,

* The Diamond Rock.

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"and having now fulfilled it, here I am. Saving the Governor Quitzaal, whom I have here, and the Princess of Aidè, whom Marenso brought to thee, I know of no enemies to thy throne in all the land."

"Thou hast done well and nobly," the Queen replied, "and art worthy the boon thou once asked, which shall be nameless here. What seemeth best to thee that I do to these prisoners? for it were well that they be settled with at once, nor cause further trouble."

"In thy hands it rests, my Queen," I said, "though I would urge that the two be heard in their defence. For my part, I would not trust myself to judge."

"Bring in the Princess Listra," said Briseis, "and the rebel captives shall both be sentenced here, while this company is assembled. Thou, Arnon, and thy two officers, with Marenso and the priest Unim, take your place at my right hand. The culprits shall be put on the left. Hasten, varlets, and bring them forward!"

The soldiers advanced as desired, leading Quitzaal and the Princess—who had been kept in the palace since her arrival—to the foot of the throne on the left, and clearing a space round them with drawn swords. Neolyn, the

The soldiers advanced as desired.

guardian of the written law and the priest of the Spirit of Life, was the first to speak indicting the sullen twain.

He read the list of penalties that wait on those who defy the Sovereign and take up arms in treachery, and, concluding, said:

"And ye two who have added treachery to rebellion and stubbornness to both, who have sought to possess yourselves of the Queen's land and have wounded and slain her loyal subjects, who have caused the cities and towns of Atlantis to be laid in ruins, and have lost to her her province in the west; ye two are doomed to death by the sacred laws, unless the Sovereign who reigneth, after taking due counsel from the ministers of state, should otherwise decree. So runneth the writ."

The Queen would have spoken then, but the Princess, looking fair as ever she had done, and reckless withal, turned to her, disdainful and contemptuous.

"I ask no other decree, my fair, mild Queen, who hath not the heart of a sparrow, than that the writ be carried out," she said defiantly. "I have dared great things and I have lost, but I can die with a fearless face."

"Silence!" thundered Neolyn, "nor speak until thou art asked. The Queen shall say which of the prisoners shall speak first."

"I would hear Quitzaal, of whom I once thought better things," said Briseis.

"Then say on, captive," said the Priest of Life.

"I can only plead for the mercy of a merciful Queen," said Quitzaal, "for there is little excuse for my disloyalty. Yet I would ask one thing, if I may."

"Ask what thou wilt," granted Briseis.

"I would ask if thou, my sovereign, sent Vichri, thy cousin, to Ulmeca, with intent to put him in my place as governor, and send me home disgraced? For so he told me."

"'Twas a foul falsehood!" cried Briseis, her cheeks flushing with anger. "'Twas he I sent from here in disgrace because of his evilness to Arnon. But 'twas like him, who knew not how to do a good deed."

"Then that, in some part, must plead for me," said the ex-Governor; "for though I was hard pressed by the barbarians and might have gone over to them in rebellion, I had never, without Vichri's lying words, sent my fleets and armies into Atlantis, nor allowed the Prince of Aidè to raise his province in revolt. In so far as I am guilty let me be punished, but in so far as I was deceived let my sentence be mitigated. Thus much, O Queen, I entreat," and the tall, bearded man fell on his knees before the throne in supplication, though with a quiet dignity that became him well.

"What say you, my councillors?" asked Briseis.

"That 'tis not wise to show any leniency to so dangerous a man," returned Neolyn coldly.

"That 'twere a matter of great risk so to do," said I, "having regard to the future."

"Which I fear also," said Atris.

"I would say, consult thine own mind, Queen, and trust its promptings," urged Unim, "and rest assured that exile will be punishment enough."

"Let him die as the law injuncts," said Valdo gruffly, "and there will be an end of him."

"Take the lying words of Vichri into account, O Queen," said Marenso, "and fear not to be merciful."

"'Tis hard to judge from such contrary counsel," said Briseis, "but the Sleeper and Unim seem to me to speak the best, and, therefore, I sentence thee, Quitzaal, who was once the Governor of Ulmeca, to be exiled in that land, amongst its barbarians, for twenty years from this day, and if before that time thou dost set your foot on my shore, the law shall take its judgment on thee. Away! I will no thanks."

So the soldiers took him out amid murmurs of applause at the fair Queen's gentleness, and catching sight of his face as he went, I felt that there was no more to fear from him. Then Neolyn turned to the Princess Listra, asking if she had ought to say against the carrying out of the sentence upon herself.

"Naught!" she answered with a superb air of scorn, her eyes flashing and her figure drawn up to its full height. "Naught from she who has conquered. Kill me, mild and virtuous Queen, so that—as the gruff soldiers said of Quitzaal, the craven, the humble—there may be an end of me! Slay me as in thy heart of hearts thou longest, my rival, for having held thy love, thy Arnon, in my spell and made him forget thee. Slay me, I say, because my kisses have burned upon his faithless lips, my arms have clasped his stalwart form—him thou wouldst make thy king! Call me wanton, fickle, rebel, if thou wilt; 'tis the privilege of the victress, but forget not, you who hate me, yet long to hide thy hate and pose as mercy's self, forget not that thy Arnon thought me fairer by far than thee, and only left me for thy service because his grasping mind saw wealth and fame that way! Kill me here and now, I ask, and let there be an end of me, and take thy lover, whom I have cast off, and be happy if thou canst with my leavings!"

She stopped, and sank back at once into a calm, cold smile, unmoved by the cries of shame and anger that rang through the mighty chamber like the echo of a distant thunder-roll. As for Briseis, her colour deepened to a tinge of fire, then paled, then deepened again, and paled at last to the whiteness of alabaster under the scathing insult of

the wanton's words, and I saw her shapely hand clasp the golden sceptre convulsively as the bitterness of the speech cut to her soul. I was roused to frenzy by the taunt, and, springing forward with "Sunderer" flashing in my hand, shouted in the fair, false face:

"Speak such foul words again in the Queen's hearing, leman, and this blade shall make thee dumb for ever!"

"I could wish a worse end than to fall by that famous sword, my lord," said she meekly, her whole manner changing now, and a strange light gleaming in those lustrous eyes that I liked not at all. "But it ill becomes thee to upbraid me for telling the truth."

I turned aside at that, and the Queen spoke.

"Think not to goad me into slaying thee, Listra," she said, "if for no other reason than because I would not have it said 'twas done for jealous revenge. Nor think that aught thou mayest say can turn me against my Arnon, whom I knew and loved before ever he saw thee, and who only fell a prey to thy evil wiles because Vichri, the traitor, led him to think me false.

"Before all my subjects I say this, Princess, fearing not that all know who is the man that my heart delighteth to honour. One have I loved and one only, and whatever his failings, at heart he has ever been true to me. By love I conquer thee, thou profligate and fallen, and thus do I bestow myself!" And stepping down the first step of the Silver Throne, my Briseis took my great, rough hand between her soft palms, and drawing me to her, placed it to her heart and held it there, looking into my eyes with triumphant love, whilst the great room rang with the admiring plaudits of the people.

I was proud that moment, and felt already a king, now that the Queen had publicly performed the ceremony that from time long past has been the sign of Royal betrothal in Atalantis. Then, gracefully disengaging my hand and remounting the steps, Briseis thus passed sentence on her chagrined enemy:

"And now, Listra, who will no longer be a Princess, but merely a fortuneless wanton, my decree is that thou goest forth from here safe and free, but an exile from Kronos and from what was once thy province. Lest any should lay hands on thee, I command that any who may strive to do thee hurt, equally with any who may aid thee in plots of revenge, shall die the death, and thyself, too, if you come before me a second time. Now lead her forth!"

One moment Listra's eyes blazed fire as she took a step forward, as though to attack the Queen, who thus repaid her evil with good, her spite with mercy, as I also started towards her, fearing danger, but on second thoughts her purpose changed, and she drew back, flushing with scorn.

"'Twere needless, lord," she said to me, "to keep guard over thy royal mate, thy mild, meek dove. I would not now injure her, for thy sake, but love her not too fondly, Macis, as thou valuest thy future happiness! I go, and thus, until we meet again, farewell!"

And gathering up her costly robes with an air of splendid hauteur that in that time of adversity became her well, the once powerful Princess went from the Audience Chamber, through the crowd that opened out to let her pass, in the midst of a great silence.

I breathed a sigh of relief when she had gone, as did the Queen, but Valdo muttered in my ear:

"My mind misgives me of this day's work. Methinks thy Queen will have need to repent of it some day."

"That is as it may befall," I said.

Then Unim, the Priest of Truth, spoke a few well-chosen words to the assembly, telling them that I was now betrothed, in the eyes of men and in the sight of the Spirits, to Briseis the Queen, and that after the customary fifty days of grace the nuptials and the coronation would be performed in the Temple of the Three Gods.

Thereupon up started certain high-placed nobles and distant kindred of the Queen, objecting to our union on the ground that I had been a pirate and was of low birth. To these I answered that, whatever my parentage might be and whatever my early life, I had not spared wealth or blood in fighting for Atlantis since, and that I held myself as noble as any who stood in that hall, and would ask the next who dared to cast a slur upon me to take it back at my sword's point.

At this they held their tongues, some craving my pardon—for bold words and defiant bearing are ever right ways to men's esteem—and then Briseis herself, with scarlet cheeks, stood up on the throne-step and said with simple grace, yet in clear and ringing tones: "The man whom I love shall be my king, nor shall I suffer any to speak a word against him." Thus were the grumblers' mouths effectually closed.

Then, with becoming modesty, the Queen withdrew to her own apartments, leaving Neolyn to read aloud the law relating to royal marriages, and Unim to invoke the blessing of the Spirits on our prospective union, amid the frantic approbations of the delighted audience, which afterwards slowly dispersed.

I then sought a bathe and a less warlike but more comfortable garb than I had worn on ship-board and on the battle-field, and that even sat down to meat with a gay company of nobles and captains in the great banquet-room of the palace. Marenso was there, with Valdo and Atris, on my right hand, Unim, Neolyn, and Orlanis on my left, and at the head of the feast-table I acted the genial host to the merry gathering.

It was a foretaste of my kinghood's duties, and flushed with my great good fortune and the devotion of my fair Briseis, to me the fairest daughter of man who has ever breathed the life-giving air, I could not well be other than overflowing with high good humour, rollicking jocularity, keen wit, and biting satire; with tales of daring, stories of peril, and episodes of love.

We had no ladies at our feast that night, and so the wine circled freely round the board as a swollen river through a dry and thirsty land, the slaves who waited on us knew not a moment's peace or rest for their weary feet, the costly, palate-tickling viands vanished as by magic before the onslaught of our ever-wagging jaws, and joke and repartee of none too straight a kind passed on from lip to lip 'mid bursts of light-won laughter.

And when the grey dawn crept into the room, paling the wasteful lamps and lighting up the dish-strewn table with its garish radiance, there were none of the guests who were not loth to rise, and did not loudly thank the gods for sending such a man to be their king.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Coronation.

Now for fifty days, according to the custom, I could not see my Briseis, nor be seen by her, so had to fill my time as best I might. In truth I had much to do during that period of probation in setting affairs of State to rights after the disorder consequent upon the war.

First I dispatched Quitzaal on a swift-sailing ship, under the charge of Orlanis, to the shores of Ulmeca, giving the officer orders to return as soon as possible.

Then I mustered the remnant of our once mighty fleet, and found to my sorrow that with warships, pirate craft, merchant vessels, slavers, and fishing barques, all told, I could only gather three hundred sail into the bay, and of these many were sorely battered, and most weakly manned. The latter deficiency was soon remedied, all hands being set to work to repair damages, and at the same time I summoned the most noted of the builders of ships to Kronos, commanding them to lay down the keels of two hundred new vessels, and have them ready for launching as soon as could be.

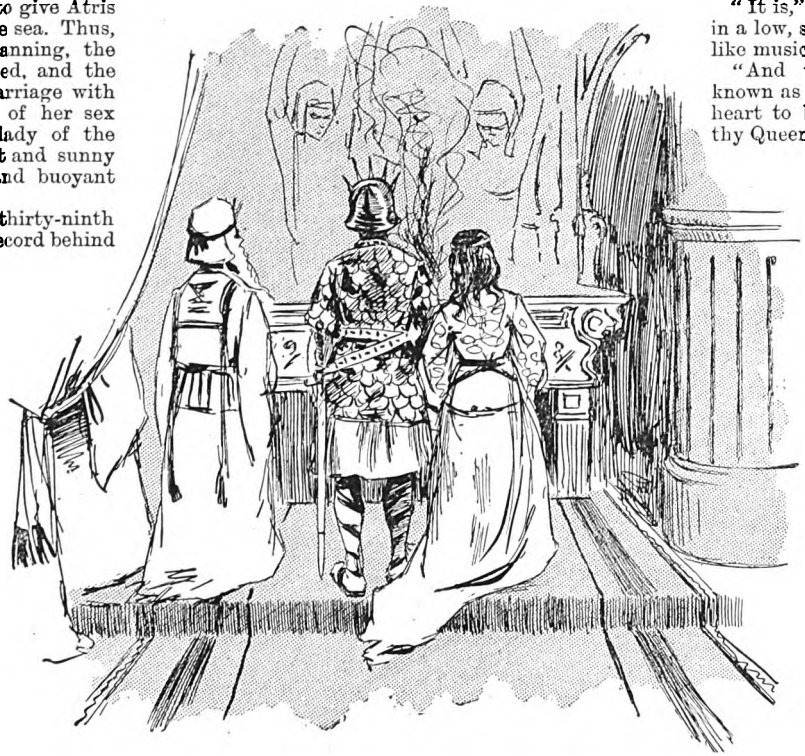
As I held out good wages, and the dockyards and building-sheds of the capital were the best in the country, the shipsmiths and their kindred craftsmen flocked to the city by hundreds, so that very soon the waterside resounded

night and day with the noise of hammering and sawing and the clang of iron tools, was dotted for a great distance with skeleton fabrics and huge timber piles, and was lighted up after sunset with the glare of a hundred flaming fires.

My authority to do all this I obtained from Briseis, her signet seal to all my orders being brought to me by Atris, who cared not how often he was sent to the palace so that he but caught glimpse of or spoke word with his love Izitla, the Queen's handmaid.

Another matter I settled was the disbandment of the greater portion of the army, and the forming of the remainder into a well-armed Royal Guard, officered by those who had borne themselves well in the war, and commanded by Valdo, who wanted nothing better. Marenso I promised to make my Chief Minister when I attained the throne, and it was in my mind to give Atris the command of the sea. Thus, with work and planning, the fifty days were sped, and the morning of my marriage with the fairest flower of her sex and the highest lady of the land dawned bright and sunny as my hopes, gay and buoyant as my heart.

I was in my thirty-ninth year then, with a record behind me that would suffice many men for a lifetime's doings, yet as I stood before the great altar of burnished bronze, whereon flamed the sacred fire that has never been quenched in the memory of man, with Briseis at my right and the three priests at my left, I could well have thought the past a vanished dream, and imagined that I stood on the threshold of a new existence, down whose long, dim vista I should ever wander, my love with me always, and the guardian spirits ever keeping watch and ward to shield us both from harm or sorrow.



I stood before the great altar of burnished bronze.

Alas! for mortal hope and dear day-dreaming, 'tis ever doomed to disappointment. And yet, when you stop to think the matter out more fully, is it not as well that now and then we should have these brighter visions in our common life? That here and there in the dark mysterious tracery of existence we should snatch a glimpse of pure and perfect love and sweet idyllic peace. Is it not as well, after all?

Well or ill, such gleam of bright illusion was mine that morning when Briseis, the Queen, was made my wife in the grand old temple of the Three Gods, the everlasting principles of Truth, and Life, and Love, nor did I strive against its sweet and subtle influence.

We stood there by the altar, with our hands interlocked, heedless of the worshippers who thronged within to get a sight of the ceremony, till Kalen, the priest of Love, bade us kneel before the marble statue of the three divinities which yet are one in essence and in soul.

Down we knelt in reverence, bowing our heads in unison to the masterpiece of sculpture. Then the priest threw sweet-smelling incense in the sacred flame, while others carried swinging censors down the pillared aisles of that great edifice, repeating to the people as they went passages from the Book of the Soul in slow, clear, earnest tones. Then Unim raised his hand for silence, and the murmuring of the vast multitude ceased like the sudden calming of a stormy sea, so that in the universal hush the lowest of his words was heard throughout the whole of the holy chamber.

"In the name of the Spirit of Truth," he said, "I command you both, who are here to be bound together in unchangeable ties, to give true answer to my questioning. Thou, Briseis, the Queen, say truly if it be thy will that the gods join thy life with that of Arnon, thy General?"

"It is," responded Briseis, in a low, sweet tone, that fell like music on my ear.

"And thou, Arnon, once known as Phrena, is it in thy heart to be truly wedded to thy Queen? Answer not without thought, for 'tis a great thing thou wouldst do."

"Natheless, I am resolved," I replied boldly.

"Then shall the wishes of you twain be fulfilled," said Unim. "Rise, O Queen, and rise, Arnon, that the Priest of Life may commend you to his brother Kalen."

We obeyed, and for the first time I gazed at the great concourse of people who crowded the pillared hall, and wedged themselves in all its nooks and corners, suffering from the heat and the pressure, but suffering uncomplainingly for curiosity's sake. Then Neolyn, taking us both by the hand, led us to Kalen, who stood near the eternal fire, and said:

"These, O Kalen, Priest of Love, are twain who would forsake the solitary paths they are pursuing, that they may henceforth walk together in one way, as one soul and one flesh. As two rivers, born on hills set far apart, and travelling many leagues of lonely distance, approach at last and merge into one great stream that is the sum of both and so continue till they reach the restless ocean, so these two would fain their lives did run, and being united, journey together as one from now until they reach that ocean whose name is Eternity."

"And have they answered the questions of Unim?" said Kalen gravely, with, nevertheless, a suggestive smile playing round the corners of his mouth, as was his wont.

"They have," answered Neolyn.

"Then their wishes shall be consummated," said Kalen, "and as the mountains soar to heaven, and the sunbeams shimmer on the sea, these two shall this day be made one."

He made a sign with his right hand, and instantly there floated on the air a soft, low melody, as of a choir of youthful

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voices singing afar off, their harmony mellowed by the distance and enriched by sweet-toned instruments lightly touched by deft fingers, yet distinct and clear, so that not a note was missed of the gentle song.

It rose by soft and slow degrees till I thought the singers were in the altar-room itself, but that I saw them not, and then as slowly sank again into the pleasing murmur of a spirit-song sung softly by a band of unseen singers far away. Fainter and fainter the melody trembled in our ears, dying, as it were, by imperceptible shades, until it went as a whisper through the sacred hall, and so ceased.

Then Kalen laid his hands upon us, one upon the Queen's shapely head, the other on my own raven-ringleted nob, and looking down at us with countenance most benign, thus spoke while the incense flame leapt fitfully in the brazen cup:

"In the name of the Spirit of Love I unite thee Briseis the Queen, with Arnon the General, who is from now the King, and declare you twain henceforward to be of one soul and one flesh, no more to be as two lives, but as one. The blessing of the Spirit of Love, which is the true blessing, shall rest on you all your days, saving only if ye thrust it from ye and cease to live in amity and joy.

"May happiness follow your footsteps as the day the night or the calm the storm; may your children be many, and a pride and a gladness to your hearts to your lives' end; may the pains and grief of the common lot pass you by with gentleness, and may the messenger whose summons none can refuse tarry long in his coming. May all who seek to harm you, to set your souls at variance, to cause you to break the bonds in which you are herewith bound be condemned to the death in this life, and to the desert of misery in the land of shadows, and may ill-fortune follow your enemies all their days.

"Thus blessed and guarded ye shall go forth from here, my children, man and wife, King and Queen of Atlantis, and see to it that you use well the power that is given to you by those who dwell for ever beyond our ken, but who will surely demand of every living soul an account of the deeds it hath done and the using of the faculties they have given it."

"*Wife, I salute thee,*" I said to Briseis, as it is usual to speak on like occasions.

"*Husband, I greet thee,*" answered she, and then, her sweet eyes full of love and joy and pride, she turned to the people, holding me by the hand, and said:

"My subjects, behold your King?"

And the vast assembly voiced their pleasure in one resounding roar of welcoming applause:

"The King! the King!"

Then I drew "Sunderer," flashing like a ray of light, from its polished sheath, and, holding it high over both our heads, I swore a full round oath, by all the spirits and lesser gods, that with this magic, far-famed blade I would cherish and defend my Queen and country against all foes whatever while its edge kept keen and life was in me.

At that another roar of wild acclaim uprose, in the midst of which I led my bride through a secret corridor that Neolyn had shown me the night before, to her gaily-decked cariole, which bore us swiftly through the streets to the Royal Palace, where the coronation ceremony must be performed.

Here a still greater congregation waited our approach in the Audience Chamber, into which I led my Queen with exultation, and in which I sat for the first time on the Silver Throne.

Who, seeing Arnon the Pirate, battling for his life with King Dulo's soldiers in the burning house of dead Miropis, an outlaw and a sea-robber, would have dared to think that one day the said outlaw would sit in the highest place in the land?

Nay, by Thoth and Amun, who would have believed it, seeing him in Sothi's power, or aboard the slaver barque swift sailing to the east, or as the leader of the refugees who fled from treacherous Ethiop, or as the captain of the wrecked *Seamew*, or even as the favoured love of the unfortunate Listra?

None but a man bereft of his senses, say you, and yet it all hath been thus, so mysteriously the Spirits weave the web of the world's destiny.

Some thoughts like these were passing through my mind, as I sat on the regal seat with Briseis, when Neolyn, who had followed us, came forward with the golden crown that Dulo had last worn, giving it to the Queen, who, when I knelt before her, placed it gently on my head.

It was a thick, plain gold circlet, with a rich round ruby of priceless value set in it, just over the forehead, and for all its worth and beauty and the power it implied I was right glad when the time came to lay it aside and rejoice in the free flowing locks that are ever the best headgear. My bride's crown was of a lighter make and with a smaller ruby, but of the same shape and pattern.

"Now," said Neolyn, when I sat once more upon the throne, with the golden symbol of majesty upon my brow, "now indeed we have a King once more in Atlantis, besides a Queen in her own right, and may the sun of happiness from now shine ever in our zenith, nor ever sink to slumber. 'Tis only needed now that thou, Arnon, take the vow on that thou dost hold most dear, and the day's requirements end. Speak well and clearly and with an honest heart, and as thou speakest so live and act. My work is done."

Then, rising amid a veritable storm of thunderous appraise, which calmed to a deep stillness when my lips opened, I took the vow of the Kings of Atlantis, with one hand holding "Sunderer" aloft, as I had done in the temple, and the other resting lightly on the Queen's shoulder.

"By the things which I hold dearest of all the things of earth," I cried, "I swear that naught shall make me faithless to the trust that I have this day taken up. By the Queen, my wife, my love, and by this famous sword, my steadfast friend, which two things in the order named are the two that I most dearly prize, I promise to guard and defend this land against all foes or traitors, within or without, to keep and enforce the laws, to oppress none, to nourish the weak and the suffering, to shield the priests and temples of the Spirits from all hurt, to make her cities great and noble, to reward her generals and captains who do great deeds, and in all things to seek her honour and glory. Thus I have sworn, and may the Spirits forsake me in the hour that I go back upon my vow."

With that I sat down again, and was king, indeed, and for the rest of my life.

Now the people pressed forward to do me homage—which ceremony I would gladly have escaped—and after them came all my friends, with whom I had more patience: Unim, the Priest of Truth, and his fellow-priest, Clisal; Kalen, the Priest of Love; Marenso, who had slept a thousand years; Neolyn; Orlanis, the captain of the dear old *Ravager*; Nayralm, the officer whom I helped to destroy Miropis; Valdo, my woman-hating follower; and, lastly, Atris—with his beloved Izitla and her aged father. All these I granted some boon in honour of the day, but none so willingly and joyfully as I granted the request of the last petitioners, that after another fifty days I would attend the marriage of my bride's waiting-maid with my trusty follower.

"'Twill be a joy second only to to-day's," I said to the blushing, sweet-faced maid, "to see my Atris so well bestowed. Only see to it that thou dost keep him not away from his duties too much. It is an easy thing to do!" They laughed, and, thanking me, went away happy.

Thus went the busy morn and noon and afternoon, nor till even did we gain a respite from the tiring whirl of pageant and festivity, which, spreading from the city outwards, thrilled through all the land in a ripple of gaiety and merrymaking.

'Twas good, indeed, to see the crowds of smiling faces everywhere, the smart displays of flags and bravery on every house, the floral arches thrown across the thronged

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streets, the rich festoons depending from the delicately-carved and finely-coloured capitols of massive columns, the streams of carioles that rattled down the stony wheelways of the roads, and the ample stores of food that, at my own expense, were served out with no niggard hands to the poorer classes.

'Twas better to hear the shouts of wild applause, the cries of joy and loyalty, that told of a people blessed with rightful rulers; to listen to the sounds of revelry, the songs of sweet-voiced singers, and the melodious clash of cymbals, rolling of drums, piping of flutes, and twanging of lyres, all merged and mellowed into festive harmony; 'twas better still to look across the bay at the fleet of three hundred sail and watch them as they fought a sham sea-battle, advancing, retreating, paying off and slewing round, chasing and grappling, till all the curving harbour was alive with mimic fight and motion. 'Twas even better still to note how well my lovely queen bore on her shoulders the burden of her fame and rank and wealth, being not too familiar with the nobles of high rank, reproving gently any courtly arrogance that came within her ken, speaking cherished words of praise to the brave and true, talking most to the humble and lowly without any false pride, and moving with matchless grace through all the day's bright scenes, a regal form of dark, deep loveliness, a type of purest and most beauteous womanhood; and 'twas best of all to see the many good, staunch friends around us who would serve us to the death and think they had but done their duty.

But 'twas when the wild rejoicings waned and the day had reached its end in a swiftly passing gloam of softened half-light that faded into star-lit darkness, and when Briseis and I retired from the gaze of our subjects, and sought the quiet of our own apartments, that the full fruition of our life's joy came to us.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Sleeper's Story.

The world went very well with me then, and as King of Atlantis I lived for seventeen happy, peaceful years; the dearest and the gladdest of my life; brightened ever by the love of Briseis, which waned not, but grew from day to day, and cheered and comforted by the lisping prattle of infant voices, and later, by the merry shouts of children at their play—our children, two black, curly-haired, boisterous, boys, fond of mimic fighting with blunted wooden swords, the eldest and the youngest, with a dark, big-eyed girl between them, giving promise of a beauty witching as her lovely mother's.

These three we had, and these only, but dearer and sweeter were they in our eyes than anything else the world could give.

Didron, we named the eldest, fourteen years old, after the gruff old pirate who had taught me what I knew of sea-craft; "Little Didron," we called him, but in truth he was tall and sturdy as a young giant, and full of consequence withal.

Our daughter we named Vesta, after my fair Egyptian bride whom the sea had taken from me, so free and forgiving to her memory was my Queen; and the youngest, six years old, we named Alcis, in remembrance of the brave standard bearer who fell at my side in the great battle of Ulmeca. He was cast in a gentler mould than the other two, for where Didron was strong and hearty, and inclined to show his mastership when it was called in question, as I had done at his age, and where Vesta was very chary of her regal dignity, Alcis was of a more retiring nature, more considerate of others and simpler in his desires, and his girlish face, though it made him beloved of the Queen and the waiting-maids, often brought down upon him the jokes of his more robust brother, with whom, nevertheless, he could hold his own at skilful fence.

For myself, I loved them all equally, seeing that all cannot be alike and that all were my own.

Atris, also, was wedded to his Izitla, and their one child, their son, they named little Phrena, after the name I had once borne, and next to my own three children I loved the lad, who was as often in the palace as at his father's house—the house where Briseis had once lived and which Valdo now shared with his comrade Atris and the latter's wife and aged father, upon whose hoary head were evident the marks of nigh upon a hundred years.

The four youngsters played together as one family, though I noticed with pleasure, as they grew older, that Phrena chose out Vesta as his especial companion, and that the wayward minx was never so happy as when he chased her through the palace corridors for a merry kiss. I wished nothing better for them than that their youthful liking should grow up into later love, and it seemed to bring back to me my own young days when I had played with golden-haired Viol on the sandy beach of our isle in the sunny sea.

So calm were those seventeen years of joy, so little trouble was there to disturb my crown, that I began to think all danger past and to sink into a restful peace of mind, contented well with the sober records of a warless reign.

The sea had gained on the land but slowly since my coronation, so that the people were lulled into a false sense of secureness, and having made no effort to regain our lost colonies, no disturbing forces moved us from without. Yet though slowly, the sea still gained on the shore, and the absence of their wonted luxuries from abroad told hardly on the populace, so that the nobles were in great disfavour because of the hoards they treasured up and which they refused to share or sell.

Few pirates now rode the southern seas, for my fleet of five-hundred craft swept our coasts continually.

Of Listra I had not heard anything since the day she proudly went from the Queen's presence, an outcast from her rank and sex.

Thus most things gave promise of a long and quiet reign unruffled by the storm of human woe, so that in fancy I already saw myself a white-haired patriarch, dispensing justice from my throne with faltering voice and teaching young Didron to follow in my steps so that in worthiness he might assume my crown when I should need it no more; saw my Queen, my Briseis, my love, still beauteous in my eyes in spite of the added years, travelling by my side, a radiant form of comfort and of hope, adown the sloping hill of life to its peaceful end; saw Atris and Izitla bearing company with us in the inevitable pilgrimage, and their son and our daughter mated in true love bonds, and, perchance, their children—my grandchildren—cheering and enlivening our withered old age with their care-free chatter and innocent happiness; saw our friends, whom we had tried and trusted and not found wanting, traversing the self-same way, and one by one, as the Fates decreed, passing on into the Shadowland beyond.

I already saw the people, better skilled by then in the gentler arts and forgetful of the tricks of war, clustering fondly round my royal dignity, all loth that I should go, yet ready to bestow their loyalty upon my eldest son, and saw beyond the grave a long illustrious dynasty of kings sprung from myself, ruling wisely a great and prosperous nation, invincible within its borders and the mistress of the seas.

So soon had I forgotten the prophecy that was told of the Sleeper, so soon forgotten the words of Unim, the Priest of Truth. My fancy was a fancy only, nor was it long after the seventeen years had passed that my dream was shattered and my earlier fears fulfilled; not long till all the land was in a tumult, destined never to subside. Read on, and you shall be wise as I, though I pray to the gods that you may never be so sorrow-stricken and so sad.

It came about, as the time sped on, and the cares of state sat more easily upon me, that I found chance to indulge in sport and pastime, my chief companion in these pursuits being Marenso, who, of all pastimes, preferred fishing.

Sometimes a great retinue would accompany us; but

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show and pomp on like occasions I abhorred, and more often than not the Sleeper and I would steal surreptitiously from the palace, lines and nets in hand, and attended solely by one faithful servant, would seek an hour of quiet sport and conversation by the brink of some secluded stream, or in a quiet nook on the wooded shore. Little Alcis went with us now and then, delighting in the landing of the shining creatures, and clapping his hands in childish glee whenever a larger fish than usual darted past.

Many places we tried, but none so suited us as one near the shore, just a little to the N.E. of the bay. It was in a smaller bay, or inlet, that curved so sharply landwards, and was so narrow at its mouth that it seemed more like the estuary of a river than an arm of the sea. On the spit of land betwixt it and the ocean was a lovely dell, disposed in terraced ridges, and sprinkled over with an abundance of glorious flowers, the rich and blended perfumes of white-robed lilies, blush-red roses, and demurely-dressed deminons filling the redolent air.

It was a lovely spot, and there, one thrice-accursed day, Marenso and I were casting our hand-nets, while Alcis gambolled merrily under the shade of a giant aloe in full bloom, whose clustering pyramidal flowers rose grandly above the dark coronals of leaf. It was towards even, in the days when twilight lingers, and, looking seaward over the limitless expanse of billowy blue, the eye caught sight of several far-off specks of snowy sail, speeding homeward for the night, while, nearer, the birds were singing their evensongs with trill and chatter, and one precocious frog was disturbing the air with his dismal croaking.

We threw our nets and let out our lines, but all to no purpose. We could see the finny denizens of the inlet flashing hither and thither in the slanting shafts of light that trembled in the water, gathering round the tempting bait or hovering near the nets, but not one would rise to bite nor float into our traps.

We lost our patience at last, which fishermen do not often, and railed loudly at the obdurate creatures. Something in the atmosphere oppressed us also; it weighed heavy on our heads, and a strange opalescent yellowness hung over sea and land like a shadowy pall. The sky in the east looked leaden, and the very insects hummed in droning, listless tones about our ears.

"A storm is brewing, I will wager," said my comrade at length, dragging out his tackle in disgust, "and if so, 'tis of no avail to try to lure these little wretches from their element. Draw up thy lines and sit back here on this mossy bank, and we will talk, for a lazy, idle feeling has seized me."

"As it hath myself," I made reply, "and as it seemeth it hath these rebellious fishes, who obey not their king as loyal subjects ought! Of what shall we speak, Marenso?"

"If thou wouldst care to hear the story of my life before I fell asleep, which I have never yet told, I will talk of that," said he, "for I have a strong premonitory sense of coming evil that urges me to speak."

"Say on, my friend," I cried, taking Alcis on my knee and bidding him hearken to a tale that he would one day be proud of having listened to, "say on, nor think to weary me, for there is an hour of day as yet, and 'tis a thing I have often wished to know, though I have forborne to ask."

"It is not a long story, though it covers forty years," said the Sleeper, "but 'tis a curious one. King Monteza had just assumed the crown when I was born, and for the first thirty years of his reign knew not a day's relief from struggling with the hostile forces of his two cousins, Alcalda and Nem. These two hated one another as the tiger hates the crocodile, but they hated their royal cousin more, and so fought in unison against him.

"You must know that Kronos here was not then built, and that the Royal Court was held in those days at Miropis, where also the Sacred Grotto was, in which I worshipped often. Also, where the sea now rolls, the land—a rich and fertile tract—extended many a league from what is now the shore. I have told you once of the Isle of Olives; it was a day's journey on horseback from Miropis to the seaport whence we sailed for it. But the Isle itself is now buried under the greedy waters.

"The rebel leaders occupied chiefly the provinces of Aidè, Yand, and Saitè, and the rival armies were evenly balanced, so that neither side could gain advantage for many years.

"With my twin brothers, Mattoni and Olasin, a year younger than myself, I grew up among the disloyalists, and as soon as we were strong and tall enough, we were put under arms, and went to the war in our father's company. Our mother wept bitterly the day we set forth, proud and excited, for the front, and would fain have kept us back at the last. But our father was a stern, gruff man, who laughed at women's fears and mocked at their weaknesses, and with a great oath he bade us march on and be like men, getting into his saddle and riding off without so much as a word of farewell to his wife.

"I shall never forget that day. Our house was near the frontier of the two countries—for so Atlantis was then known—and the tide of battle had rolled to within a day's march of it, so that when we joined our array at noon, the fight had begun. Long and severe was that fight, the issue hanging in the balance, finely drawn, till the very end. Backwards and forwards the red tide surged, now from our home, and now towards it, but ever flowing with blood and death.

"At even it was over, and our friends were flying for their lives across the plain, hotly pursued by the victorious soldiers of King Monteza. My father fell and received his death-wound in that mad retreat, and when I and my brothers returned to our home, hungry, ragged, and foot-sore, after many days, we found only a charred ruin, with the corpses of our mother and our faithful servants lying under the gaunt, grim wreck, slain by the enemy."

"'Tis a terrible hearing," said I, "but how came it that thou afterwards went over to the enemy? for you said to the Queen, after your awakening, that you had fallen asleep, Monteza's General."

"If you will have patience, King, you shall soon know," answered the Sleeper gravely, "and when thou hast heard, you will no longer marvel thereat. Of all men, I least could have fashioned the thought that one day I should make peace with the enemies of my father and mother, and least of all on that day when we three brothers stood by the blackened, ruined house, and swore with uplifted hands never to rest until the slayers of our mother were themselves slain and their friends defeated and brought to justice.

"The King's triumph was short-lived, and in the next long engagement we found ourselves in the ranks of the victorious, gaining glory and renown by our recklessness in the struggle and our eagerness in the pursuit, and thence-forward rose steadily in favour till we were made captains of brigades, and were known throughout the land as the Dauntless Brothers, inseparable either in victory or defeat.

"Now, tired of the long struggle, and jealous of each other, the quarrellings of the two claimants to the throne grew frequent, causing a division in our ranks, and setting our soldiers against their friends and comrades. This I regretted greatly, seeing that our division would be the enemy's advantage, but, with my brothers, was compelled to uphold Prince Nem, who was the more honourable of the two, and the more inclined to peace.

"At last the trouble came to a head at a banquet that was held after a defeat that should have been a triumph. We three were there, as well as the two leaders, and from the first I feared that blood would be shed before the feast was done. However, all went well till the wine passed round, when Alcalda, who was given to drink and like a tiger when full of it, began to growl at our ill-luck, and throw out dark hints as to where the blame should rest. Nem bore his insults in silence for awhile, or only answered in jest, but when his brother, enraged at his quietness, rose and hurled a drinking cup straight at his

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head, he sprang to his feet with a fierce oath, and at the sword's point dared Alcalda to repeat his words.

"Like an infuriated beast now, the other replied with his weapon, and the guests taking part, the room was at once full of strife and running with ruddy blood. Our side, chiefly owing to the efforts of our Dauntless Brothers, was rapidly gaining the mastery, when an old general, Balinin by name, rushed in and bade us cease.

"'Let our leaders fight out their own quarrel,' he said, wisely, 'and let whoever is the victor be our only chief.'

"His words pleased us, and holding down our blades, we stood and watched the two struggling in the death grip. It was a struggle long and severe, but in the end, much to my chagrin, Alcalda slew his rival, the temperate-minded Nem, and Alcalda we all acknowledged as our rightful King.

"We three, for our liking for Nem, were never in favour with the victor thereafter, and but for our vow we had gone over to Monteza's camp, as some others did. As it was, we served Alcalda faithfully, so that he had no excuse for turning against us openly.

"Thus matters stood with us for awhile, till one day, pursuing a band of the foe's foragers too far, we were taken in an ambuscade, surrounded, and captured, after a stern fight. In a few days we were brought to the King's presence—for our fame was well known in his camp—and put upon our trial.

"'And so you are the Dauntless Brothers?' said Monteza, eyeing us keenly; 'you are the three who have so often turned the tide of battle against me?'

"'We are, and are proud of it,' answered Olasin.

"'And why have you fought against me, instead of for me?' asked the King. 'Think you that your prince, who has slain his brother, would make a fitter ruler than myself?'

"'No, King,' replied Mattoni, who was the readiest of speech amongst us, 'no, King. But thy men killed our father in battle the first day that we bore arms at his side, and thy men also slew our mother and our servants, and burnt our house to the ground. For that we fight against thee, for that we have sworn to fight thee until our parent-slayers are themselves slain and their friends dishonoured.'

"'"Tis no wonder that ye are rebels,' said Monteza; 'and I cannot cast blame upon ye for it, though such evil deeds were never done with my wish.'

"Then he thought for awhile, resting his chin on his hands, saying at last:

"'Art aware that since Alcalda has made a practice of slaying all his prisoners, I have done the same, and that your lives are forfeited?'

"'To our sorrow, King,' said we: 'we know our Chief has done it, and make no appeal to thy mercy.'

"'Nevertheless,' said Monteza, 'promise me but one thing—namely, that if your vow should be accomplished, and your Chief should turn against you, you three will come and serve under my banner, and you shall go free from here and back to your friends.'

"Astonished beyond measure, we took counsel amongst ourselves, and through Mattoni promised, and, thanking the King, went back to Alcalda's camp rejoicing, giving out there that we had escaped by stratagem.

"We understood King Monteza's intentions better a few months later, when a great bullock waggon, full of human heads, and attended by a countryman, drove into our lines, and was emptied in front of our tent, to the amazement of the soldiers.

"'These are the heads of the slayers of the parents of the Dauntless Brother,' said the unarmed, rustic waggoner who brought them, 'and are sent by command of King Monteza, who bade me say that the generals who commanded the day the deed was done are now dishonoured and reduced to the lowest rank, so that the Dauntless Brothers have now no cause to fight against him.'

"'"Tis well,' said Mattoni to Olasin and I, 'but as yet Alcalda has not turned on us, and our promise can still remain a promise. As for these heads, let us get them buried, for now I have seen them even revenge has lost its charm.'

"'As it hath to me,' I answered.

"Now some of the soldiers would have taken the messenger captive, but I interfered, and saw that he was given a safe conduct to the frontier.

"For a day or two all went on as before, but it seems that certain of the soldiers, mean wretches without shame, went secretly to Alcalda and told him of the matter, repeating the royal message, and seeing a chance to vent his jealous hate upon us, the Rebel Chief sent a strong body of his most trusted men to seize us in the night. Our friends, however, were many, and the plot being revealed to us in time we managed to evade his myrmidons, and, seeking safety in flight, came to Monteza's camp and offered him our services."

"Thou couldst do little else, then," I said.

"So thought we," continued Marenso, "and right gladly our erstwhile enemy welcomed us, saying with a chuckle of conceit, that though he had spared our lives once, we had given them up to him of our own free will.

"Thereafter we fought with the soldiers of Monteza, gaining even greater fame than before, and because of our knowledge of Alcalda's weaknesses, leading our troops to victory after victory, till only the province of Yand was left to the rebels, wherein they were cooped up by our armies.

"By that time I alone was left a soldier amongst my brethren, for Mattoni, ever glib of tongue, had become the High Priest of Truth and well versed in all the ancient mysteries, while Olasin, slower of speech, but more cunning and fonder of his ease, became the King's chief minister.

"But in camp and on the battlefield 'twas I whom the King liked best and I whom he made his general, second only in authority to himself. 'Twas I who led his victorious armies in the last campaign, and who, after a pitched battle and a long, running fight, met and slew Alcalda in single combat, and so brought the war to an end and gave peace to Atlantis. 'Twas I who thus gave Monteza an undivided realm, seating him firmly on the throne."

"Then how came it that the King let thee sleep so long a slumber without effort to wake thee?" I said. "For surely thou wert too useful a subject to be lightly lost!"

"I am coming to that presently," he said, "for there was a woman at the root of my mishap, as I verily believe there is a woman at the root of all earthly troubles. Let me tell thee the story in my own way."

(*To be continued.*)

Jumbled Story Competition.—25.

On the next page appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *December 21st,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 25.] [*See Page 795.*

NOT HER WAY TOM ASHLUN.

A quaint cottage, standing alone in a little bit of broken hearts.

A young girl, friendless and relationless, lived accompanied by a large dog, and carrying a stout face turned towards the heat of the flames.

A man was fishing at the side of the bridge. He looked back at the figure seated at the fire. Then noticed that she hesitated, and came forward to the story of his love, and the eyes of the blind girl encountered a cabinet. She drew a key from her detail of that last meeting. The man poured out this woman who had waited five long years for his broken heart.

But this man was not as other men.

The man watched her with dog-like eyes, as she walked through the village, past the straggling row beneath her. She started back with a little cry, as he passed on, and the curtain dropped softly behind many things over the winter's fire.

The man dropped his hands to his side. Something moved about the room with easy grace. It was late that he knew so well.

In the dim light of the fire it was with difficulty but he placed the girl's trembling hand under his feet, and Wealth in his hands.

But the time soon came for the man to go away. Afterwards neither of them ever forgot the smallest last remnant of former days.

And a great love sprang up between them.

After that the man came often to see the blind girl placed her foot upon it, and a plank gave way a tiny cottage in a tiny village.

Blind! The man started at the word. It seemed eternal darkness. He did not say, "I am sorry," though fearing some unknown danger.

"Thank you," said the girl. "I am very grateful so that he hardly knew it himself. "I have come here alone, cared for only by her housekeeper, the girl's confidence returned. She stirred up the fire of a swift-flowing stream.

The man's teeth bit into his lip until the blood went away.

He came a step forward, and held out his arms.

Presently she rose to her feet, and crossing the sides of a room, the floors were covered with artisticness—the furniture was placed round the heavy carpets, there were no doors, and few stairs—Then, with a quick movement, she drew out the words softly to herself. Then, without turning her walking stick in her hand. She went down the garden, arranged within with a certain æsthetic bottle, containing a greenish liquid.

Now it has been said that men do not die of blind eyes.

He looked keenly into the girl's face, but she seemed to rise in his throat and hold him before he tore himself away.

Somehow, he had expected that her instinct would assist her. He led her carefully across.

Then a thought occurred to him. "I will test her room. He paused, with his hand on the curtain, and sat quite still in her chair, as though turned to that he made out the figure of the girl seated in a floor.

So, with her promises ringing in his ears, the man came.

One winter afternoon the girl went for a walk, country lanes, across the meadows, and through the woods, until she presently found herself at the side of cottages to that tiny one at the end of them all smiting him for what he had done, found the body and wrote on a sheet of paper:

"Who is it?"

"I go to find him."

The man thought it was indifference. Rather, a stopper, and placed the bottle to her lips.

Five years later he came back, with Fame at his pocket, and opening the door, brought out a little dog bounded on in front, and showed him the way.

A fragile bridge crossed to the other side. The low chair drawn up before it.

She passed her fingers over it, feeling it carefully.

When they came to the little cottage, the blind girl. They took long walks together, and talked of him."

He found everything as he had left it, when he worshipped him. Tell me, what of him? Is he well? Is he happy?"

What is time, when one faces eternity?

"He is dead. He is dead." The girl repeated the tongue-tied. Yet he longed to rush forward, and like to be alone."

"He is well," he replied slowly, "and happy, indeed, if her love is strong."

"Loved him," cried the girl, "I adored him; I seemed to brighten as she heard him.

Without a word, the man turned, and crossed the room to the writing table, took a pen in her hand, for the troubles of this world are now as nothing to the man.

"I have come," he said, and his voice was changed to you. I am blind."

The girl sat quite still when he had left her, her head: "I thank you for your news. Now, I would return!

The little clock on the mantlepiece struck hour after hour, but she did not heed it.

Then she felt on the wall until her hands impossible that one so young and fair should live in strong arm, and insisted on taking her home. The from one who loved you, and who thought that you once loved him."

The man, returning a little later, his heart into a cheerful blaze, and drew two chairs before it. take the girl in his arms, and kiss her on her dear, have told her that it was he. Instead:

If he had only known how perfect was the love of of the girl he loved lying cold and stiff upon the stone.

* * * * *

And that was the worst thought that ever came to him.

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THE CHRISTMAS JEWELS.

Amid the vast stillness of the winter night there was a gleaming, like the dust of diamonds, whose particles sparkled into minute flames when the moonlight glanced athwart the snow, which seemed to sing beneath the tread of two passers-by, so crisp and frosty it was.

"Christel, oh, little Christel; dost thou feel how my love binds me fast to thee?" murmured a youth's voice, and handsome Jean took the hand of the maiden, whose red lips quivered as if in response to the glistening of her beautiful eyes.

With her slender fingers smoothing down a lock of fair hair that was in danger of straying into her eyes, the girl spoke as follows: "I think Rose will be at the *réveillon* (midnight repast), so let us hurry on. Dost thou know her lover has given her a gold cross and also a ring of gold with an agate setting? Last month my grandfather gave me a gold cross, too, but it is so small a one! What will he give me, I wonder, for a New Year's gift?"

Poor, handsome Jean pressed her hand, and swiftly, softly, bent down and imprinted a burning kiss upon it. But pretty Christel seemed not to notice what he had done, and sighingly continued: "Many, many jewels have great ladies. Is it not a fine thing, Jean, to be a great lady with jewels and gold—to be rich and beautiful, Jean, rich and beautiful!"

The poor fellow gazed with gloomy, yet yearning, love-gleaming glances upon her; for his love for her was no less timid than deep, no less helpless than ardent, and impressed upon him a look of sorrow. If riches had only been his, how he would have lavished them on the girl beside him!

They walked on in silence until, when the woodland grew sparse, a red, flickering light guided the guests to the midnight feast, and invited them to enter the house. There crackled and blazed the cheery hearth-fire; there the old folks talked in low, measured tones of things of the olden times; the young people sitting apart listening with tender respect and due attention, while a fatty smell from the buckwheat cakes, mingled with the sugary scent of mulled wine, permeated the thick steam that, rising, flattened itself out against the low ceiling.

Eleven o'clock struck in some distant church tower, and the first clang of a bell trembled athwart the clear out-of-door shadowiness. Christel, listening, turned towards her companion, and with tear-dimmed eyes whispered: "If we could only believe the old folks, Jean!"

"What dost thou mean, pretty Christel?"

"Dost thou not remember, Jean, the legend of the Brèche up yonder," and she pointed through the window to a lofty crag, coldly shining above the forest, "the legend of the rock that every Christmas eve is cleft asunder and remains thus apart whilst midnight completes its twelve strokes; the legend of yonder rock and its hidden treasures? Surely, Jean, thou canst not fail to remember? What if we venture up there, what if it all should be true, Jean?"

Incredulity was in her voice and eyes, yet she smiled so longingly that the youth said: "Let us go then, dearest maid. Let us discover if it indeed be true."

So, taking leave of the kind people assembled for the *réveillon*, they set forth once more, gaining faith with every forward step that led them towards the crag, as they both silently recalled the ancient story, handed down from sire to son for ages, of a castle that once reared upon that height its gloomy, terror-inspiring battlements and bade defiance to all the peaceful country side, until one night, along with its sacrilegious lord and his accursed wealth, it was on a sudden swallowed up by the yawning maw of the mountain.

Many a witness there had been, so said the old folk, of the prodigies occurring at the Brèche just at the hour when in universal joy the Christian world celebrates the birth of the Redeemer, and miracles are permitted to astonish and awe mankind. Had the great rock not been seen to open as a door turns on its hinges, letting one gaze into dark passages that suddenly shone with the subterranean splendour of the long-lost treasure, whose fabulous masses of flashing gold and scintillating heaps of precious stones, the harvest of woe and bloodshed, were for an instant revealed, to be as swiftly sealed fast within the mountain again until another twelve months had fled into the past?

At length Christel broke the silence by murmuring: "Oh, Jean! if it be true, if it really be true, shall we not, while the hour is striking, shall we not stoop down and lean forward and pick up a ring, a necklace? We'll be so quick, so quick—a ring, a necklace, a string of pearls, a diamond brooch! Only just think of it, Jean! Thou wilt try for me, wilt thou not, dear Jean?" she urged, again appealing to her lover.

"Yes," he answered, with burning eyes and firmly-pressed lips, "yes, my Christel, I will try. Come, let us walk faster! Come, my darling!"

She looked at him adoringly: "Oh, Jean, how kind thou art!" she murmured, and was about to proffer her lips for a kiss; but there came such a sadness into Jean's eyes that she felt a vague shame steal upon her and hinder her from doing more than give him her hand.

Turning aside from the road, they plunged into the snow beneath the ancient spruce trees, whose sleet-bearded branches bent earthwards protectingly and, as it were, warningly, seeming to be conscious of the mad errand whereon the young couple had set out, then amongst loose stones and rocks, that jutted towards the summit.

Immense masses of ice groaned and seemed ready to split beneath their footsteps as they crossed fissures of unknown depth; often they would slip and come near sliding down some precipitious slope. Jean even had to carry Christel in places, a task anything but disagreeable, if such danger had not constantly threatened them. She fretted lest they should arrive beyond the hour of midnight, and thus be too late for the acquisition of any of the beautiful fabulous things locked up within the mountain.

But the sky grew cloudy, veiling the moon and stars, while, like petals detached from the flowers in some

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enchanted garden, a few snowflakes fell slowly through the seemingly stirless air. The huge Brèche loomed threateningly above the spruce forest, and far, far below, the valley lay dimly white, like the ghost of a landscape. Some black, gnarled roots coiled snakelike at the base of the crag as they approached and joined divers jagged lumps of rock together in dismal union. Jean, setting his precious burden down, pointed to a spot where the rock appeared beneath a bluish layer of ice, and simply said: "It is here."

Then they both sat down upon a stone to await the mysterious scene at the midnight stroke. Shivering with cold and a little frightened, Christel drew close to Jean, ever keeping her eyes fixed on the bluish spot in the ice; while the youth again clasped her hand and endeavoured to let her feel silently how strong and willing he was to protect her. He did not watch the ice upon the rock; his eyes turned skywards to gaze on the moon, which, re-issuing from a cloud, appeared reddish as in an eclipse, and a few stars also came fresh into view athwart the mist and the sparsely-falling snowflakes.

Hark! Remote, muffled, like a voice from out the past, amid the vast stillness a prelusive tinkle ascends. The first stroke of the midnight hour sounds! The mystery must now, if ever, unfold itself. With fast-beating hearts, Jean and Christel rise to their feet, in silent expectancy awaiting the miracle, and both now riveting their eyes upon the ice-covered rock. The air still vibrates with the first stroke of midnight, when, as though smitten by the spear of some pagan deity, the rock is rent asunder, gaping wide almost at their very feet; while a deep, dark, cavernous passage appears, that gradually becomes luminous from the entrance of the outer semi-radiance, as well as from the increase of the mystic inner glimmering.

While Christel stretches out her hands eagerly towards the sparkling cavern, Jean, disdaining to make use of a ruined flight of steps leading sideward into the mountain, leaps down directly into the shining mass and is lost to view in its dazzling splendour; but the shock of his leap causes the gold to chink and knock together with a sound that makes sweetest music to the ear of the young girl who stands without, now feverish with anxiety also, lest the magic spectacle vanish ere she can profit thereby, and she shudders with apprehension as the third stroke of the twelve resounds, faint and far, from the distant valley.

Meanwhile, Jean, his feet bathed, so to speak, in the precious coruscations, stoops down and gathers handfuls of big gold discs linked together by tiny chains, and, after flinging them out of the cavern, he picks up a diadem with an open setting of imperial diamonds and emeralds blazing like white and green flies, intermixed with rubies whose tint is like snow touched by the rosy light of dawn, and with topaz radiantly yellow as the sunlight itself.

This crown of fabulous worth he likewise tosses out into the snow, so as to gather an armful of pearl necklaces beautiful beyond expression; costly girdles of amethysts, sapphires, and turquoises, polished, but uncut, and held in place by gold filagree; rosaries fit for a queen, wherein in every tenth bead is a garnet, round and glossy as little crimson gooseberries, and wherein the Paternoster is composed of black and white diamonds arranged alternately. Like Christel, Jean also grows anxious, but not for himself, as the strokes fall from the distant clock. At the tenth stroke, with arms full laden, he stands upright, and casts the rich burden at his fair companion's feet; then, clutching firmly the jagged edge of the rock, he draws himself together preparatory to making a spring upwards and outwards.

He can see Christel close beside the cavern entrance, kneeling in the snow, her blonde hair tossed by the wind that has begun to blow, and streaming back into the shadows. Her eyes laugh at him, despite their fervour and anxiety of expression, and seem to caress him with their fond, fervid gaze.

Hark! Another stroke of the clock! Jean is ready to leap out; but he hears the cry of her whom he loves, a cry that is like a supplication: "More, more!"

He paused and looks at Christel, and, with close-set lips, but a heart full of forgiveness, lets go his hold of the rock and plunges down again into the inexhaustible treasure. He snatches a ring, and holding it high, like a symbol of victory, flings it with its gold-encircled, great, blood-red Oriental ruby towards the girl, whose hand makes a movement to catch it. Suddenly the twelfth stroke echoes through the wind-stirred air. Quick! Oh, Jean! Quick, ere it be too late! But the last vibration had ceased.

Noiselessly, even as it unclosed, does the rock shut to once more, and the snow begins to fall fast, its great white flakes dancing impishly round the maiden kneeling all alone with her eyes still fixed smilingly upon the glorious ruby, not yet realising the horror of her situation, not yet awakened to the thought of the brave, loyal lover, self-sacrificed to satisfy her thirst for wealth.

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Two Jolly Girl Bachelors.

For several years they had worked together, lunched and dined and breakfasted together, shared one another's heart's secrets, and been inseparable companions. Men who knew the jolly girl bachelors called them ideal women. When one felt sad and heartsick and given over to the little moods that make a girl wretchedly, miserably woe-begone, the other was always there to comfort or laugh the tears away.

Flat Cosy, with its tiny corners filled with downy sofa cushions, was the resting place for more than one weary friend, who would drop in during the evenings for a cup of fragrant tea and a comfortable chat. The little brass tea kettle would hum a busy roundelay, and join in the argument as sturdily as if its fat little body contained a fairly good pair of lungs. Margaret was the elder of the two girls. She was always the same, good-natured, laughing Margaret.

Their men friends raved over Margaret's pretty face, but she sadly lacked the graceful, pretty ways that so soon disappear whan a girl enters the busy world of business. Her appearance was that of a well-informed, independent young woman, who was quite content with her masculine manner and airs of a girl bachelor.

As to Dorothy, the other girl—well, she wasn't what one would call a pretty girl. Her nose was a trifle too saucy, and her mouth could have been smaller. But she had wonderfully soft and fluffy hair that curled round her ears, and then piled itself in a silky knot on the top of her head. Her eyes were always bright, and were of that tender brown that one so seldom sees.

They were so unlike, those two girls, yet they drifted through life, each firm in her belief that no other girl lived who was quiet so unselfish, so sweetly dear, and so thoroughly good as her friend.

"We must be nice old spinisters, Margaret, dear," Dorothy used to say. "Or cross old maids, with cork-screw curls and plenty of cats and parrots, you know; because if you were to marry and leave me I'd die from loneliness, and I am sure you couldn't live without me."

"Indeed, I could not," Margaret would answer. "But I feel sure you will be the first to desert our little nest."

"How can you say such things?" and Dorothy's mouth would pucker up in a most melancholy manner.

Secrets were unknown to them. Love-letters were always read and commented on, and considered the rightful property of both girls. Simple Dorothy would dilate at great length over her love affairs, and many a glorious laugh did they both have when Jack Ryerson took it into his head to fall in love with her.

Jack was an artist. Not at all like the fascinating fellow in the story-books, who wears velvet coats and lives on biscuits and ale in a dusty and romantic studio, but a well-built man, who was employed in the art department of a commonplace publishing house.

"Sometimes I think that Dorothy isn't a real live girl at all," he once remarked to Margaret. "When she stood there in the doorway a moment ago, with her head tilted on one side and her hair looking so pretty, I couldn't help wondering if I were not actually looking at some old painting."

Dorothy was very fond of Jack. They used to have jolly times when she posed for his pictures, and, in fact, Jack Ryerson's sketches of pretty girls were unrivalled and the envy of all his fellow-workers. After each of their little sketching séances Dorothy would tell Margaret all about what Jack said, and how he said it, and what she said back. But one evening after Jack had gathered up his crayons and departed Dorothy marched off to her own room without the customary chat. Margaret was alarmed.

She brought out the mandoline, and sang several street ditties in the hopes that Dorothy would emerge from her den to have her ruffled spirits smoothed down. But no Dorothy appeared. It was after midnight, and Margaret had been asleep for some time when she was aroused by a white-robed figure that glided silently to her side, slid two very cold arms round her, and with a dismal little tremble sobbed:

"Maggy, darling, I'm so wretched and unhappy."

"Dorothy," Margaret gasped, "you'll catch your death; go back to bed at once and sleep. Do now, there's a dear."

"Sleep?" queried Dorothy. "I can't sleep. I haven't slept for a week. I got some powders from Dr. Hall to-day, and he said that I was nervous and tired out and needed rest; but he doesn't know anything. He——"

"Is it Jack, Dolly?" and Margaret looked into the fine brown eyes that shone in the moonlight.

"I don't know myself," Dorothy doubtfully replied, "but I presume it is. I feel as if I hadn't a friend in the world when he's not with me, and I'm too happy to breathe when he is here" (Margaret smiled just then), "and that's what makes me wild, and that's what makes me hate myself. He probably says all those pretty compliments to every woman he meets."

Things were never quite the same between them after that. Somehow Margaret seemed less sympathetic, and Dorothy felt that she was no longer interested in her foolish affairs. Jack and Dorothy began to find comfort in the silly little quarrels that only those who are in love indulge in.

At last, one day their argument ended most unfortunately, and although Jack wasn't really serious, Dorothy felt sure that he was, and was quite broken-hearted.

"You do make me so unhappy," she pouted. "I almost wish that you'd go and drown yourself, or hang yourself—do anything so that I'll never see you again. You keep me perfectly miserable all the time."

"Dolly! Sweetheart!" Jack pleaded. "Forgive me. I was only teasing you. I love you with all my heart!" Then, noticing her sneering smile, he said desperately: "but you don't believe it."

"No, I don't," Dorothy answered pettishly. "How many girls have you said that to? How far down on the list do I come? Really, now, but doesn't your conscience trouble you when you think of all the feminine hearts that you have broken? But I presume you have become hardened to it," and then Dorothy started up a series of hysterical bursts of merriment.

"Dorothy, I can't understand you," was all Jack said, and he slowly gathered together his scattered pencils, put them in his pockets, and departed without another word.

As he went out into the shadows of the street, he

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was half-inclined to rush back and entreat her to believe him. He did love her. To be sure, he had told other girls that he loved them, but his regard for them had never been just like the affection he had for Dorothy. He would give his life for that moody, tearful bit of femininity that he had left curled up in a big arm-chair. He kept saying to himself in an insane sort of fashion: "I love you, Dorothy, I love you." Then, when he found that he had wandered for miles with the chill air cutting his face and making his ears tingle, he laughed silently and said: "But I'll tease her. I'll pretend to make love to Margaret. By Jove! Why didn't I think of that before?"

A few days after that, Dorothy was missed from her desk at the office, and for the first time since the beginning of their friendship, Margaret lunched alone. During the long hours Dorothy wandered about the Flat Cosy, now plucking leaves from the geraniums in the window, now standing before the large mirror on the dressing-table, smoothing her white cheeks, brushing back the curls from her damp forehead, and studying her eyes that appeared to have grown suddenly larger.

But when Margaret went home that night Dorothy was quite like her old self. There was a bright spot on either cheek, and Margaret thought she had never seen Dorothy look sweeter. After dinner they sat before the fire, Dorothy with her head in Margaret's lap and Margaret's arms about her. They talked over every happy hour they had spent together. They laughed and even played childish games as they munched chocolates that Margaret said grew in her jacket-pockets. And when the time came to say good-night, and Dorothy kissed Margaret, as was her custom, Margaret puzzled over the tear that had fallen on her hand.

Dorothy had planned it all that afternoon. Three powders, Dr. Hall had said, would cause the death of a ten-year-old child, and she had all the powders that he had left with her—there were ten at least. He had cautioned her so carefully, for the medicine was very strong, and an overdose would surely prove fatal. Yes, she felt that she was wicked. Jack loved Margaret. He didn't love her, with the plain face and moody ways. It was Margaret. How could she have been so blind? He knew that she, Dorothy, loved him, so he said all those pretty things to comfort her.

She slipped into the pink eider-down that Jack so admired. She arranged her hair after the fashion that he professed to have liked best. Mechanically she folded and put away all the stray garments that were lying about the room. From her glove box she took a package that contained several folded bits of paper. Her gloves! They had never looked so pretty before. Her fan, too—but then Margaret could use it. How her temples throbbed! What made her choke so? Her heart seemed bursting with grief.

Oh, yes, she had forgotten. She must say her prayers—she had never neglected them—so she knelt down beside the white bed. For some reason she couldn't frame the words. She would get as far as "Thy kingdom come," and she would seem to forget and would mutter, "Dear old Jack! When I am dead you can marry Margaret and forget all about silly Dorothy. I would not love you if I could help it, and don't want you to love me because you are sorry for me."

At last she arose. How cramped her limbs were! There were the powders. Taking the cover of her porcelain powder-box, she emptied the contents of all the white papers in it. Her hands trembled when she raised it to her lips, but she grew strong, and in a moment was staring vacantly at the little cover, with its feathery coating of powder. The bed seemed so far away! She tottered towards it. How soft the pillows felt! She was so sleepy, too.

What sweet music she heard, and who had brought all the flowers that were floating through the air? There was an odour of jasmine. Jack was so fond of jasmine. Jack! Why, there was Jack! Dear Jack! He did love her after all. It was not Margaret at all. If she could only run her fingers through his hair, but somehow she could not move her hands. Ah! Jack came closer then. Yes, yes, it was really Jack. She felt his warm breath against her cheeks, but she could not see him any more. Everything was so black and dark. Jack's lips met hers. With a happy smile, she drifted into the mysterious "Valley of the Shadow."

P. S. L.

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION, No. 22.

The first prize of £5 goes to Miss E. Champ, 16, Prospect Hill, Walthamstow.

A prize of £2 has been sent to Mr. Henry E. Fay, 12, Ormond Road, Rathmines, Dublin.

Prizes of £1 each have been sent to Mr. R. H. Jacobs, H.M.S. *Alexandra*, Portland; Miss Burge, Lorne Cottage, Newton Abbot, Devon; and Mr. Robert Henderson, 4, School Terrace, Golborne, Newton-le-Willows, Lancs.

KEY.—Title: "A Love Song."

10	83	75	9	2	54	43	14	51
65	98	8	90	39	24	70	84	119
3	73	12	36	113	99	23	94	77
67	95	37	62	87	4	82	112	55
34	81	29	38	92	63	120	25	64
115	88	121	102	18	40	47	13	122
41	53	42	124	20	26	46	49	30
56	21	118	107	72	1	80	93	45
52	126	108	69	78	44	111	66	71
89	106	116	58	101	19	7	79	22
76	28	100	33	15	50	60	68	104
16	74	117	85	5	105	6	109	48
32	97	31	91	57	27	110	86	59
35	114	11	17	103	125	123	96	61

Result of Post-Card Competition, No. 23.

The London guinea was awarded to Mr. Julius W. Jacobson, 82, Grosvenor Street, W.; and the Provincial guinea to A. Leonard Nestor, 4, Warrender Park Terrace, Edinburgh.

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Every parce contains: A beautiful Crocodile Leatherette Writing Case, with compartments, note-papers, envelopes, and blottine-paper, one of Raphael Tuck's best 6d. Plaques, Magic Japanese Fan, a Christmas Goose ready stuffed, a powerful Microscope, a Comical Climbing Monkey, Pack of Cards, the Old Maid's Game, a Card of Tools, the complete Game of Ludo, the Performing Sailor, Race Game, with board, horses, etc., a Transformation Album, over 50 changes of figures, a Working Japanese figure, 3 Japanese Lanterns, Tuck's Panorama Toy Books, in colours, a beautiful Model Fire Escape, with extending ladders, fireman rescuing child, made to put together and move along. 1 Box of pretty Japanese Expanding Flowers, Spring Pistol with dart and bird complete, Story Book of Mother Hubbard, in colours, Running Crocodile, or other animal, Grand Bicycle Race Game, board, bikes, and boys to move. The popular game of Jumpkins, 3 Fancy Plaques, a magnificent elegant Fancy Carved Table Mat, the marvellous Optical Illusion, Trilby hypnotised by Svengali, moves across the room, the String and Ball Puzzle, the Magic Cylinder Puzzle, Japanese Butterfly Trick, Double-headed Puzzle, the Card Square Illusion.

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SPECIAL SALE—23 DAYS ONLY.

READ THIS CAREFULLY, and if you want one send at once. We have bought up the entire stock of a large firm of Organette dealers at one-sixth the original cost. We have 600 only left. We offer them at 10s. 6d. Each organette is packed in a wooden case. We give six rolls of music with each instrument. Every part is thoroughly well made and fitted with automatic working rollers, the best quality reeds, firm full tone. Everyone wants music in the home for the winter months, and this is one of those exceptional opportunities which occasionally occur of obtaining a high-class instrument at far below cost. Once gone, gone for ever; as we cannot get any more. If you want one, kindly send us 10s. 6d., and we will at once send you one packed free in case. Please cut out the coupon below and send it with order, or get your friends to call and buy one for you.

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Entitles the sender to one Organette as advertised for 10s. 6d., unless we are sold out.
(Signed) J. THEOBALD & Co.

OUR SUPERB PARCEL OF CHRISTMAS CARDS.

Magnificent Prizes given away Free of Charge to our Customers.

Prize Coupon in Every Parcel. One Prize guaranteed to every ten persons sending in.

PRIZES: 100 Golden Sovereigns, 100 Half-Sovereigns, 100 Five Shilling Pieces, 100 Real Silver Watches, 500 Framed Oil Paintings, 500 Clocks, 500 Keyless Watches, 500 Real Gold Brooches, 500 Real Gold Rings, 500 Silver Brooches, 500 Silver Rings, 500 Silver Pins. These Prizes are actually given away; there is no trickery about them.

No. 1 PACKET OF CHRISTMAS CARDS, 2/6, carriage free, contains cards to shop value of 10/6. The parcel, weighing 1lb., consists of 100 cards, comprising the Mechanical Negro Lover's Card, with movable donkey; Magnificent Three-fold Embossed Shaped Card, "For Auld Lang Syne"; a Three-fold Embossed Shaped Horseshoe card, embossed frosted ivy leaves, with laced edge, and trellis work of gilded bells; a unique Three-fold Jewelled Card, "For auld acquaintance," with embossed leather corrugated edge; "The Old Window Casement," unique mechanical card, with windows to open, and movable heads, with effect of sunlight glow and evening shade, prettily embossed, and with trellis work; "The Dear Old Homestead," with overhanging eaves, cut out to shape, embossed swallows nesting, beautifully frosted with floral emblem, three-fold; The Ideal Mechanical Shipping Card, with movable changing sails; corrugated border; "The Swallow's Return," embossed primroses with ferns, corrugated edging; Three-fold Comic "Caudle Lecture" Card, with changing heads; "The Bicycle Girl in Rational Costume"; Beautiful Four-leaf Booklet, with Cupid page; Mechanical Circus Card, a really funny pig jumping through hoop held by comic French clown; "The Judge and Jury Poultry" Card, three-fold, with comic wording; "A Christmas Message," pretty two-fold landscape card, surmounted with loops of Forget-me-nots; also 12 Frosted Cards, 6 Two-fold Cards, 6 choice Ivy and Rose Cards, 6 Comical Cards, 12 Floral Cards, 6 Landscapes, 6 Sea and Lake Scenery, and 31 other Choice Assorted Cards. Entire lot carriage free for 2/6. Two parcels for 4/6.

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No. 4 Packet, 12 Cards, assorted High-grade Cards, 1/3 post free.

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On receipt of stamped addressed envelope a lady will send to those afflicted with Superfluous Hairs, free particulars of a simple remedy which *permanently* removed a large growth from her sister's face without injuring the skin. Address, in confidence, Miss E. R. DALE, 26, Belvedere Rd., Lambeth, London.

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In Patent Air-tight Tins, ½lb., **1s. 4d.**; 1lb., **2s. 4d.**; 2lb., **4s. 4d.**; including tin and postage.

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KILKHAMPTON, STRATTON, N. DEVON.

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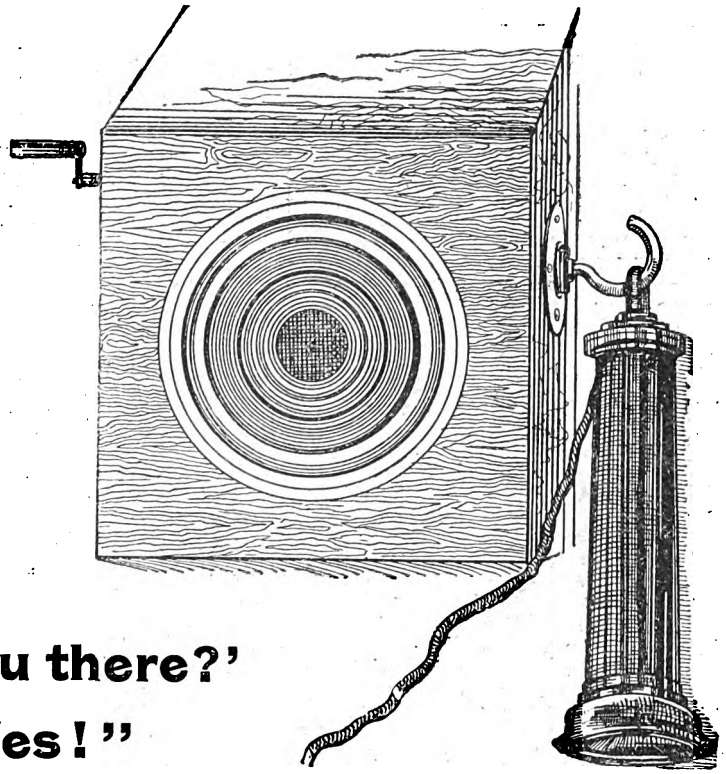
CHRISTMAS WEEK DOUBLE NUMBER.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 417. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 26TH, 1896. [TWOPENCE.

TELEPHONE-Y STORY.



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"Yes!"

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"All right!!!"

"Don't Forget!!!"

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Delicious for Breakfast or After Dinner.

In making, use rather less quantity, it being so much stronger than ordinary Coffee.

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'DOLLY' Cream Colour, for tinting Curtains, Muslins, Laces, Silks, Blouses, etc., a Rich Cream Shade.

'DOLLY' Tints manufactured in Six Shades—Pink, Terra Cotta, Old Gold, Heliotrope, Sea Green, and Canary Yellow—for tinting Faded Ribbons, Lace, etc. Sold everywhere, **1d.** per bag. Will wash out when required.

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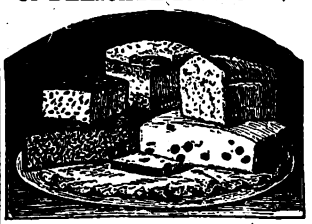

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or "Maggots," Pimples, Blotches, etc., immediately and permanently removed by my infallible SKIN CLEANSING LOTION. Hundreds of testimonials. Post free with directions 1/- and 2/6. AUSTIN LENNOX, Skin Specialist, 1, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street, E.C.

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The greatest beautifier in the World. Produces a lovely skin and complexion, and cures spots, pimples, redness, and freckles. The finest and purest soap made. For **Eczema** and all irritations it is the most emollient and soothing. Absolutely harmless. But beware of the many worthless imitations. Have Dr. Mackenzie's or none. At all Chemists and Stores, 6d. and 1s. a tablet.

Madame Adelina Patti writes from Craig-y-Nos Castle: "I find Dr. Mackenzie's Arsenical Toilet Soap most excellent."

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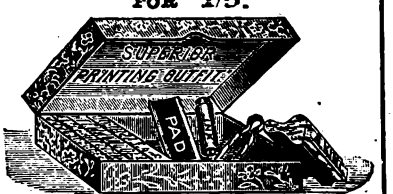

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PEARSON'S
£100
COUPON.
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Permanently cured. A Pamphlet giving sound practical advice and particulars of a successful treatment for a rapid, simple, and inexpensive home cure, forwarded free to all upon receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—Prof. B. L. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

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HAWICK HOSIERY is the BEST.
Lamb's Wool Shirts and Pants, 3/6 each.
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CARRIAGE PAID.

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NEWSAGENTS
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THE DOUBLE CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF

SHORT STORIES

THE EDITOR AND STAFF SEND YOU CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

No. 417.] [TWOPENCE.

EDITED BY

C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

For the Week ending Dec. 26th, 1896.

Treasure Trove.

By JOHN K. LEYS.

Author of "The Tenth of June," etc., etc.

MR. PERCY ALGERNON GRIBBLE, junior invoice-clerk in the firm of Messrs. White, Spilliter and Co., of Little Britain, had changed his lodgings. Punctually at a quarter past six one October evening, Mr. Gribble left the office, and for the first time set out, not for the far-off wilds of Brixton, but for the more strictly Metropolitan neighbourhood of Pentonville.

The young man was very much like any other of a thousand young men in his class of life—better than some, not so good as others. He fancied that on the whole he was rather good-looking, the truth being that his short and stumpy figure, his colourless face, and commonplace features prevented even his most partial friends from considering him good-looking. But it was in the domain of intellect that Mr. Gribble conceived that his true claim to distinction lay. Ever since he could spell out of a

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child's toy-book he had been extremely fond of stories, and in later years he had been a ravenous devourer of the romances of M. Gaboriau, and his many English imitators. These tales had wrought in his brain very much as the tales of chivalry wrought in the brain of Don Quixote, of immortal memory, though not perhaps to so marked a degree. He longed to be the discoverer of the mystery. He could not refrain from haunting the scene of any notorious crime, and indulging in the delicious fancy that he was a detective engaged in unearthing the criminal, and in possession of a clue which was invisible to all eyes but his own.

He had even meditated applying for employment at the Criminal Investigation Department, but refrained, alleging to himself as a reason for not doing so, that so long as the Department was kept by a penurious government at its present level it really was not worthy of the attention of a gentleman.

The set of apartments which Mr. Gribble was about to occupy consisted of a small sitting-room, and a yet smaller bedroom which opened out of it. The furniture of both rooms was cheap and scanty; but opposite the fire in the sitting-room, with its back to the wall, stood an old-fashioned sofa of such generous size that the sight of it at once inclined Mr. Gribble to take the rooms, so that he might have the right of resting in the evening in its ample embrace. It was only horsehair, and entirely destitute of springs, but it was both long and deep, and Mr. Gribble sagely reflected that in a sofa no springs are better than broken ones. So the rooms were taken, very much on account of the promises made by the sofa; and on the first night of his residence in his new quarters, Mr. Gribble, having finished his evening meal, drew the table bearing the lamp up to the sofa, pulled out a novel that had been recommended to him as having a first-rate mystery in it, lighted a cigarette, and threw himself down upon the sofa with the intention of abandoning himself to the intellectual dissipation his soul loved.

Like most anticipated treats, however, the apples were not quite so good to the taste as they had seemed to the eye. The cigarette was of inferior flavour—the tale, like so many others, belied its title—the sofa was not only hard, but positively lumpy. Mr. Gribble dropped his book, and in spite of the unkindly nature of his couch, he presently fell asleep.

His sleep was uneasy, and disturbed by confused, nightmare-like dreams. The story he had been reading had been about a buried treasure, and this subject mixed itself up with fancies that must have come from recollections of the Arabian Nights. He thought he had reached the Valley of Diamonds, and was lying on a mound of large pebbles, which bruised his body all over; but some invisible power held him down to his stony bed, so that he could not rise

At length he awoke, and mechanically fell to rubbing his leg, which was positively paining him. He thought at first that this was merely the effect of his excited imagination, but on lying down again he found that the pain had been occasioned by one of the inequalities in his couch, which he had before noticed.

Surely, he thought, that might be remedied. The large horsehair cushion or mattress, which formed the upper surface of the sofa, was loose; and, thrusting his hand underneath it, he found that the inequality arose from a number of round, hard objects, not unlike the large pebbles of his dream.

Drawing one of them out, he saw at once that it was a jewel-case!

His amazement was unbounded. With trembling fingers he opened it—a magnificent diamond brooch lay before him!

It was with difficulty that he could repress a cry of astonishment. For a few seconds he gazed at it, his heart beating fast with excitement; and then he plunged his hand a second time beneath the sofa cushion. A curiously-shaped box was the first he fingered. He brought it out. It proved to be the case of a superb necklace of pearls. Without closing it he made another plunge into this extraordinary treasure-house, and his fingers had just closed upon another box, when——

"Tap—tap—tap!"

It was Mrs. Sparke, the landlady, come with his supper-tray.

Hastily catching up a newspaper, Gribble flung it over the open jewel-cases, and shouted: "Come in!"

Fortunately there was room enough on the table for the tray without disturbing the newspaper, which Mr. Gribble affected to be diligently reading. All the time the woman was in the room the young man was in a state of the most excruciating anxiety. He hardly dared trust himself to speak; and when he did answer a question his voice sounded so odd that it startled him to think what it must sound like to another. However, at last the good woman received her orders and went off. No sooner was she fairly out of the way, than Mr. Gribble locked his door, and set about his task in earnest.

He removed all the jewel-cases he could find under the sofa-cushion, opened them, and ranged them in order on the table.

Never was such a sight seen before in Pentonville.

The display was magnificent. There were rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and turquoises, as well as diamonds and pearls; and they set in every conceivable form of ornament—brooches, necklaces, and pendants—rings, earrings, and bracelets, with several trinkets of which the young man did not even know the name. He stood like one fascinated, unable to think clearly, his eyes dazzled by the sight of the gems, and his imagination bewildered by the thought of the wealth which they represented. It was not until he had compelled himself to close the cases and put them away in a black bag, which he daily carried to and from the city, that he recovered his mental balance. He then ate some bread and cheese, and, having finished his supper, he sat down to consider the matter.

Here certainly was a mystery. By what strange train of circumstances did these jewels come to be under the sofa cushion? To whom did they belong? Why had they been hidden there? What was he to do with them? Was it his duty to hand them over to Mrs. Sparke? Or to the police? Or set himself the task of discovering the true owner of the gems?

With regard to the first point, Mr. Gribble considered that the jewel-cases had probably lain under the sofa cushion for some time—it might be for years—and there was but one way, it seemed to him, of accounting for their presence where he had found them. They had been placed there hurriedly, and the owner, or the person in whose possession they had last been, had been prevented from returning to claim his property. He might have been killed by accident, or by design, or (more likely) he had been arrested, and the police had not succeeded in learning the place of his abode. This would explain the whole matter, and the young man came to the conclusion that this explanation must be

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the true one, for there could be no doubt that the treasure had been dishonestly come by. It was absurd to suppose that the true owner had secreted the jewels in such a place.

And Mr. Gribble told himself that a great deal turned upon that fact, for one cannot steal from a thief. The jewels seemed, in fact, to be of the nature of treasure-trove belonging by the law of Nature, if not by the law of human framing, to the first finder. On further consideration Mr. Gribble found no sufficient reason for surrendering his claim to anyone. It was tolerably certain that if he were to make his discovery public, many claimants would step forward—for it seemed most unlikely that so large and varied an assortment of jewels should belong to one person—and what security had he that the successful claimants would have any better right to the jewellery than he himself had? It was possible, certainly, that the treasure was the result of the robbery of a jeweller's shop; but Gribble was certain that there had been no robbery of such magnitude for a very long time.

With such arguments as those Mr. Gribble succeeded in stifling the voice of his conscience. He finally determined to look upon the jewels as his own, precisely as if he had found them on a desert island, and a thrill ran through his veins as he realised what this might mean to him. Wealth beyond what he had ever dreamt of possessing was already in his grasp. But there were certain dangers and difficulties to be met and overcome.

He must remember that although this treasure seemed to be derelict, it might not be so in reality, and that his appropriation of it might be attended with distinct peril. But this consideration, instead of weakening, only strengthened his resolution. He would match his wits against those of the clumsy London detectives, and beat them. He would dispose of the jewels secretly, one by one, in such a way as to baffle the keenest scent. In less than twelve months he would be a wealthy man, beyond the reach even of suspicion.

Having settled the main point, Mr. Gribble considered what his next steps ought to be, and then went to bed, taking care to carry the jewels into his bedroom, and to lock the door carefully before he lay down.

Next morning he put the bulk of the cases into his black bag, and the rest into his pockets. It was evident that he must return to these rooms no more, and this involved the loss of his trunk. That, however, Mr. Gribble told himself, was a small matter. His personal belongings would be enough to pay the small sum he owed to Mrs. Sparke—compared with the wealth he was now carrying about him it was not to be mentioned for a moment. One or two indispensable articles of clothing he disposed about his person, and went off to the City, looking as if he had gone marketing and had elected to carry his purchases home in his pockets.

Having reached the office without being challenged by the police, as he half expected to be, Gribble put his bag and overcoat away in a corner where they would not be noticed, and applied himself to his work with such an amount of attention as he could command. His plan was to go on quietly with his work at the office, seek out new rooms, and live in them in such a way as to occasion no remark for some time. Then, when his former landlady would have forgotten him and his abrupt desertion of her, he would begin the task of turning the jewels into cash.

He found suitable lodgings that night with no great difficulty, and the first thing he did after he settled down was to strip the stones of their settings, and secure them in a stout leather belt which, after a good deal of trouble, he succeeded in fabricating. This he wore round his waist; and if it caused him some inconvenience he consoled himself with the thought that he carried about with him continually that which placed him above the wants, the cares, and the anxieties of mankind.

As for the discarded cases, the disposing of them gave Mr. Gribble some anxious thought. One or two of them he threw away on waste pieces of land in the neighbourhood, but remembering that he could not throw away the eighteen remaining cases in this manner without running some risk, and that, at any rate, the plan was one which would never have commended itself to Lecoq, or any of his contemporaries, he made up the remaining cases with the gold settings in a parcel, which he weighted with a couple of bricks carried home in his black bag, and sank the bundle in the Thames by throwing it over one of the less frequented bridges at midnight. That done, he felt tolerably safe.

The shock was, therefore, all the greater, when, on being summoned one day to Mr. Spilliter's room, he found there, not the well-known figure of his employer, but a tall, hard-featured, military-looking man, dressed in a frock-coat buttoned up to the chin, and a young man about his own age, in a suit of tweeds of a telling pattern, on whose ingenuous countenance there rested a certain look of anxiety.

Gribble looked from one to the other, and said nothing. He knew he had grown very white, but that he could not help. He determined not to surrender the treasure if he could possibly avoid it. There was one point in his favour. Mr. Spilliter seemed to be out. It might be that if he succeeded in outwitting the detective his employer might never hear that the accusation had been made.

"I came to inquire," said the hard-featured man, "whether you lately stayed for one night—one night only—at the house of a Mrs. Sparke, 39, Caroline Street, Pentonville."

"What's that to you?" retorted Mr. Gribble. He was pleased with his own display of spirit; but the tall, hard-featured man only smiled.

"Come now," he said, "I see you're our man. And there are only the two ways of it—either you tell us all you know, and 'elp us all you can, or we'll have to make a criminal business of it, and then it won't be askin' questions of ye, but somethin' a vast deal worse to put up with. So take your choice, my young friend. But if you will be guided by me you will own up at once. What have ye done with 'em? Eh?"

Mr. Gribble gasped a little, for somehow he seemed to be choking, and moistened his lips. It was all so dreadfully prosaic, but at the same time so horribly real! What was he to do? The mirage of wealth which had haunted him ever since he had made his grand discovery faded from before his eyes. Concealment was no longer possible. He must give up the jewels and make the best terms he could.

"Do you represent the owners of this—this alleged property?" he asked, turning to the young man in tweeds, who had not yet spoken.

"I certainly do," said the young man firmly; "and what I say is, I can't see the need of all this palaver. Why can't you deliver up the goods at once, and be hanged to you? You ought to be prosecuted, and you may think yourself deuced lucky if we take the stuff and say no more about it."

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Something in the young man's manner awakened Gribble's suspicions.

"You will have to prove your right to—to the property," he said.

"Oh, of course. Are you going to give up the things, or are you not?"

"I am," said Mr. Gribble, with dignity, "and all I stipulate for is that my claim to a reward—salvage, I may call it—should be fairly and dispassionately considered."

He left the room without noticing the stare with which this speech was received; and in a few minutes he returned, carrying in his hand the leather belt which he had made to keep the jewels in.

"There, gentlemen!" he exclaimed, laying the belt on the table with a smile of conscious rectitude, "I believe you will find the stones there without one exception."

So saying he raised one end of the belt and rained a shower of sparkling gems upon Mr. Spilliter's office table.

"What d'ye mean by that, you young rascal?" cried the hard-featured man, while the gentleman in tweeds sprang forward, and grasped the invoice-clerk by the collar.

"What's all this?" he shouted.

"The stones!" cried Gribble, twisting himself free—"the stones, you ungrateful hound!"

"To the mischief with your stones!" screamed the other, with one movement of his arm sweeping the glittering heap on to the floor—"I don't care a hang for the stones. They ain't stones—they're glass. What have you done with the gold settings—none of it less than nine-carat gold, and some of it as much as fifteen! What have you done with the gold settings and the cases, worth half-a-crown apiece at the very least—what have you done with *them?*"

"Those," said Mr. Gribble with quiet contempt, "are beyond your reach. You will have to seek them at the bottom of the Thames!"

"Shall I? By George, though, I'll make you pay for them!"

It was some time before the bewildered Mr. Gribble could be made to understand the facts of the case. When at length he understood that the priceless gems which he had appropriated were neither more nor less than specimens of sham jewellery made by a Birmingham firm for which Mrs. Sparke's eldest son acted as travelling salesman, he began to think that he had been greatly to blame in meddling with the matter at all.

And when he further learnt that young Mr. Sparke insisted that he should make up the value of the cases and the nine-carat gold settings by monthly payments, under the penalty of being denounced and prosecuted, his disgust was too deep for words. It took Mr. Gribble eighteen months to work off the debt, but it was a much longer time before his experience—the only one he ever had—of treasure-trove faded from his memory.

ONCE upon a time there was an old woman who had a niece, whom she had brought up very strictly, and who was a good, pious girl, but very timid and retiring. The old woman worried a good deal as to what should become of her niece when she herself was gone, and prayed God to send her a good husband. She made inquiries of a friend of hers who kept a boarding-house, and found that among her guests was a rich West Indian, who had announced that he would marry as soon as he could find a good, industrious, and clever girl.

The old woman sent him word that her niece was just what he wanted, that she was a prize, a grain of gold, and so clever that she could paint the birds in the air. The gentleman answered that he should be happy to make her acquaintance, and that he would come to see her next day. The old woman ran home, for she lived in a back street, and told her niece to put the house in order and to dress herself in her best the next day, for she was going to have a visitor. When the gentleman came the next morning he asked the girl if she knew how to spin.

"Why shouldn't she know how to spin?" answered the aunt. "She can spin a skein of thread while you are drinking a glass of water."

"What have you done, señora?" cried the niece after the gentleman had gone. "You *know* I cannot spin."

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"Go ahead and try!" said the aunt, "and see what Providence will do for you."

"Ah, what a scrape you have got me into!" said the girl, weeping.

"Just wait," said the aunt, "we'll see how you'll get along; but you must spin these hanks, for the future depends on it."

The girl went to her room that night in great distress and began to pray to all the blessed souls in Paradise, for she was very pious.

While she was still on her knees, three beautiful spirits, dressed all in white, appeared to her and told her not to distress herself, for they would help her in return for the benefit which they had derived from her prayers, and each took a hank and, in a twinkling of an eye, spun it into thread as fine as a hair.

The next day, when the West Indian came, he was astonished at her skill and industry.

"Didn't I tell you, your Honour," said the old woman, full of delight.

The gentleman then asked the girl if she knew how to sew.

"Sew?" said the aunt. "Of course she knows how to sew. She'll finish a piece of sewing in the time it would take you to swallow a cherry at a bite."

Then the gentleman went away, leaving enough linen for three shirts, and the same thing happened as before, and again the next day, when he brought a satin waistcoat for her to embroider; only that night when the girl, with many tears, made a fervent appeal to the three blessed souls in Paradise, they appeared to her, and one of them said: "Do not worry, we will embroider this waistcoat for you, but on one condition."

"What is it?" asked the girl anxiously.

"You must invite us to your wedding."

"Am I going to be married?" asked the girl.

"Yes," answered the spirits, "to the rich West Indian."

And so it turned out, for when the gentleman saw the waistcoat so neatly embroidered that it looked as if hands could never have touched it, and fine enough to put your eye out, he told the aunt that he would like to marry her niece.

The aunt jumped for joy; not so the niece, who said to her:

"But, señora, what will become of me when my husband finds out that I don't know how to do anything?"

"Never mind, never mind!" said the aunt. "The blessed souls who have helped you so far will get you out of the difficulty."

So the wedding-day was fixed, and the night before the bride invited the blessed souls, according to agreement.

On the wedding-day, at the height of the festivities, three old women entered the hall, so bitterly ugly that everybody stared in amazement, and the bridegroom was dumfoundered. The first to enter had one very short arm and the other so long that it dragged on the ground. The second was hump-backed, and held her body all awry. The third had eyes more prominent than those of a conger eel, and redder than a tomato.

"Santa Maria!" said the groom to the bride. "Who are those three frights?"

"They are three aunts of my father's, whom I invited to my wedding," said the bride.

The señor, who believed her, went and spoke to them and offered them seats.

"Pray tell me," said he to the first old woman, "why have you a short arm and a long arm?"

"My son," answered the old woman, "it is because I have done so much spinning."

The bridegroom rose and went to his bride and said:

"Go at once and burn your wheel and your spindle, and never let me see you spin."

Then he asked the second old woman why she was hump-backed and all awry.

"My son," answered she, "because I have sat so much at the embroidery frame."

The gentleman went to his wife and said:

"Hurry up and burn your embroidery frame, and never let me see you embroider as long as you live."

Then he turned to the third old woman, and asked her why her eyes were so bulging and so red.

"My son," answered she, rolling them about in her head, "it is because I have sewed so much and bent my head over my work."

She had no sooner spoken these words than the bridegroom hastened to his wife's side and said:

"Collect your needles and thread and throw them down the well, and remember that the day I see you sew I will get a divorce." FERNAN CABELLERO.

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By Christian Lys.

Author of "The Doctor's Idol," "Suspicions," etc.

I.

Mr. Christopher sat in front of his office fire nursing his left knee, his right leg stretched out to the fender, and in the corner of his mouth was an expensive cigar.

"Thirty thousand pounds," he murmured softly, almost caressingly. "Thirty thousand pounds! It is a great temptation, and, by Jove! it's business. Why should I give the fellow up to justice? If I wanted to, I could not prove that what I stated was true. After all, he is more sinned against than sinning, and besides, he has trusted me. It would be inhuman to put the law upon him."

Mr. Christopher took a paper from his pocket, a newspaper that had come from abroad, for part of the stamp adhered to it still.

"There's no mistake about it. Here it is in black and white. Five lakhs of rupees, thirty thousand pounds, to be made for twenty-five hundred down. If I don't do it, somebody else will. Of course I must do it."

Mr. Christopher blew a cloud of tobacco smoke into the face of the clock on the mantelpiece. A large number of letters were lying upon his table waiting to be attended to, but he could not give them his attention just now.

Presently there was a sharp tap at his door.

"Come in. What is it, Mr. Thomas?"

"A Mr. Smith to see you, sir. He says that his business is of a private nature."

"Show him in," said Mr. Christopher, and then he added to himself: "Private nature! I should think so."

There entered with great deference, as conscious of coming into the presence of such a considerable personage as the head of the largest firm of India merchants in the City of London, a tall, lank, hungry-looking individual. He had a wisp of grey hair under his chin, and his scanty eyebrows, which were permanently elevated, gave his keen, deep-set eyes a constant look of astonishment. His clothes, although scrupulously tidy, had seen better days; and his hands—long, thin hands they were—were clean and well cared for.

"Sit down, Mr. Smith, sit down. Let us come to business at once. I am a man of very few words."

Mr. Smith sat down on the extreme edge of an arm-chair, and placed his hat on the carpet beside him.

"You have decided then, Mr. Christopher?" he said slowly, with a drawl.

"I have."

"To buy?"

"To buy."

Mr. Smith took his handkerchief from his pocket, and dabbed first one eye and then the other.

"That is very good of you, Mr. Christopher," he said; "very good. I have put myself entirely in your hands, sir. I am not going back upon my word. I stole the jewel, I——"

"Sh! sh! I don't want to know that," interrupted Mr. Christopher.

"Of course not, but my position is a peculiar one. In justification to myself, I must tell you, Mr. Christopher, I am no ordinary thief. As you know, I was well known and respected abroad, and it was not until the blackguards robbed me of the means of getting my living that I sank low enough to be revenged by robbery."

"To business, Mr. Smith," said Mr. Christopher. "You told me all about that last night."

"Well, I—got possession of the stone, and I want to sell it. You can quite understand, Mr. Christopher, that so valuable a jewel in my possession looks suspicious"—he glanced down at his shabby garments as he spoke—"while in yours——"

"Just so," said Mr. Christopher.

"I am told the stone is worth twenty thousand pounds."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Christopher. "Let me look at it again."

The long man stood up, and from an inner pocket took a small box. He opened it carefully, and displayed to Mr. Christopher an enormous pigeon-blood ruby.

"It is supposed to be the only stone of the size and perfect colour in the world," said Mr. Smith.

In truth it was a wonderful gem, and Mr. Christopher's eyes sparkled as he looked at it.

"You are willing to hand this stone to me for two thousand five hundred pounds!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Smith slowly. "It is a sacrifice, but, under the circumstances, I cannot help it. I will not disguise from you the fact, Mr. Christopher, that you may find it difficult to dispose of."

"I will take my chance," was the answer.

"Of course it will be easier for you to do so than it would be for me. I should hardly sell at such a sacrifice otherwise."

Mr. Christopher smiled. Evidently Mr. Smith did not know that a reward had been offered for the jewel.

"There is one condition I make," said Mr. Smith.

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"Well, what is it?"

"That you undertake not to deal with the stone, and not to speak of it to anybody for a month from this date. I have to think of myself, Mr. Christopher, and I want to entirely obliterate myself, so to speak, before anything is known about it. I was too well known in India to be careless even in England, and should you have occasion to give a description of the individual you got the stone from you might forget that he is tall and thin. My appearance is a somewhat marked one."

"This is purely a business transaction, Mr. Smith, as far as I am concerned," said Mr. Christopher. "It comes into my hands in the course of business, and I have no wish to remember how you became possessed of the stone, or, indeed, from whom I obtained it."

"I cannot part with it except under the condition I have mentioned," said Mr. Smith decidedly.

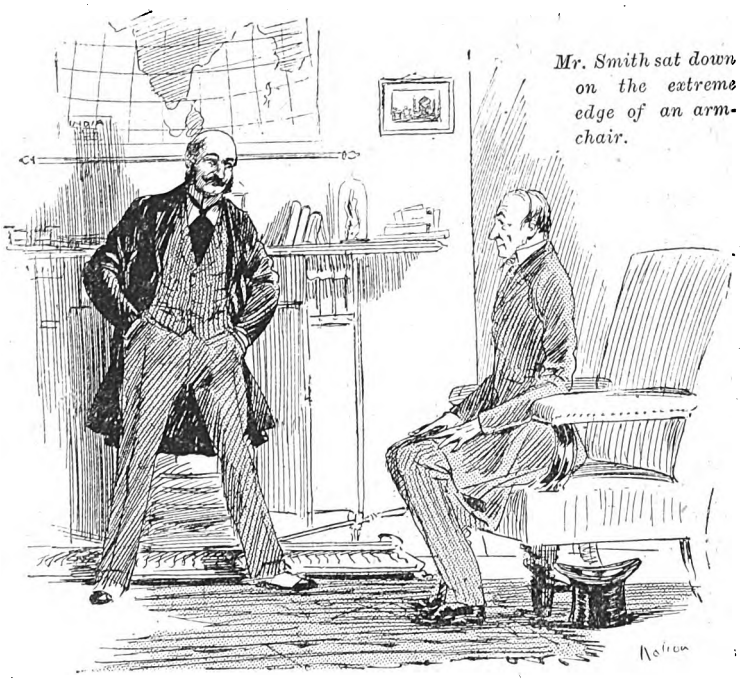
"I accept the condition, and undertake to forget you, my friend."

"You will not write, or telegraph, or talk about it. I do not intend to jeopardise my safety."

"I will not. I give you my word."

"Then give me your money," and a long, thin hand was extended.

Mr. Christopher opened his cheque book, and in exchange for the jewel gave Mr. Smith a cheque for two thousand five hundred pounds. Mr. Smith placed the box upon the desk, and, folding up the cheque, put it carefully in his pocket.



Mr. Smith sat down on the extreme edge of an arm-chair.

"Good-day, Mr. Christopher, and thank you."

"Good-day, Mr. Smith. Kindly remember that in future we are absolute strangers."

"I shall not forget."

And, still deferential, Mr. Smith bowed himself out.

Mr. Christopher was a man of his word. He had promised Mr. Smith to make no use of the jewel for a month, and he would as soon have thought of flying as breaking this promise. He locked the jewel in a drawer in his safe, but hardly a day passed that he did not take it from its hiding-place and feast his eyes upon it. A man who gives two thousand five hundred pounds for an article, no matter what its actual value may be, naturally looks upon his purchase as a treasure.

As a matter of fact, however, Mr. Christopher knew the value of the ruby—at least its sentimental value; would have known that it was worth a vast sum, even had he not seen the reward offered for it in the Indian paper. Perhaps Mr. Smith had overrated its intrinsic value when he mentioned twenty thousand pounds, but, at the same time, he was a man who ought to know.

Mr. Christopher had not been in India for some years now, but in the past he had been there a great deal, and few men knew the country better than he did, at any rate from a commercial point of view.

He was a practical man, had made a point of knowing personally the various countries his firm had business with, so that he was an exceedingly well-travelled man, a man of wide experience, and had an enormous amount of general and out-of-the-way knowledge in his head.

A few years ago his peregrinations had taken him into the State of Bhugerpore in Central India, and during his sojourn there he had laid the foundation of a very extensive trade for his firm, of which he was now the sole representative, and this trade had steadily increased ever since. The laying of this foundation had brought him in contact with many influential native merchants, and on more than one occasion with the Rajah of Bhugerpore himself, a potentate of considerable enlightenment, and as avaricious as he was enormously wealthy. The fame of his wealth was not confined to the State he ruled over, but had spread throughout India, and among his treasures nothing was more renowned than the great ruby the Rajah wore in his state turban, and which was known as "The Rajah's Eye."

Although the Rajah was enlightened, he had, in common with all Orientals, many superstitions, and was at one with his subjects in attaching great significance to this jewel. It was not only the emblem of sovereignty, but the pledge of the gods' protection; for ever since Bhugerpore was a State—and according to those who were supposed to know, its beginning must have been contemporaneous with the flood—it had adorned the head-dress of the ruler, and was commonly believed to shine more or less brilliantly as its wearer governed his people well or ill.

This jewel was at the present moment in Mr. Christopher's possession. It had been mysteriously removed from the turban, and the enormous reward of five lakhs of rupees had been offered for its recovery. Mr. Smith admitted that he had stolen it in revenge, and Mr. Christopher could quite understand that it had been a comparatively easy theft, since Mr. Smith had held an important position in the Rajah's palace. Mr. Smith's story of ill usuage might be a fabrication to condone the offence to some extent, but of the theft there was no doubt. Mr. Christopher had recognised the stone the moment he saw it. He had admired it many

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a time in Bhugerpore when the Rajah had passed on state occasions, and he had more than once stood close to the wearer of it, and talked with him, while the jewel sparkled at every movement of his head. It was indeed impossible to forget the stone, having once seen it. There was not its equal in the two hemispheres.

Mr. Christopher had a conscience, and it pricked him to some extent. There was no getting over the fact that he was the receiver of stolen property; still, property stolen from an Indian Rajah was hardly the same thing as property stolen from a fellow-countryman, who might possibly rub sleeves with you every day in the street.

"It makes all the difference," Mr. Christopher argued to himself; but whether he was convinced by his own argument or not, is a moot point. At any rate, he did not tell anybody, not even his wife, that "The Rajah's Eye" was in his keeping, or that in the near future he would receive about thirty thousand pounds for restoring it to the rightful owner.

During the month of silence which Mr. Smith had bargained for, Mr. Christopher was very hard at work early and late at his office. He had many things to arrange before going to India, for, of course, he was obliged to go to Bhugerpore himself. He could trust nobody with so delicate and important a mission.

Without uttering a falsehood, he was able to tell his wife that he was going abroad on business. It was business—business worth somewhere about twenty-seven thousand pounds after allowing for the money he had paid, the expense of the journey, and the loss by exchange.

Of course his clerks were curious, knowing of no transactions with Bhugerpore that made it necessary for the "Governor" to go there. Mr. Thomas, who had as much of Mr. Christopher's confidence as that gentleman ever gave to anyone, gave it as his opinion that the journey had something to do with that "long, lean Johnnie," as he was pleased to call Mr. Smith.

"The 'Governor' hasn't been himself since he came."

"More than that, I believe he gave the man a lot of money," said another.

"It wasn't business, then," said the cashier, "for no cheque has been drawn on the firm, except those I know all about."

Mr. Thomas had some reason for connecting his employer's journey with Mr. Smith's visit. He had twice chanced to go into the private room at the moment Mr. Christopher was locking the jewel away after inspecting it, and on both occasions Mr. Christopher had expressed annoyance at the interruption, and seemed rather confused. The clerk was surprised at such unusual behaviour, and not a little curious.

The stipulated month over, Mr. Christopher was ready to start. He did not intend to be away longer than he could help, so with as little luggage as possible, and with the jewel, which he had put in a small leather case, carefully concealed about his person, he joined the steamer at Suez.

He had been on deck about half-an-hour, when he was startled by a cheery voice behind him exclaiming:

"Hallo, Christopher! What in the name of all that's wonderful brings you in this part of the world?"

"Business," he answered, turning to shake hands with a fat, round individual, who looked the picture of self-complacency. Mr. Christopher was not pleased to see Mr. Fenwick of the firm of Fenwick, Gibbs and Co. It may have been professional prejudice, but he had always looked upon Mr. Fenwick as a man quite capable of underhand dealing.

"Business, eh! I thought you didn't go abroad much now?"

"I do not, but this time my business is too important to intrust to another person."

"Same here, exactly. I'm off to Bhugerpore as fast as this ship will carry me."

"Bhugerpore!"

"Yes—oh, your firm doesn't monopolise the trade there."

Mr. Christopher did not answer. He did not believe that Fenwick, Gibbs and Co. had much trade with Bhugerpore, in fact, was perfectly certain they had not. Why was Mr. Fenwick going there? And then he grew suspicious, especially as he could feel that his companion was watching him. Could Mr. Fenwick know anything about the theft of "The Rajah's Eye?" Could he have come out with the idea of blackmailing him, and sharing the reward? Could he in short know anything about the jewel at all? No. Perfectly absurd.

And yet—— Like a flash, the remembrance came to him of the two occasions his clerk Thomas had entered the room, just at the moment he was replacing the stone in the safe. Had Thomas caught sight of it by any chance, and sold the information to the rival firm?

"I am going to Bhugerpore too," said Mr. Christopher quietly.

Mr. Fenwick said he was very pleased, but somehow he did not look it.

II.

Very suspicious of his fellow traveller, confident that he was bent upon some underhand deal, Mr. Christopher was extremely careful of the jewel, and exceedingly cautious in his conversation. After watching Mr. Fenwick closely for two or three days, he came to the conclusion that Mr. Fenwick certainly knew of the stone, and that his intention was to get possession of it. No doubt the reward was a great temptation to such a man, and he would not be likely to stick at trifles. But how did he expect to get it? By robbery. It was the only way, for he was not likely to circumvent Mr. Christopher by any sharp practice he might attempt. Mr. Christopher was much too old a bird to be caught by the proverbial pinch of salt. His 'cuteness was well known, and it would require an abnormally early riser to find him asleep.

Mr. Christopher smiled as his hand pressed the small case which was sewn into his waistcoat. He wore that waistcoat always, even wore it under his pyjamas at night. Seeing how impossible it was for Mr. Fenwick to rob him, Mr. Christopher took an absolute delight in tempting him to try. He purposely left his cabin door open. He left his portmanteau unfastened and his things lying about; and, whenever he missed Mr. Fenwick for any length of time, crept down in the hope of catching him in the act.

However, Mr. Fenwick showed no disposition to rifle Mr. Christopher's luggage. He contented himself with watching Mr. Christopher as closely as that gentleman watched him. In the limited space of a mail steamer it was impossible to get far away from each other. Perforce they met at meals three times a day, and encountered each other whenever they promenaded the deck. The studied politeness with which they endeavoured to conceal their dislike for each other was a source of endless amusement to the other passengers.

On landing, circumstances obliged them to be closer

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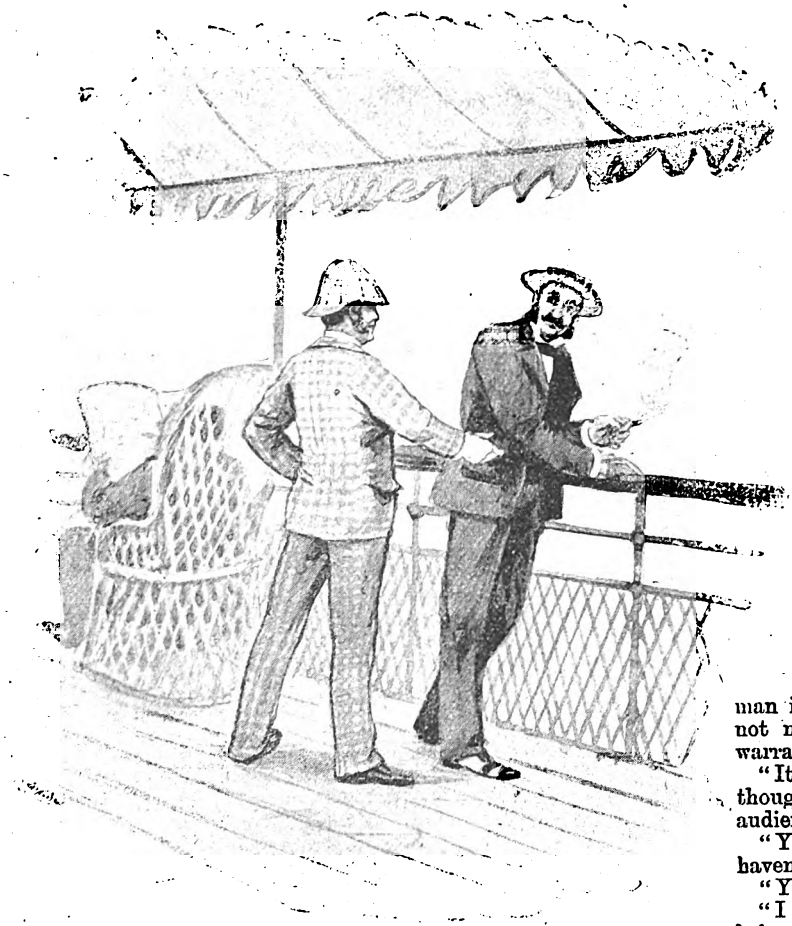

He was startled by a cheery voice behind him.

companions still, as they made the journey from the coast into the interior to Bhugerpore together.

"Are you staying long?" Mr. Fenwick asked, as they neared the journey's end.

"A few days—and you?"

"Precisely my case," said Mr. Fenwick, and then he added casually, "I trust your enterprise will be successful."

Mr. Christopher smiled. It was too transparent an effort to draw him.

"I never take a step unless I am quite certain of my ground," he said.

"'Twixt cup and lip, there's many a slip," quoted his companion. "I can truthfully say my business causes me some anxiety."

"I have noticed that you have been somewhat excited ever since we left Suez."

"Merely my temperament," returned Mr. Fenwick quickly.

"Ah! I never get excited," said Mr. Christopher, with a superiority which was overwhelming. "A cool head is the only one for business. I built my firm on a cool head."

"Fenwick, Gibbs and Co. was founded by me, sir, has increased every year under my management, and I do not boast of a cool head. I fancy that knocks the bottom out of your argument."

Mr. Fenwick was much annoyed and did not refer to business again.

In Bhugerpore they separated.

"We may meet on our return journey," said Mr. Christopher, shaking hands.

"We may," was the curt answer, implying that it was most improbable.

Mr. Christopher accepted the hospitality of one of the richest merchants in Bhugerpore, and as he regarded the sumptuous luxury around him, he pitied poor Mr. Fenwick. Of course, the people he knew in Bhugerpore must be of a secondhand character. The merchants Mr. Christopher did not know were hardly worth knowing.

"You have come upon some great business, I presume, Mr. Christopher?" said his host.

"I have."

"May I know it?"

"First I must have an audience with the Rajah. My business affects him, in fact it has to do with everyone in Bhugerpore."

He spoke grandiloquently, and the merchant was duly impressed. His business relations with the Englishman in the past convinced him that he would not make such a statement without due warranty.

"It must be a very great business," he said thoughtfully; and he promised to secure an audience as soon as possible.

"You have had bad times in Bhugerpore, haven't you?" queried Mr. Christopher.

"Yes, rather bad, but I have known worse."

"I trust my coming will have the effect of bringing better times."

That night, Mr. Christopher took the jewel from his waistcoat to examine it and make sure it was secure. He experienced a little pang of fear every time he opened the case, fear that something might have happened to his treasure. It was perfectly safe, scintillating brilliantly.

Two days afterwards, the Rajah gave audience. The merchant told his guest that the potentate had been much out of temper lately, and hoped the business would tend to pacify him.

"It will," said Mr. Christopher confidently. He could quite understand the Rajah's anger.

It was a day of audience, and there was considerable excitement about the palace.

Cool man as he was, Mr. Christopher was guilty of a feeling of excitement when he thought of the change his mission would cause. He forgot all about the reward for the time being, in speculation of the general rejoicing that would follow his interview. If in England he attained no lasting honours, in Bhugerpore his name would certainly be handed down to posterity; some title even might be conferred upon him which he could use with advantage in the city and in Society at home.

He entered the palace, accompanied by two or three merchants, his friends, and, if there was excitement without, it was nothing to the excitement within. The audience had commenced, and in the outer court there was a regular Babel. The first person he set eyes upon

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"For Heaven's sake, Chris'opher, speak for me!"

was Mr. Fenwick, held tightly by soldiers, abject terror depicted in his face.

"For Heaven's sake, Christopher, speak for me!" and then the soldiers hurried him away, and would allow him to say no more.

Mr. Christopher was bewildered. Hardly understanding what he heard, he learnt that Mr. Fenwick's crime was the offering of a valueless stone as the great jewel of Bhugerpore which had been lost.

"Fool!" he muttered, as his hand closed over the case he had protected so long and carefully. "Fool!"

The next moment he passed into the presence of the Rajah. The dusky monarch looked exceedingly fierce, a man not to be trifled with at any time, and just now enraged at Mr. Fenwick's attempted fraud.

The friendly merchants trembled for Mr. Christopher, should his business prove to be of less importance than he deemed it.

Mr. Christopher stood still and was silent. He grew pale and his limbs shook, but not with fear. He was an Englishman, and a Rajah, however angry, was not likely to strike terror into him. In fact, he hardly noticed the Rajah. His gaze was fixed upon the turban, for there in the centre of it, scintillating with liquid fire, shone a jewel—the jewel—"The Rajah's Eye!"

Mr. Christopher, his fingers still closed tightly round the case he had treasured so assiduously, looked at the coruscating gem with a fascination which was not entirely free from superstition. How had it got there? For two months or more it had been in his possession, was in his possession only this morning when he had last looked at it, and yet——

There was no time to speculate, for the Rajah was waiting for him to approach; and collecting himself with a great effort Mr. Christopher saluted, and suggested that their interview should be more private. The Rajah motioned those about him to stand back a little, and while they did so Mr. Christopher had a moment or two for reflection. Then he poured into the Rajah's ears a long rigmarole about an extention of business which he contemplated with the State of Bhugerpore. It was all a fairy-tale, and the fluency with which the cool-headed Englishman unfolded his imaginary scheme spoke volumes for his inventive genius. The monarch was an avaricious man and listened attentively. Mr. Christopher had already done much for the trade of the State, why should he not do even more for it in the future.

"I leave it to your consideration," said the Englishman. "I have, as yet, spoken of it to no man, not even to your most illustrious subjects, who have traded with me in the past. I deemed it wise to consult with you first."

This pleased the Rajah greatly.

"Now may I congratulate your Highness, and speak of another matter, which is partly the reason of my presence here," continued Mr. Christopher, glancing at the turban. "We in England"—he spoke pompously, as if the destiny of England were under his immediate control—"we in England have heard that the glorious jewel, the pride and glory of your Highness, the 'Eye' that watches over all people in this great State of Bhugerpore, had been stolen, and that a large reward had been offered for it. I rejoice to see that it again gleams and sparkles above your august brow, to speak to all of your mightiness, and the stupendous antiquity of your race, which since time was has given rulers to Bhugerpore."

The Rajah's face clouded, remembering Mr. Fenwick.

"It has become known to me," Mr. Christopher went on, "that the reward has proved a great temptation to unscrupulous men, who intended to proclaim that they had found the jewel, whereas they have only possessed themselves of a copy, hoping thereby to deceive your Majesty, and to plunder your State of five lahks of rupees."

Then the Rajah burst out with all his native savagery.

"I know it—behold! This bauble was but now brought to me as the great 'Eye' of my forefathers, this worthless stone as the jewel that has crowned the brow of every Rajah of Bhugerpore, since Bhugerpore was. Fools! could I be deceived with such a thing as this, even if the jewel had not been found?"

He held the bauble out to Mr. Christopher, who looked at it, and then at the real jewel set in the turban.

"I have already seen two such stones, your Highness," said Mr. Christopher, for in his pocket he had an exact duplicate of the sham jewel. He had been deceived, there was no doubt of it. Seeing the great pink ruby blazing before him, the stone he had treasured so carefully appeared only a very poor imitation.

"Two!" exclaimed the Rajah.

"Yes, two," said Mr. Christopher; no one was more grieved at the sad depravity of man than he was just then. "And this has brought me to Bhugerpore, to warn your Highness. It is not only those whose hearts are

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open, and whose deeds can bear the light of day, who possess a smooth tongue and courteous manner. If there are two copies of the jewel, there may be more."

"I shall know how to deal with all such as bring them to me," said the Rajah, a grim smile puckering his dusky countenance. "This was brought by a countryman of yours, a frightened, fat little man."

"I would speak of him, your Highness." Mr. Christopher disliked Mr. Fenwick, but he understood the sacred obligations of an Englishman. "May I first inquire how the jewel came to be stolen?"

"It was all a mistake. It never was stolen. One day it was missing from the turban, and proclamation was made throughout the State, and the news spread through the country. But no; it was only lost. It had only become loose and slipped from its place, and the next day was found in the folds of my dress."

"When did all this occur?"

"Five months ago, or more. I remember, because another countryman of yours, one who was in much honour here, displeased me at that time, and soon afterwards left me. I suspected him of stealing the jewel, but in that I injured him. I had forgotten all about it until now, when this little, fat man comes to me with his lying. Were he one of my own people he should lie no more, but as it is he shall not escape punishment."

"I would speak of him, your Highness," said Mr. Christopher slowly, thinking more rapidly than he spoke; "I would entreat for him. He did not cause this trashy imitation to be made; he has not the ability to be so crafty. He was deceived, and, in his foolishness, imagined that he was bringing you the real jewel."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the Rajah.

"In Bhugerpore such foolishness may be impossible, but in England, although we have many wise men, we have also many fools. This little fat man is one of them and I beseech your Highness not to punish him too severely. Let him pay for his folly, and then I will take him away."

"Pay!"

"Certainly," said Mr. Christopher, still thinking very rapidly. "Should he pay half a lakh of rupees, would you consent to forgive him?"

"I would think of it," said the Rajah, his eyes sparkling.

"It will be difficult," said Mr. Christopher. "My countryman may prefer to suffer punishment rather than pay money. He is not at all a liberal man, your Highness."

"He must pay!" exclaimed the Rajah.

"Supposing he prefers to suffer punishment?"

"Make him pay, Mr. Christopher. He is a frightened little man. Make him afraid of what I will do to him."

"And if I succeed?"

The Rajah looked at Mr. Christopher, and that gentleman met his gaze steadily, and without giving the slightest clue to his thoughts on his affable features.

"I would think of it," said the Rajah, his eyes sparkling.

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"What would you have?" asked the monarch, disappointed that such a question should have arisen.

"Twelve thousand rupees."

"Ah, no! It is too much."

"I shall have great difficulty to make my countryman pay at all."

The Rajah tried to beat Mr. Christopher down, but to no purpose, and at last he gave in. Mr. Christopher bowed low, and was then conducted to Mr. Fenwick. He assumed a grave aspect as he approached him, for he did not know how much of a coward Mr. Fenwick was.

"Well, Christopher, what has happened?"

"My dear Fenwick, you have terribly enraged the Rajah. Had I not come I cannot tell what might have happened. These Eastern potentates are vindictive, and although it is dangerous to take vengeance upon an Englishman, they sometimes forget the danger. The Rajah wants justice."

"Justice!"

"Sh! It is no time to argue. We are not in England, but in Bhugerpore, which I fear you know very imperfectly, Fenwick, or you would not have placed yourself in such a perilous position. The Rajah has spoken of death."

"The Rajah has spoken of death."

Mr. Fenwick's jaw fell, and his lips grew ashen. Mr. Christopher saw that the man was a coward.

"Death! Good heavens! what shall I do? Save me, Christopher. You know much more of this blackguardly country than I do."

"Fortunately, yes. Avarice is rampart in Bhugerpore. I have talked long and seriously with the Rajah, and only through his avarice can you hope to escape."

"He wants money!" Mr. Fenwick's pale face brightened.

"He does."

"How much?"

Mr. Christopher looked at him, almost a look of pity, and then said very deliberately:

"A lakh of rupees."

"A lakh! Did you say a lakh?"

Mr. Christopher nodded.

"A lakh! Why, that's six thousand pounds at least!"

"I am sorry, but they are terribly avaricious in Bhugerpore."

"Six thousand pounds!" repeated poor Mr. Fenwick. "I wouldn't give that sum for the life of any man in the world."

"It is your own life you have to consider just now. It is a long price to give for it, I know, but I suppose it is worth it to you. What answer am I to return to his Highness? If you pay the money, I have promised to get you out of the country as speedily as possible. To be quite plain, Fenwick, it is advisable that the Rajah should not see you again. He is so enraged that even his avarice might not save you."

"A lakh of rupees! How is it going to be done!"

The unfortunate man spread out his arms in despair, his face the picture of uncomfortable dismay.

"Come! Put a good face on your bad luck. It might be worse. Be thankful that the rate of exchange is as low as it is. Think of what a lakh of rupees would mean if the exchange were higher, and comfort yourself. You must arrange this payment somehow through me with a merchant here, for in a way I have become responsible for you. Should the amount be too great a draw upon the firm of Fenwick, Gibbs and Co., no doubt the firm of Christopher can manage a loan when we get back to London."

"I beg your pardon. Six thousand pounds will not break Fenwick, Gibbs and Co."

"I am glad to hear it. Where is the difficulty then?"

"Oh, pay the blackguard!" exclaimed Mr. Fenwick with an oath. "I shall make a Government matter of it when I get home. I'll have justice somehow."

With the utmost expedition the matter was arranged, the Rajah being delighted with his half a lakh of rupees, although he did make another vain attempt to get Mr. Christopher to lessen the amount of the commission, and that gentleman was equally pleased with the other half lakh, plus his twelve thousand rupees commission. It repaid him the money he had given to that scoundrel, Smith, and gave him a very handsome interest besides. Poor Mr. Fenwick! If he

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could only have known the meaning of Mr. Christopher's smile of pity!

Not until the shores of India had sunk below the horizon, did the unfortunate man breathe freely.

"Six thousand pounds is an awful price to pay for freedom," he said, as he stood watching the screw churn the blue ocean into foam.

"How did that trashy imitation come into your possession?" asked Mr. Christopher.

"This way. Of course, you have heard of a man named Smith, who had a rather important position in Bhugerpore."

"Yes."

"Well, he came to me with a tale of the many injuries he had suffered at the hands of the Rajah, that he had been nearly ruined, and in revenge had stolen 'The Rajah's Eye.' He showed me the jewel, and I recognised it at once, and knowing that the jewel had been stolen, and that a reward of five lakhs of rupees had been offered, I bought the stone for two thousand five hundred pounds. It was business. If I hadn't done so somebody else would."

"Hardly Fenwick, hardly. For a sham stone!"

"It was a wonderful copy. Did you see it?"

"I did. The Rajah showed it to me. It was a palpable imitation."

"I should like to get hold of Smith for half-an-hour," said Mr. Fenwick, his little body swelling with indignation. "He actually made the sale conditionally upon my keeping quiet about the jewel for a month. Of course, he wanted time to get out of the way. The scoundrel! He must have known of the loss of the stone."

"Oh, yes; he was in Bhugerpore at the time. The Rajah told me all about it. The fact is, Fenwick, you are too impetuous; your head is not cool enough for business."

"Don't jeer at me, Christopher." Mr. Fenwick was very humble. "How did your business succeed?"

"Fairly well; indeed, considering everything — very well."

"Christopher, you'll keep this quiet on 'Change, won't you?"

"I give you my word I will."

"Thank you."

"And I don't think I would make a Government affair of it, if I were you," Mr. Christopher said. "You see, receivers of stolen property are not treated very kindly, as a rule."

"Oh, but this was an exceptional case."

"Very exceptional, as far as you are concerned."

"Perhaps I had better leave it alone," Mr. Fenwick reflected. And he did. He was as silent as Mr. Christopher, who kept his word, and never mentioned a single item of the transaction, either on 'Change or anywhere else, with one exception.

On arriving in London, Mr. Christopher took the stone to an expert in Hatton Garden, who, to begin with, uttered an exclamation of surprise, but after careful examination, pronounced it a sham.

"It is a wonderful imitation—might deceive anybody," he said. "There is a method of manipulating rubies, Mr. Christopher. The surface of this is a very thin layer of a genuine, although inferior, stone, and the interior substance has been very cleverly worked. It is a long time since I have seen such a perfect fraud. I trust you have not been victimised."

"No. That stone is an exact copy of a very valuable jewel in India. I have just returned from there, and may say that I have had something to do with the discovery of the fraud."

"I hope your services were well rewarded."

"I am thankful to say that I did not lose money, which at one time I was in danger of doing."

Mr. Christopher paid into his account the half of Mr. Fenwick's ransom money, and the commission he had received from the Rajah. He sighed as he thought of that scoundrel Smith. Mr. Christopher had told him to remember that they were strangers for the future, and he did not expect Mr. Smith would forget.

"The scoundrel!" said Mr. Christopher, as he leant back in his office chair, and blew a tobacco cloud at the clock. "I was never so nearly robbed before. It is fortunate that Fenwick got first audience. The little deal has cost him between eight and nine thousand pounds, and I am something like a thousand pounds in pocket over the transaction. That is, at any rate, better than being robbed by Mr. Smith. There is nothing like a cool head for business. Poor Fenwick! No doubt he will stick to legitimate trading for the future."

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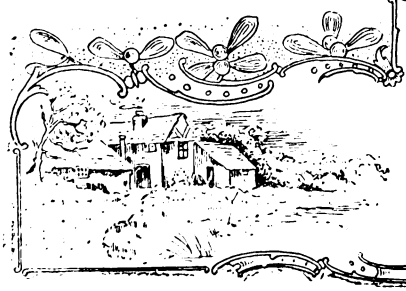

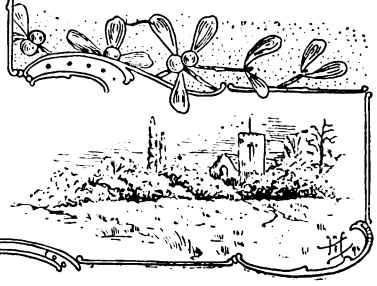

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Centuries and a Day.

A ROSE vine clung to the grey stone tower of an ancient castle. In the night, when the moon rose and the bleak highlands lay revealed by the pale light, the rose clung to the tower more closely still and shivered.

"I live but for a day," it said. "Why am I here at all?—Why?" And the anguish and terror of the little rose was intense, as it looked over at the black mountains and the deep, dark valleys, and felt the awfulness of this great world. But the breeze lulled it to rest, saying: "Never mind, sweet rose, there is a reason—sleep!"

When the sunshine flooded and the tower was warmed by its persistent rays, the little rose forgot its fears and would listen with rapture to the story the grey stones told of their life. Centuries and centuries they had lived—far back in the primeval ages. What had they not seen? Volcanoes, glaciers, mad, rushing torrents, earthquakes—centuries and centuries of wonders.

"We are made of consolidated sediments," said the stones. "Once we were soft, like sand, and some time in the far, far future, we will be decomposed again into the same. And so the cycle goes on and we will live for ever. We have seen the wonders of the earth unfold before us!"

The little rose marvelled at this strange existence. "And I live but for one day!" it moaned. "I shall never see these beautiful things!"

The rose envied the stones.

One day, from a window, just above the rose, a girl leaned. "It is the Princess," whispered the stones.

She leant farther, and the breeze fluttered her golden hair. She was even more beautiful than the rose. She stretched down her arm and plucked the flower.

"Good-bye!" said the stones. "Perhaps you may see some of this world's greatness."

The Princess gazed at the rose with a look of pleasure in her eyes that thrilled the flower. "If I give her happiness, but for a moment," it thought, "I have not lived in vain!"

The maiden leant against the casement. Her eyes turned from the rose. She was very still. The sun was sinking—a great ball of fire away off behind the mountains. There came a clatter of hoofs. The girl clasped her hands to her heart, almost crushing the little rose. But through her trembling white fingers it peeped, and saw a cavalier come riding by. He paused beneath the window, and looked up, resting his eyes upon the Princess—as only a lover can.

She looked down. In her eyes was a light so pure, so true. She threw him the rose. And so, quick as it fell, vanished its envy of the stones.

"Ho, ho! for your centuries of earth's wonders—your lofty mountains—your mad, passionate torrents! I have seen the revelation of love!"

So said the little rose, as it was carried away, and over the hills, pressed to a human heart.

A. J. Lyman

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THROUGH THE MULTITUDE OF BUSINESS

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Pauper Blue Blood," "On the Down Grade," etc., etc.

I.

"MEN are powerless to charm me," laughed Muriel Adeane. "I have been engaged to two, and I don't know which bored me most."

"And now?"

"Now I am free—thank Heaven!"

Miss Adeane was tall and handsome, with a rich olive skin, and eyes that were naturally bright and sparkling. A rather cruel little smile flickered round her mouth as she tore the leaves of a lily with restless fingers. Undoubtedly she was a splendid creature—a genuine "daughter of the gods"—but all too cold in her regal beauty, and so thought the man before her.

"Your flower!" she said, throwing it aside. "Flowers are dangerous things. They sometimes give away our secrets."

"We have no secrets to betray—you and I."

"Speak for yourself, Courtenay," she retorted. "I have no belief in your powers. You mesmerise poor fools who are weak enough to submit. *You* read thoughts—who could not look into my heart, or see one inch below the surface if you died for it. You have great influence over women! But I—I am not a woman."

"What then?"

"God knows! Half a sinner, and a little bit of an angel. I have never sued for forgiveness, and yet, in the eyes of some, I am higher than the stars."

"You do not believe I could curb your will—make you my slave—if I would?"

"Men are powerless to charm me."

"If you would!" she laughed. "What man would not? It is impossible, dear friend. So spare yourself the fruitless task of trying, and the still more aggravating fact of having failed."

"You know," he cried, "the intoxicating joy of success. To utter the very word 'failure' is like touching the sharp edge of a knife. 'Excess' is my motto; 'Success' my king."

"You are a strange man," she murmured softly, "and if you had not sworn to conquer me I might almost like you. Ernest Mitchell repeated your words at the club—told me about your bet. Your friends say you cannot win me in one month, and that I am going to marry Earl Pembroke—or his money—so I hear."

"Mitchell is a babbling cur! Why do you listen to him?"

"I don't listen. He talks to me, and sometimes I overhear. He has a sharp, penetrating voice, that hurts my head."

"It is twelve o'clock," he said, pointing to the time. "The first of the month."

The music, alluring and soft, stole from the ball-room, and wailed among the palms.

"Do you see that woman in the long black gown?" asked Muriel Adeane.

"The girl with hazel hair and a very white forehead?"

"Yes. She is beautiful. Her jewels are finer than mine."

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"What of that?"

"Look!" pointing to the retreating figure. "How she is laughing! Her husband cut his throat at dinner, and they say she gets drunk every night."

"Grief is devoured in flames," he replied. "God made women weak."

"Finish the sentence. He trusted their defence to man's generosity."

"I will be generous, if you will be weak!"

Miss Adeane drew her skirts aside, with a deprecating gesture.

"What quaint witchcraft you practice! It is so obscurely veiled one cannot feel even a little fluttered or confused. Poor Courtenay!"

He looked straight into her eyes—so straight that she almost thought he had struck her. A strange, stunned feeling surged through her brain, and for the moment she was robbed of sight and sense. With a sudden inward fear she sprang to her feet, and then she laughed a soft, rippling peal, which broke from her lips to smother a cry.

"It is light outside," she said, turning to the window. "Why! The day has dawned!"

They glanced up and saw that the clock had stopped. It was still twelve.

"Let us go," said Muriel.

She led the way to the hall. The music was silent and though a few stray guests still lingered, the dance was over. Her chaperon stood cloaked in the doorway awaiting her charge.

Miss Adeane took in the situation at a glance.

"I feel honoured," whispered a voice in her ear, "that I have been able to detain you so long. It shows me I found favour after all." Again his piercing eyes were riveted upon her—and they seemed to burn and burn. "I am glad—most glad," he continued. "Have you not one word for me at parting?"

"You are cruel," she replied. "I think you're the sort of man who would ill-treat his animals."

All that night Muriel could not sleep. She told herself it was over-fatigue, and was horrified at the dark lines beneath her eyes in the morning.

"I will ride," she said. "There is nothing so refreshing as a good gallop."

She started out, turning her horse's head towards the Row—then hesitated. Some intuition warned her not to go. She seldom believed in presentiments, but this one startled her. A desperate longing to get out of town made her decide on Richmond Park as the best place for a canter, and the thought became more delightful as she rode on. "Richmond Park." These two words rang in her ears. She longed for a sight of the deer and the shady trees, the large expanse of soft green turf. Faster she urged her steed—away from the city of London to sweeter, purer air. As her horse passed through the gates into the grass beyond, another rider came in sight. At first Muriel did not recognise him, but as he approached, a vague dread crept over her, and a second later Courtenay Somerville was at her side.

"I thought you would come," he said excitedly. "I knew it!"

"Don't talk so loudly, or my groom will hear. I never meant to meet you."

A flush of anger spread its tell-tale crimson over her cheek, and then left it paler than before.

"I willed it," he whispered mysteriously. "I made you come. It was to prove my power!"

She laughed scornfully, turning her mocking eyes upon him.

"If such power can give you a pleasant companion at every turn, what a useful gift to possess! My friend! I cannot take all you say *au grand sérieux*. It would be too ridiculous."

"You blind yourself to all that displeases you, but the day will come when you must and shall believe."

"I hope you do not try your experiments on nervous girls. It might frighten them. As to me—you may 'will' me as you like, for I never consider anybody but myself. I stand at my own helm, and no other hand can guide me."

Her pride and self-assurance amused him. He smiled, and Muriel noticed his eyes were filled with cunning, while the touch of his fingers on the horse's mane caused the animal to start and shiver, as though charged with electricity.

"Are you going to the McClintocks' to-night? They have a musical evening."

"If you intend to honour them," replied Courtenay, "I shall be there."

Miss Adeane looked at her admirer critically. He was a fine specimen of manhood—bold, handsome, tall, and young. She felt a little glad he loved her. The intercourse of hearts was sweet.

When they returned, Courtenay knew he had advanced a step nearer the victory.

That night they met again. Miss Adeane declared the music was not good, and Courtenay led the way to a balcony, where a low lounge had been placed. Muriel settled herself among the cushions, and gazed vaguely out into the darkness.

"I don't know why I came," she said at last. "I think it was because I wanted to see you."

"How very flattering," he replied with a wave of her fan which he was holding. But the air it created seemed heated to Muriel, and she took it from him.

"Do not imagine it is your irresistible fascination, for at times I almost hate you. Your presence overpowers me!" she declared.

A short laugh broke from his lips and rang out on the evening breeze, as, rising excitedly, he leant against the railings. They were the only occupants of the balcony, and Muriel tried to rise also, for she longed to get away from him.

"Take me in," she said faintly. A deadly sense of fatigue crept over her. She glanced up and saw his eyes glistening. "Please do not look at me like that, I cannot stand it."

"Own that I have a little power over you," he whispered in reply, gazing more fixedly. "Own it, once for all."

She tried to smile and rise, denying there could be any truth in his assertion. She would fain have laughed him to scorn, but no words came. Miss Adeane remained among the cushions mute and staring in front of her as one in a trance.

"Come!" he said steadily. "You are not yourself. I will take you in."

Courtenay Somerville knew well what he had done, and felt no surprise that even before his victim staggered to her feet, she fell back helpless, while her head sank heavily upon the sofa. It was not the first time he had mesmerised a woman. For fully ten minutes he stood watching the sleeping girl, and not attempting to wake her—his ambition gratified—his conquest attained. She was white to the very lips, and scarcely appeared to breathe at all. Presently he took one limp hand firmly in his, rapping her sharply on the forehead with the other.

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"Wake up!" he cried imperiously. "Do you hear me? Wake up!"

Muriel heaved a sigh, and moved her head. There was a slight stir among the silken pillows, and then she raised herself wearily, while she clung to him—trembling and weeping.

"Courtenay!" she gasped. "Courtenay, don't leave me! I am so frightened."

In a moment his arms were round her, and their strong support brought comfort.

"You love me?" she murmured. "What a beautiful dream!"

"Yes," he replied, "and to-morrow, Muriel, you will marry me?"

"To-morrow!" She passed her hand over her forehead, and tried to think. Then she said again: "To-morrow!"

"Your aunt will be away, and I shall fetch you, during her absence, in my carriage. I knew you would consent to-night, and I have made all arrangements."

She laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I know nothing now except that I love you. When the spell is broken we will talk of marriage."

The following day, as he had said, Muriel was left alone. She remembered but vaguely the events of the previous evening, till Courtenay Somerville's appearance brought them back only too vividly.

"I have come to fetch you," he said, "as I promised last night. A drive will do you good, and on the way I will tell you where we are going."

Miss Adeane did not know why, but she obeyed him like a child, and she did not realise until they were speeding through the streets that the object of their drive was without explanation.

"We are going to a registry office," he told her. "Love cannot wait. It is now or never! You must marry me to-day or not at all!"

"To-day then let it be!" she cried, clasping her hands. "I would sooner die than lose you."

"I only hope your devotion is sincere!"

"Yes; I have never been denied anything. I require you above all the world."

For fully ten minutes he stood watching the sleeping girl.

"This is romantic. It reminds me of the dark ages. We are off to Gretna Green!"

So they talked on till the horses drew up in front of a house, into which Courtenay led the way. Muriel signed her name mechanically, but her mind was a blank, and she could hardly recollect what had taken place as they passed out.

"Where are we going?" she asked, turning her flushed face to Courtenay.

"I am taking you back to your home," he replied coldly, and his voice sounded strained and hard.

She started involuntarily.

"Why?" she gasped. "What are *you* going to do?"

"I shall go abroad to-morrow alone."

"But I do not understand. We are married!"

"Then let me explain. The whole thing has been a play! I have won my bet, and you, I hope, have learnt a lesson. You, who had broken so many hearts, dared me to try my power. Now that I have shown you the full force of that power, I am going away. The little trick that has been played will be kept as secret as the grave. Ernest Mitchell was the man who handed you the paper and watched you sign. He disguised himself. The others were also men I know, and they came to witness it themselves. They could hardly believe their eyes! Here is the paper. Keep it, or tear it in a thousand atoms, and fling it into the fire of forgetfulness. Ours was no marriage, and you will find there is not even any writing on the sheet where you signed your name. Imagination led you to believe there was. You were mesmerised at the time."

A cry of despair broke from Muriel's lips.

"It was wicked, cruel, and yet—yet—I loved you, and I think I love you still! You shall not leave me! Now that you have proved to your friends I am willing to take you, it is your duty to marry me. I will not blame you, but claim you as my right."

"My dear lady," he answered softly, "such a thing is impossible. Women have no power to charm my soul, thank Heaven! I am free, and intend to remain so."

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Miss Adeane leant back in the carriage and stifled a sob. Her teeth were clenched, and there was a dangerous look in her eyes.

"You were right," she muttered at last. "I *was* mesmerised. I hated you from the first, and I have always despised you in my heart. Your very touch is pollution; your every word an insult. When we meet again, Mr. Somerville, I will repay you."

The carriage had drawn up, and she sprang from it eagerly, refusing his proffered aid. Her eyes blazed with indignation as he bowed her a last farewell.

"*Au revoir*," she said in her low, musical voice, which reached his ear, and his alone. "Not until I am equal with you will I say adieu!"

"Forewarned is forearmed," he answered, raising his hat. "Besides, revenge never satisfies. Only the ignorant practise it, and the foolhardy feel its whip."

"Then I think you will suffer!" Muriel replied slowly, as she turned away.

II.

"NOTHING is bad enough for men!" said Muriel. "They do so much harm in the world. It is well to give them a rub back sometimes!"

Her aunt looked up, surprised. "My dear child, I am sure you have no old scores to remember, and even if you had, it would be more Christian to forget them, now fate has been so good to you."

"I suppose it is tremendously lucky to come into a huge fortune at four-and-twenty, and to have such a sweet creature as you, Aunt Cicely, to bear with me in all my moods. Yet, still I pity women! Especially those unfortunate individuals who have nothing to recommend them. I should die under the misfortune of an ugly face. When a man falls in love he can plead his own cause, but women have to wrap their unasked affection away in aching hearts, and only too often the secret love, that descends hidden to the grave, is the best and purest that the world can give. Wasted, yet still unquenched, it burns internally, eating its way like a deadly cancer into the soul."

"Why, Muriel, one would almost think you had been crossed in love."

"What an absurd idea! No; I was talking of the whole sex, and showing you they are at a disadvantage. I have entirely left myself out of the argument, for, of course, I could buy a husband any day."

"You have so many friends it would indeed be strange if amongst them you had not many admirers."

"People talk of being 'in love,' but they never name the opposite state of mind and become 'in hate.' How odd it would be to say: 'I have fallen in hate!' Would it not?"

Mrs. Vincent smiled. She was so unoriginal herself that she considered Muriel the most entertaining companion imaginable, and hung upon her words with flattering interest.

"By-the-way, Aunt Cicely, do you happen to remember Mr. Somerville?"

"Yes. He has been absent a long while; we have not seen him for years. He left, I remember, rather suddenly, and I mentally added him to the list of your victims."

"He has returned to town, and I have asked him to come and see me."

"When do you expect him?"

"This very afternoon."

"I had promised to go to the Gordons' 'At Home.'"

"By all means fulfil your engagement, as I can quite well receive him alone."

"I shall not be gone long, my dear."

"Oh, do not hurry on my account! I have frequently entertained a host of visitors while you were enjoying a peaceful siesta upstairs, far away through the ivory gate of dreams. Go, my good aunt, and amuse yourself. Drink a lot of tea and talk any amount of scandal!"

"Muriel, you know I never pull my acquaintances to pieces."

"Not literally—and, after all, speech is our own, to use as we please. Half the flavour of conversation would vanish if an Act of Parliament were passed to bridle tongues."

Muriel flung herself into an easy chair, and picked up a book.

"Good-bye, Aunt Cicely," she said, without raising her eyes.

She sat alone, perfectly still, for a long time, with the book open before her, but unread, and then started suddenly. Someone was coming upstairs, and she sprang to her feet, holding her breath. Muriel expected to see Courtenay Somerville, instead of whom Henry Erskine entered the room, and she went forward to greet him with mixed feelings of disappointment and relief. He was her old and trusted solicitor—a man she had known all her life, and who took the entire management of her affairs. She consulted him in everything, and had perfect confidence in his judgment.

"I have called several times lately," he said, "in hopes of finding you alone."

"So you chose my 'At Home' day," she replied laughing.

"Unfortunately, and twice I have found you out."

"What have you to say that is so secret and important?"

Mr. Erskine looked at her steadily.

"Perhaps you will be annoyed with me for mentioning it, but I am going to give you a word of advice simply from a sense of duty and friendship."

"You mystify me."

"Well, I will come to the point at once. Miss Adeane, you have made a very undesirable acquaintance. Forgive me for blackening your friend, but you have no father—no one who could warn you against him."

"And his name?"

"Mervyn Dalbiac, one of the cleverest swindlers of the day. He has initiated himself into your good graces because you are rich. His trade is a very simple one. He will probably lead you to believe he is a great financier, and offer to treble your fortune in a couple of months. He will do you out of thousands if you fall into his trap. Don't listen to his schemes, and steer clear of the money market. He has been the ruin of numerous unwary speculators, and is on the hunt for more. It is his business. I am speaking plainly, for it is my privilege to warn you, as I consider him one of the greatest blackguards in the city. I was perfectly horrified when I met him at your house."

"You astonish me! I have always looked upon Mr. Dalbiac as a most harmless individual. But do you really think so badly of him?"

"Indeed, I was never more in earnest in my life. Your interests, Miss Adeane, concern me, and in this case I am absolutely certain caution is necessary."

"Then let me thank you heartily for your valuable advice. I know you are the truest friend I have in the world."

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"You will not pin your faith to him if he spreads the most tempting nets and opens gold mines at your feet?"

"No. When he commences a great harangue on finance I shall know what to expect."

"Now I have unburdened my mind I must leave you, for my time is precious; and forgive this very fleeting visit, as well as the advice you have taken so kindly."

"It is most kind of you to spare me even two minutes of your valuable day."

As Henry Erskine left her, Courtenay Somerville was announced.

Muriel welcomed him cordially, extending her hand with a smile.

"You are quite a stranger," she said sweetly.

"Yes; and I trust you will regard me as such, for

Muriel welcomed him cordially.

strangers may grow into friends—that is, if you can forgive and forget the past?"

"It may seem strange that I should wish to see you after our parting, but I am a little wiser now. I thought I knew the world then, when I tempted you to prove your power. We cease playing with fire when our fingers get burnt! You taught me my mistake, yet I do not blame you. It was humiliating at the time, but, believe me, I have swept it from my mind like a dream of the night."

"I hardly dared to hope for so much kindness."

"Do you know, I quite enjoy discussing old times."

"I think the new ones are still more interesting."

"Perhaps; but I have so much to occupy me now, since a turn of fortune's wheel made me one of the richest women in England."

"And you still live with your aunt?"

"Oh, yes! She is a sort of niece to me. We—the orphan and the widow—both feel sadly destitute of family ties."

"Yet half the world might envy you!"

"Men, doubtless, covet my money, and I can feel with them, for I was not always rich. They would sacrifice everything to the golden calf when the fever is once on them. Like Judas, they touch the accursed coin, and give up their lives to buying, selling, and getting gain, and when the end comes——"

"Do not talk of that," interrupted Courtenay. "Live in the present, die in the present, and leave the 'after' vague."

Muriel sighed. He drew his chair closer and leant forward.

"I cannot tell you how delighted I am to be with you again. You will never know the remorse I have suffered, nor how bitterly I regret the past. I believe I was possessed of a devil!"

"Very likely, there are plenty of them about."

"Oh, please do not laugh!"

"Why?"

"I cannot bear to see others cheerful when I am sad," he muttered with downcast eyes.

"As selfish as ever!"

He glanced up and saw the calm, sweet look return to her face, that look which only dwelt there in her happiest moments, and though she spoke jestingly, there was sympathy in her eyes.

"What a fool I was once!" he thought, grinding his teeth.

"Why are you unhappy?"

"The world has been treating me badly. While it has given you everything, it has left me practically destitute."

"You have spent your substance in riotous living, and now you are grinding the husks."

"You jump at conclusions. I was relying on an uncle, who is the head of a large firm in the City, to start me in business. However, he has just married a widow with four sons, all over six feet, and will do nothing for me."

"How very unfortunate! But why despair? There is a 'multitude of business.'"

"Not for men like me."

"Why?"

"I have no capital."

"I am glad you told me, for it is terrible to be cramped for the sake of a helping hand. If ever it be in my power, I will show you there are still such things as true forgiveness and undying friendship lingering in this dark world."

Before he had time to thank her, their *solitude à deux* was interrupted by Mrs. Vincent's return, and the conversation drifted to general topics, only occasionally his eyes met hers, in a swift glance of mutual confidence.

"Will you dine with us to-morrow?" Muriel said, as he rose to go. "Mervyn Dalbiac is coming, and I should like you to meet him."

Courtenay gladly accepted. His hopes ran high, and the prize he had once so scornfully discarded now offered the only way of escape from the cramping clasp of poverty.

III.

After their first meeting Miss Adeane frequently entertained Mervyn Dalbiac and Courtenay Somerville. They struck up a friendship that she encouraged in

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every possible way, and while Courtenay's visits occurred daily, Mr. Dalbiac's became more numerous and lengthy than of yore.

"You are not looking well," the latter told her one day as they were sitting together in her boudoir. "You have been shutting yourself up and losing your interest in society."

"Yes, it is early days to grow tired of pleasure; but the fact is I am heartily sick of a perpetual round of gaiety."

"It is quite strange to hear you talk so seriously."

"Oh, I am not such a frivolous being as you imagine, Mr. Dalbiac! I can be sensible sometimes. Men sneer at our sex and think us empty-headed. If they would treat us as their equals they might find out what we really are."

"But women cannot share our graver interests. Look at business, for instance. They do not understand ——"

"There you are wrong! I, for one, take the keenest interest in finance. I have often longed to talk to you on the subject."

Mr. Dalbiac's eyes glistened. "It is my daily occupation to increase the fortunes of others," he said. "Everything I touch turns to gold."

"That is because you are so clever. Oh, it is wonderful to be such a great financier. There is nothing in the world I admire more in a man."

"Miss Adeane, I am delighted to hear you speak so, as I am deeply absorbed at present in a scheme which is practically bound to succeed. It will prove a trump card for all concerned—a master-stroke of business!"

"I should like to hear about it, if it is anything in which I could buy a share. I have promised to help Courtenay Somerville, who is a very old and dear friend of mine, and should this prove anything in which I could interest him, and if by its means I could help him to amass a fortune on his own account, I would gladly supply the capital. You understand?"

"Perfectly. You were always generous!"

"He is really in straitened circumstances, and for a man of his social standing it is utter beggary. I cannot bear to think of the penury some endure, while their moneyed friends continue to live on the fat of the land, without raising a finger to help them. Friends, indeed! That is not my idea of friendship!"

"What noble sentiments!" ejaculated Mr. Dalbiac, raising his eyes.

"Now, if you will tell me your scheme," said Muriel, "I will give you my undivided attention."

"Candidly, I do not think you will be disappointed. I myself am infatuated with the idea. A friend of mine has discovered a wonderful application of electricity, which will revolutionise the present lighting system. The electric light is acknowledged to be the very best, the only drawback being its costliness. Under his invention, the cost will be reduced to a minimum, and the benefit of it placed in the hands of the million. The profits are quite incalculable, and the only thing wanted now to produce it on a scale to show its practicability is capital."

He spoke excitedly, and Miss Adeane seemed to have caught his ardour, her eyes brightened, she bent forward involuntarily.

"Go on—I am listening."

Mr. Dalbiac, encouraged by her interest, broached the most important subject.

"If you feel inclined to find this capital," he said, "I will enter more fully into details."

Muriel replied she had already told him so.

"But," she added, "I must confess my knowledge of business is limited. I cannot gauge what amount would be required."

"As you entertain the proposal, I will evolve my plans. The process is simplicity itself. The only marvel is that it should have remained so long overlooked by more scientific electricians. Under the present system the electricity is produced by a motor, and, through a process which I need not describe, makes a thread inclosed in a glass vacuum in a state of incandescence, which gives the light. The amount of electricity consumed is very great, and hence its heavy cost. Now my friend has discovered that by filling this vacuum with a certain species of gas, and by passing a very slight current, which can be procured from a small battery, this gas becomes highly illuminated, and gives out many times the light of the present incandescent burner at a nominal cost. Now picture to yourself for a moment a light that must supersede every other, costing a hundredth part of the best at present known. Think what it would be in your own house—no gas bills, no electric light bills, and your lighting rates reduced to the vanishing point! It would be the greatest boon of modern times! Its brilliancy is dazzling—bewildering. It would flood our streets, our houses, our theatres, with a wealth obtained by no other artificial means. We should rise, as it were, from a chaos of darkness, and bless the man whose fertile brain had organised so marvellous a public benefit!"

Mr. Dalbiac spoke quickly, without pausing. He continued his subject in a lower tone, however, and there was a touch of regret in his voice.

"I have only one feeling of hesitation, Miss Adeane," he said thoughtfully, "and that is pity for the unfortunate shareholders in gas and electric light companies. It is, alas! a terrible look-out for them! But, after all, we cannot prevent their downfall. The few must suffer for the many—the individual for the nation. It can be kept for an after-consideration whether, out of the millions which must flow into our pockets, we should set apart a sum for their relief. Prosperity should not permit us to neglect the duty we owe to the poverty-stricken people—ruined through our success."

"How charitable you are!" said Muriel softly. "Very few men would have such a thought in the midst of their own triumph. I decidedly favour your praiseworthy suggestion."

Then she went into the question of how much capital would be required to rake in these millions, hardly suppressing her inclination to ask him whether they might not eventually immortalise their names by paying off the National Debt. The amount seemed startlingly small—only £10,000 cash, and £10,000 in shares of a syndicate company of £20,000—of which she was to provide the money.

"I will readily assent to that," said Miss Adeane, upon hearing the sum, "on two conditions."

Mr. Dalbiac could hardly conceal his surprise. Why had he not trebled the figure? Suppressing his vexation, he said simply:

"What are your conditions, Miss Adeane?"

"First, that Mr. Somerville looks thoroughly into the matter and advises me upon it. Secondly, that the prospectus be advertised once in one daily paper, so that I may feel the public have had a chance of participating to some small exent in this El Dorado."

Muriel's reply staggered Mr. Dalbiac. For a moment there was a pause, and she noticed a dark shadow flit

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across his face. Then he broke into a tirade upon the ingratitude of the public, and the waste of their future profits, for a mere sentiment. But Miss Adeane stuck to her point, asking, as she silenced his objections, how much of the capital she was to be allowed to take.

She . . . . looked out at the sun.

"The whole of the cash capital," he replied; "£10,000."

A few details as to how this sum was to be disposed of had to be gone into, and the form of the prospectus to be considered.

"Nine thousand of it," said Mr. Dalbiac, "is to go to my friend the inventor, and one thousand to be used for publicly showing the light."

He enlarged upon the fortunate circumstances for her that his friend was so pressed for money he was obliged to take it, instead of shares, for his invention. Their conversation ended by a promise from Mr. Dalbiac that Somerville should benefit by being appointed a director, and a reminder on her part that his certificate as to the *bonâ fides* of the concern should appear on the prospectus.

Mr. Dalbiac left in the highest spirits, and went straight to Courtenay Somerville, to whom he explained in glowing terms what had passed. A meeting between them in the City on the following day was then agreed upon.

Muriel appeared greatly agitated when she was again alone. Her face had grown paler, and her lips trembled. She paced the room in that restless impetuous manner which denotes a mind ill at ease.

"I cannot help it," she muttered under her breath, struggling with a stormy gust of passion. "It is fight for yourself in this world. Revenge your wrongs measure for measure. God alone knows my grievance rankled till it turned my soul to gall."

She went to the window and looked out at the sun.

"It is shining!" she said. "Shining like a great globe of electrified gas."

IV.

Courtenay knew nothing of business, and his ideas on the subject were decidedly vague. It gratified his vanity that he had been able to reassert his influence over Miss Adeane, upon renewing her acquaintance. Now her friendship—ah! more than that—her love, could be of service to him, and his heart grew buoyant at the thought.

He met Mr. Dalbiac at the appointed hour in his office, where the latter explained the invention even more graphically than on the previous afternoon. In a corner of the room sat an insignificant individual, who evidently with an effort suppressed adding the deferential "Sir" to every reply he made to Mr. Dalbiac's questions. He was Mark Snewleigh, the inventor of the "World's Lighting Revolution." When the matter had been thoroughly explained to Somerville, the prospectus was placed before him for his approval. Mr. Dalbiac drew his attention to a brilliant light in the office, and proceeded in a most bewildering and voluminous manner to describe its action. Having done so, he handed him a letter for his signature, addressed to Mark Snewleigh—the wording being as follows:

Sir,—I agree to accept a seat on the Board of the "Gazelectro Lighting Syndicate," having thoroughly satisfied myself of its practicability and adaptability. I have also satisfied myself that the cost per candle power is not more than one-tenth of that of any known light. It must, therefore, unquestionably revolutionise the lighting of the civilised world.

As Courtenay ran his eye over the document, his face assumed a puzzled expression, and he read it twice before speaking, the second time more carefully than the first. Then he laid it down, and remarked in tones denoting surprise:

"But how can I sign such a letter, when I don't know the facts to which I am certifying?"

"I can satisfy you at once," replied Mr. Dalbiac promptly, and proceeded to describe, in a technical and very confusing manner, batteries, currents, gases, vacuums, candle-power, etc., till Somerville felt undecided as to whether he knew all or nothing about the subject in question. In his indecision Dalbiac fired his big gun and hit the target. "I omitted to tell you," he said, with his bland smile, "that the vendor here, who is being paid partly in cash for his invention, recognises the fact of the enormous value to him of your knowledge in business matters, and wishes you to accept one-fourth of the money for your services."

Somerville never did a sum quicker in his head, and the words were hardly out of Dalbiac's mouth before he had realised that one-fourth of £9,000 was £2,250. The temptation was too great. He persuaded himself it must be right, since he had Dalbiac's word for it. Of course, Miss Adeane merely requested his opinion out of compliment, and there could be little doubt the thing was perfectly genuine. Thus he argued with his conscience, Mr. Dalbiac urging

Courtenay ran his eye over the document.

him the while, till finally his irresolution turned to decision. He came to the conclusion that the letter was concise enough, and signed his name in full.

He bent his head in assent.

"The Board of Directors," said Mr. Dalbiac, "will consist of you, the inventor, and myself."

Courtenay looked furtively towards Mark Snewleigh, who had been silent throughout. He appeared utterly incapable of revolutionising anything, and merely assented, somewhat nervously, when referred to by Mr. Dalbiac.

"These clever people appear to have very little to say for themselves," thought Somerville wonderingly.

"We can have a larger Board if you wish it," continued Dalbiac hastily, "but, if you will give the time and work, I think it would be a pity to reduce the fees by further division. The emolument for the Board I propose should be £500 a year; you, as chairman, taking £300, and the vendor dividing the remainder with me. Besides this, it should be arranged for a percentage of the profits to come to the Board, which would bring you in a very handsome income."

As Somerville's mind imbibed all this, the sudden overwhelming good fortune seemed too wonderful to be true.

He announced his intention on parting with Dalbiac of going at once to see Miss Adeane.

"You can tell her exactly how matters stand, Somerville," he said, "for she is a thorough business woman, and has a wonderful head. She takes a thing in directly, and is quite astoundingly sharp."

Courtenay detained Miss Adeane's little gloved hand longer than usual upon meeting her in the hall.

"I was starting for a drive," she said.

"I have come to thank you most heartily," he murmured, "for all you are about to do for me. I cannot express my gratitude—I should be thanking you every moment of the day."

He spoke so earnestly that for a moment her heart stood still. She then turned away from him with a shudder.

"For Heaven's sake don't thank me! I *detest* being thanked. I would rather you never mentioned the matter again. I do not want gratitude, for to me it is of all things the most hateful."

Her harsh tone jarred on his feelings, and her retort confused him. She noticed his discomfort, and tried to make amends, while her voice became pleading and persuasive.

"You won't thank me any more?" she said, and her eyes were so grave that it gave her whole face a mournful expression. "It is the one thing I ask you in return."

He bent his head in assent.

"Mr. Dalbiac is a great financier," she said, changing the subject; "I have perfect confidence in all he does. You may safely rely on his judgment, and be guided by him in everything, as there is no doubt he is an exceptionally clever man. Here is Aunt Cicely. You will come with us?"

He appreciated her objection to being thanked, and followed her to the carriage, with a thrill of happiness quivering through his frame.

V.

Gazelectricity progressed steadily, and the prospectus appeared in due course in one daily paper, Mr. Dalbiac being careful to select the least likely to bring it under public notice. Miss Adeane had a copy of the newspaper, and one of the prospectus, both of which she locked carefully away in her safe. The response from the British public was small, owing to the limited circulation of the chosen daily. Nevertheless, it came into the hands of sufficient very young men and guileless old ladies to extract from them a total of £5,000. The shares were duly allotted, and the same fate befell Miss Adeane's application for the remaining £5,000. The first payment made by the company was £2,250 to Courtenay Somerville and the next £6,750 to the vendor. After this Somerville was told there would be no active business done for some time.

One night he was dining at the Savoy with his friend, Jack Percival, a young solicitor, to whom he enlarged on his good fortune.

Dining at the Savoy.

"It is quite a new line of business for me," he said cheerfully, "the directorship of a company. I never had much of a head for that sort of thing, but this is quite sound. It has paid me already £2,250 as a start, and the joke of it is they wanted to get hold of me for my knowledge! I suppose Miss Adeane stuffed them up. Dalbiac got her to put the money into it."

"I hope you were properly advised in the first place,

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for it is a dangerous thing nowadays to put your name to a prospectus. Who looked into the contracts for you to see if they were properly drawn?"

Somerville hesitated and began to feel rather a fool. "I—well, to tell you the truth, I never saw a contract."

His friend grew suddenly grave, and told him he had acted most rashly. Jack Percival could put a case clearly, and showed him his mistake in such a new and unpleasant light, that he became thoroughly alarmed. The folly of his implicit faith in Dalbiac presented itself to his mind in a painfully aggravating manner, till he worked himself into a perfect fever of apprehension.

"I have no doubt it is all right, old fellow," said Jack consolingly. "Don't worry over it to-night, but these things have a nasty way of tricking one sometimes, and of turning out in a confoundedly awkward way."

"I have an appointment with Dalbiac to-morrow in the City. Will you come with me and look into the matter? I shall not rest till my doubts are dispelled. You have made me most horribly uncomfortable."

After asking some further particulars of the company, Jack readily agreed to accompany him.

* * * * *

Miss Adeane was lounging in the luxurious apartment she called her sanctum. The day was hot and depressing, and she had fallen half asleep over a novel. Every luxury conducive to ease and comfort met her eyes as she raised them drowsily, and let them wander round. Numerous quaint and grotesque embellishments caught her gaze at every turn, and each detail of wealth and splendour gave her a delicious sense of satisfaction. She looked dreamily at the velvet tapestries and costly decorations, and from them to the paintings, the flowers, and the sculpture.

Courtenay Somerville broke in upon her reverie, and she rose to greet him with her ready smile. His hand as she took it was deathly cold.

"I am in great trouble," he said tremulously. "Something very terrible has happened."

Muriel showed no sign of surprise.

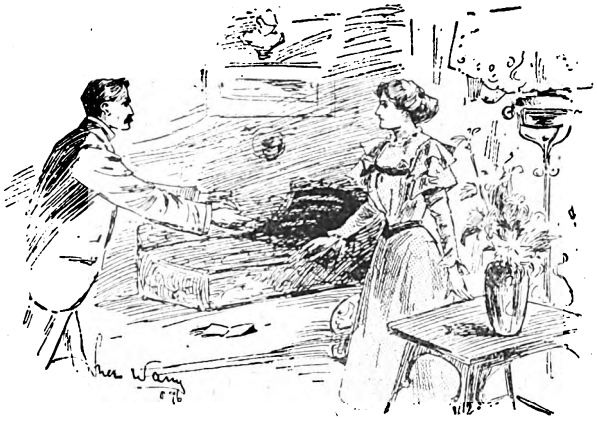
"Dalbiac has disappeared," he continued, while his voice sounded hollow. "I have been duped and fooled! Percival first opened my eyes. We went together to find him, but he had gone and left no address. The Gazelectricity was a snare, a fraud, and I—I have been their tool. I was induced to accept part of the purchase money, which I have spent, and have no means of replacing. The shareholders can come down on me for this, while they can prosecute me for giving a fraudulent certificate since I was a director, and receiving money as a vendor, without disclosing the fact on the prospectus. I come here to throw myself upon your mercy, Miss Adeane. To implore you of your boundless wealth to buy up all the shares in the hands of the public, and to bury the company, and so prevent my being exposed to ruin and disgrace. I know you will do this, for you sacrificed so much to help me. You could not wish your good intentions to put me in so terrible a position."

Courtenay tried to suppress his emotion and speak calmly, but Muriel's utter indifference only excited him the more in his overwrought condition. He had looked for the ready sympathy—the kindly pity—and he feasted his eyes hungrily upon her, as though seeking a ray of hope.

"It is all very well for you to come and tell me this," she answered with a shrug of her shoulders, "but you looked into the matter, and certified to its accuracy upon the prospectus."

"Fool that I was!" he broke in angrily, "to be tempted by such a bait."

"Consequently, Mr. Somerville," she continued, eyeing



Courtenay Somerville broke in upon her reverie.

him with languid disapproval, "*you* are responsible."

"I know it! I know it!" he replied, struggling to retain his self-command. "But I was tricked and cheated by your friend. The light was never produced by the means he represented—the means to which I was deluded into certifying. Perhaps you have not realised my position to its full extent——"

She held up her hand. "I must ask you not to worry me with details. I understand the facts as clearly as you do yourself."

"You mean you will not raise a hand to save me?" he asked breathlessly.

"Did you consider me when you made me the butt of that cruel jest?" replied Muriel slowly, and her face flushed hotly as she spoke.

For a moment Courtenay was too dazed to answer. He could hardly grasp her meaning. His lips moved, but he said nothing.

She watched him in silence as he clung to the back of a chair. The evil triumph of her nature flashed out in pitiless exultation, while the pent-up hatred of years blazed forth from her eyes, and a victorious, jeering laugh broke from her lips. She had conquered his influence and revelled in it.

"You have courted your torture," she said at last. "You have implanted with your own hand this desire in my heart to see you fall. I have had but one toil, one aim, one hope. To level you to the dust as you lowered me."

Her words vibrated with cruel intensity, and it was sweet to her to see the man she hated quivering from head to foot with blanched face, while his control forsook him; to note the amazed fixity into which his features set, as he gazed at her in a mute stupor! Once he would have spoken, but she stayed him with a gesture.

"My plans were laid as deeply as was your plot to entrap me," she continued, still with the same mocking smile, "and, notwithstanding your age and experience, you walked as unwarily into my net as a child, comparatively. I have encircled your life with the iron bonds of retribution! Have you forgotten how you humiliated me? Remember it now! Had the past glided from your mind as a buried episode? Let it

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rise from its grave to see justice! You became accursed and abhorrent to me from the day when you first made me your toy and put me to open ridicule to win a paltry bet. You thought the fury of the storm had abated! After a lapse of years you did not reckon upon a yawning gulf beneath the electric glare. Your eyes were blinded by flattery and artifice, and you thought that fortune's fingers were already in your grasp when you held my hand and whispered words of devotion! Oh! a man can little realise that a woman may have the soul of an avenger; that she can strike him down and break his spirit, as he would fain have broken hers. He cannot believe her heart is hard so long as her lips smile and her voice sounds softly on his ear!"

Muriel turned her scornful eyes full upon him with haughty power and bitter irony. The disdain of the look seemed to wither him up like a devouring flame, and involuntarily he stretched out his arms.

"For the mercy of God remember what you have brought me to," he cried, hoarse with anguish and breathless with despair. "Your vengeance condemns me to death in life! I shall be arrested unless I fly the country. Oh, how could I be so blind to your merciless scheming? In the glory of your exultation may the vileness of your sin find you out! When the ashes of an overpowering fate have hidden me for ever from your sight, may your own conscience condemn you and cheat you of your fiendish joy. Though your proud and ice-cold heart may never own regret, some bitter sadness will sigh through the memories of your youth when you think of the man you wrecked and ruined to satisfy a devil's craving!"

Her eyes remained with their gaze riveted upon Courtenay as he spoke. The supreme moment of her life had come! No words could move her to mercy, while the hard smile which still flickered round her lips silenced the plea that trembled on his tongue and changed it to a curse. Then Muriel, with a sudden impulse, crossed the room, and in the unbroken silence rang the bell.

"We are quits," she said, with pitiless self-possession. "This makes us equal. You deserve your fate. If you remember once I only said *au revoir*—now, Mr. Somerville, I will say adieu!"

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The Romance of an Australian Christmas Tree.

JOHN RAINUPP, the driver, had been speculating upon the white-haired stranger on the seat beside him ever since the North Queensland coach left the railway station. He wanted a square look into his eyes before venturing a "feeler," but the big slouched hat prevented that. So, as they got within sight of the town on the slopes ahead of them, the old driver turned his attention to the only other passenger on the box, and pointed out the buildings that came into view.

"And that's the orphanage," he continued, pointing to a white building in the midst of a grove of evergreen trees on the brow of the slope ahead of them. "Percival Hanson's money started it, but they have hard work to keep it going. Always hampered for funds, unlucky from the first start fifteen years ago. They had a fire, then they were robbed of a round sum——"

"Robbed? Who would rob orphans?" interrupted the passenger.

"Well, nobody expected it of Dick when he was trusted with the money. He got into wild company, and it went in some kind of speculation that was to double it. Served a sentence in prison for it. Too bad. I suppose he's gone to the dogs since. Precious few ever get over that disgrace. Pity. I knew Dick from a boy. He was awful good-hearted."

"Yes. Robbery of orphans was a fine proof of goodness," returned the old gentleman with cutting sarcasm.

"Well, he only meant to borrow the money," said John.

"Poor excuse to cheat the fatherless," persisted the other with severity.

"There's Millicent Andrews on her way to the orphanage," pursued John, as the coach reached the level beyond the slope. "She's taught the children to sing like nightingales for Christmas. There's to be a tree in the grounds, and a big time."

As he said this the stranger looked up and seemed to regard the young woman in a light muslin garment ahead of them with interest.

"She's done a lot for them first and last, and they worship her," said John. "Queer she don't get married," he added reflectively, as he touched up the greys, "but I don't know a man in Warrady good enough for her."

With the last words the greys dashed round the curve and brought up in fine style before the Warrady Hotel.

The silent stranger was christened "The Mystery" very shortly. He had meals sent to his rooms. "J. H. Afterforth" on the hotel register was as noncommittal as his ponderous strapped trunks. Always with hat down, he took long, lonely walks about the town and its outskirts.

He might be a harmless lunatic, it was conjectured, until he was seen to go in and out of the orphanage several times, when it got about that he was a rich, eccentric relative of one of the children, who, if he found all things on the square, was likely to give them a handsome Christmas donation. In fact, Mr. Melladew, the superintendent, admitted that he had hopes a new friend had been raised up to them.

* * * * *

The lawn of the house belonging to Captain Andrews was the centre of attraction on Christmas Eve. Curious rumours were afloat—although the Tree Committee had been personified caution—that the three ponderous trunks were to turn tell-tales, and that "The Mystery" was to have not only a finger but both arms and shoulders, up to his ears, in the festivities.

As the sun set on the warm, Australian Christmas Day, Captain Andrews stepped out of his door, then his wife, then Millicent, to welcome the first arrivals, who came, hurrying, converging from all points, laughing, chattering, wondering what the evening was to bring forth, and all passing into the grounds until the seats provided were full.

Once inside they found themselves in a bower of evergreens, and, of all things, two Christmas trees blazing away in splendour! One, the usual size, hung with the usual quota of Christmas presents, was completely overshadowed by the other, which towered skywards, a very monarch of the woods, wearing its royal honours not unconsciously, but with the air of triumphant, tantalising mystery.

Everybody, from Mr. Merrivale, the minister, to deformed Billy Bowl, the grocer's small boy, was bowing and smiling to everybody else. The orphans were in

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the front seats in gala dress. There was much craning of necks and wondering over the tall tree and the mysterious father thereof, for it was well understood that the white-bearded stranger was the sole author and finisher of this transcendent surprise.

"Mebbe he's the Wandering Jew," suggested Billy Bowl, leaning forward on his crutch towards the tree.

"Looks more like Rip Van Winkle, with his white hair," dissented Ned, the barber's boy, who had lately seen Joe Jefferson from the "heaven" of a Sydney theatre.

"Pooh! Didn't I say he was Santa Claus himself the first day?" was the triumphant query of Ben, the hotel boy.

How these orphans' fingers laced and interlaced, and how their eyes flashed from tree to tree until both seemed to kindle into one blaze! How they aroused Millicent's reassuring smile, with confidence in their own ability to tune their throats when called upon!

In the midst of all, Millicent's eyes had a far-away reminiscent expression of sadness, as if she were occupying a sphere inside the radiant one around her. And "The Mystery," who was in a small shed beyond the platform with the Tree Committee, stood looking through the door at her, so absorbed that Rhoda Barker had to give him a smart shake to call his attention to the mask and toggery in which he must array himself at once.

"There he is! That's 'The Mystery!'" was the cry when Santa Claus, in fantastic array, with snowy head and the jolliest of rubicund faces, came forth flourishing a long wand with ribbon streamers, and took his stand between the two Christmas trees. For a minute the commotion in the air made the evergreens tremble.

The chairman mounted the platform, and after many shouts and much waste of breath brought the meeting to order. At a signal from Millicent, who played a piano accompaniment, the orphans bubbled and overflowed in a joyous Christmas carol which brought everybody into sympathetic unison, and fairly seemed to make the trees join arms and whirl each other round and round from sheer enthusiasm.

"See! see!" was echoed, as half-a-dozen Christmas fairies in misty tulle and spangled wings came filing out into the grounds.

Santa Claus marshalled them round him by quaint and curious flourishes of the wand he carried, and began to despoil the smaller tree. Its fruitage was soon scattered right and left by the dainty little messengers, and then Santa Claus, with more flourishes, turned to the other ready for invasion by the miniature world, which after all only remained for the larger one to plunder.

"Won't he need a long step-ladder to reach the top of it?" queried Billy Bowl.

"You watch him charm the things down," said Ned. "He's a wizard. That wand has magic in it."

"The children of the orphanage will prepare for the lion's share of the plunder," Santa Claus called out in jovial tones, and he broke up the flirtation under the bough abruptly by consigning the youth in a sailor suit to one fairy, and the long-lashed coquette to another, she uttering a little squeak of protest as he did so.

Clothing there was, too, piles of it, from blue and pink Tam-o'-Shanters down to patent-tipped shoes.

Santa Claus stood back from the tree with a view to dispersing the soft clouds clinging to the summit of the tall tree all the evening, as if it had settled down there from the summer sky of the tropics.

A touch of the wand and it materialised into a dainty India shawl. He flourished it aloft airily, turned round on his heels in apparent uncertainty as to its disposal, wound it into a fluffy ball with the wand and tossed it up, caught it dexterously, roved with his eyes all over the audience, balancing it, faced round to Millicent's quarter where the orphans beamed, faced back upon the Tree Committee, again to Millicent, letting his eyes rest upon her, and then everybody, watching his capers, saw the shawl descend and settle in graceful folds over her head and shoulders.

"What is the meaning of that tomfoolery, I wonder?" Captain Andrews muttered under his breath uneasily, and his shapely eyebrows lowered perceptibly as he noticed Millicent's smiling, blushing perplexity.

"So 'The Mystery' has let his mantle fall upon Millicent," remarked Dr. Chalifoux.

"It seems to belong there, doesn't it?" remarked Mr. Melladew, as his clear eyes searched her blonde face in the azure cloud with just a shade of anxiety.

"You know what it all means," challenged the doctor's wife.

"We shall see later," returned Mr. Melladew.

The fairies, having got through with the orphans, were now fluttering like silver butterflies all over the grounds with their hands full. Gift books with cream margins and handsome bindings, more baskets of candied fruits and bonbons, more dolls, and more animals for other children, until it did seem that "The Mystery" had had to find some outlet for his benevolence to avoid bursting outright. Billy Bowl had, besides books and sweetmeats, a complete outfit from top to toe.

At the last minute a small oblong box, with spring clasps was carried in both hands to Mr. Melladew by the eldest of the fairies. There were some conjectures over its contents, as he lifted the lid cautiously and closed it, shutting off the curious from even a peep.

The chairman mounted the table again, got a show of order, after labouring a full quarter of an hour for it, and made them understand that Mr. Melladew had something to say to them.

Mr. Melladew stood holding the mysterious box conspicuously until complete silence had fallen.

"Friends," he began slowly, as if he wished every word to be an apple of gold in a picture of silver, "you will, I think, be glad to know that the money taken from the orphanage funds ten years ago has been restored to us trebled."

He held up the box as he spoke, drew out of it a shining handful of coins, allowing them to fall back with a jingle.

There was a profound sensation.

"The older ones will remember the circumstances," he went on, with a furtive glance at Squire Halliday, "and that there was more of grief than indignation among us. Would we not be glad to know that he who did the deed has lived down both it and the disgrace bravely, has made an honourable place for himself among men, and has now come forward to repair the wrong?"

There was one suspended breath around him.

"If he were here, would you—could you—not even find it in your hearts to give him a frank and hearty hand of fellowship?"

"Yes! Yes! We would!" on all sides.

"Those in favour of Santa Claus unmasking at once will say 'I!'"

One tremendous and unanimous "I!" resounded.

Santa Claus stepped forward from the centre of the

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tall Christmas tree. He threw off his fantastic garments. The grotesque mask of the evening fell to his feet, carrying the white wig and beard along with it, and a man not over thirty, with a square jaw and pathetic dark eyes, which held the shadow of past suffering in them, stood bared to these questioning glances, with a mingling of shrinking sensitiveness and manly self-possession that won the hearts of the entire crowd.

Everybody swayed towards him. The older people were tracing the likeness of the brown, manly face to the boyish one they remembered before his life had suffered eclipse.

"I'm bothered if it isn't Dick Halliday himself!" was Captain Andrew's suppressed comment.

"Dick Halliday! Why, it's Dick, sure enough. Wouldn't you have known him anywhere?" sounded over the grounds.

Squire Halliday and his wife had their faces hidden.

"I thought there was something familiar about him the day he rode on the coach with me," said John Rainupp, in deep disgust at his own stupidity.

"He's a fine fellow if he has worn prison garb," was the comment of Dr. Chalifoux to Captain Andrews. "Comes of good stock, you see. Had the grit to live it down."

"Yes," assented the Captain absently. "I wish he had steered clear of the rocks in the first place," he added with his eyes on Millicent's face, now flooded with a mild radiance as of moonlight. It was plain she still loved him. If the broken engagement was to be reversed, why then——

Dick stood there silent. It was a trying ordeal, this bidding publicly for the respect and confidence of his townspeople with the taint of dishonour not yet outlived. To one of Dick's nature sin brings its own punishment. But, seconded by Mr. Melladew, he had dared all in this peculiar fashion, because he longed, let it be whispered, to be reinstated fully for the sake of Millicent, whose life he had so shamefully clouded.

The murmur in the grounds swelled to a round of heart-felt applause. What but large, generous sentiments could have been the outcome of that evening?

"My friends, I thank you," Dick began, and broke down completely.

Squire Halliday and his wife were making their way up to him. There were few dry eyes there as the father, whose proud heart had been bowed in shame over his dishonoured name, grasped Dick's outstretched hand, with a trembling, "God bless you, my son!" and the mother, whose heart had yearned over her wayward boy all these years, drew his head down upon her breast tenderly, and shed tears of joy upon his face.

"Makes me think of the night she first held him in her arms thirty years ago," said Dr. Chalifoux in a broken voice.

"Halliday ought to be proud of him," rejoined Lawyer Winthrop, whose pleading had shortened Dick's sentence. "It isn't every young fellow who can recover from a slip so thoroughly."

"No need, you see, of killing a boy for one mistake," said John Rainupp.

"No. But this seems to be a mighty fuss over a gaol-bird," rejoined Cyril Hubbard, the druggist, who had failed to win Millicent's favour in time past.

"Don't use that word again in my hearing," said John.

"Nor in mine! Nor in mine!" came from all those within earshot.

"I am master of my own tongue," retorted Cyril.

"I move we march round and give him a handshake," said Lawyer Winthrop.

Seconded and carried, and Dick, as they filed up to welcome him, wondered if it were only last night he had lain awake shrinking from imagined hisses and epithets, such as are apt to descend upon sinners of his type.

Up they came—Mr. Melladew beaming over the unanimous and hearty reception when he had feared deep-seated prejudice; the Rev. Mr. Merrivale, resting his hand on Dick's head with a hearty "Happy Christmas"; Dr. Chalifoux with a hard grip that spoke volumes. On and on they came, Billy Bowl and Ned, Maggy Maguire in her armchair, with tears on her lashes and a smile about her mouth.

Millicent, with sweet flushed face and tremulous lips, still in her cloud of drapery, letting her warm palm rest in his, frankly and tenderly even. Captain Andrews, with all reservations vanishing from his big, kindly nature, nurtured on the ocean, when he looked keen and close into Dick's half-pleading, honest eyes. The orphans, too, chocolates in their cheeks and "things" hugged under their arms—everybody, in fact, but Cyril, and really he ought to be excused, for a successful rival is a hard pill to swallow. Millicent's face had told tales.

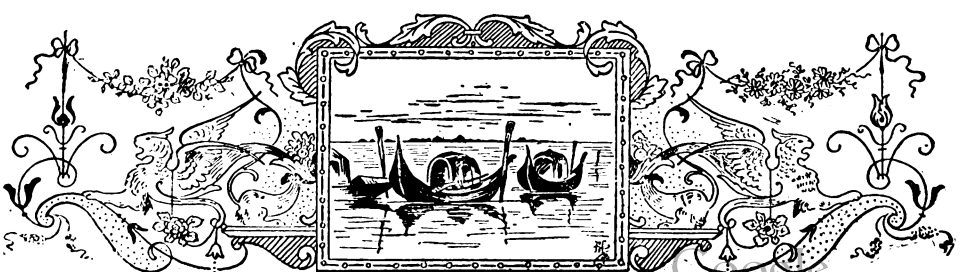
At last came a general movement to the house, where a spread awaited those who were left with an appetite.

Dick was seated between his father and mother, who were flanked by Dr. Chalifoux, Lawyer Winthrop and the rest of the "old stock," and Mr. Melladew took out letters from Dick's friends in Melbourne and passed them round, and Dick must needs recount how he worked his way out to the West coast as a hand before the mast, and struck it rich in the gold-fields after a hand-to-hand tussle, and afterwards went into business in Peel, where he now had many friends, which he did with halting speech, modestly, for this whole-hearted ignoring of a grave misdeed by all of them quite overcame him.

* * * * *

So Dick came into the confidence of his home friends on the crest of the Christmas wave.

BARRY SHARPE.



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Through the Fire of the Commune

By Walter Rothwell.

"Jean, Jean, don't—don't go!"

"I must, Marie; we march for Versailles to-morrow. There, cheer up, little one, I shall soon be back. Prussians and rebels will leave Paris at rest, and when everything is quiet once more, we must be married."

"But, Jean, I am afraid. Father says Monsieur Thiers' soldiers will all be shot, and—oh, Jean—Jean——" she broke down and sobbed as if her heart would break.

The young man bit his lips to keep back his emotion.

"But see, dear," he said, as cheerfully as he could, "that is impossible. We shall soon put an end to this little riot. Be a brave girl and don't cry any more."

"And Monsieur Gruchon, Jean?"

The soldier's face fell, and the fear he had been so bravely trying to conceal, showed itself plainly.

"True, there is Gruchon," he said; and before his mind rose the wrinkled face, the horrible leer, the thick, protruding lips, of the old money-lender of the Rue des Martyrs.

It was in that street—where Marie lived with her father, Martial Buissonière—that Gruchon first saw her, six months ago. She thought, then, how strange it was that he smiled at, and made signs to her so often.

Jean was away with the army at the time, or he would soon have stopped the annoyance, for the old man had, besides, a curious way of creeping up unnoticed and whispering in her ear that alarmed her. But after all, perhaps it was only that he wished to be friendly with her, for she had never joined the other women in the street in execration and jeers when they caught sight of Gruchon. With them and with the *gamins* it was: "The old vampire—the leech—the pig of an usurer!" but Marie, who seldom said a harsh word of anyone, had never the heart to speak against the old man. She pitied him for his loneliness, his ugliness, even for his evil passions.

One evening, however, on returning from her work, she found the money-lender with her father, talking eagerly. As she entered they ceased their conversation abruptly, and Gruchon took his leave with a cunning smile and a "Good-evening, Mam'selle Buissonière."

All through the dinner her father was uneasy and embarrassed. At last, pressed by Marie, he confessed that his visitor had made a proposal for her hand.

The young girl was amazed, and then burst into a laugh.

"It is so droll!" she said. "I should not laugh at the poor man, but how can I help it? I—his wife! And give up poor Jean?" she added in a mock whimper, smiling at her father with pouting lips.

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Martial sat looking into space, his thick, heavy eyebrows drawn down.

Marie rose and put her arm caressingly round his neck.

"Come, father, don't look so stern. Is it because I laughed? Well, I will do so no more; now go on with your dinner."

But still he scowled moodily.

"Marie," he said at length, "Gruchon is rich, he has property—houses and land, my child."

"Yes, father."

"He loves you, Marie."

"Father!"

"And now, since war has been declared, work is scarce. I can barely earn enough to buy bread," continued Martial, as if to himself.

His daughter sat as if turned into stone, listening.

"He is rich, he will make you a good husband, for he loves you. Jean—if he be not dead—will never have enough to marry——"

"Stop, father," and Marie rose to her feet proudly. "I belong to Jean, we are betrothed, and we love each other,"—then her dignity broke down and she burst into tears—"and I wouldn't marry that old man if—if—he owned the Bank of France." Then she ran into her bedroom and slammed the door.

All Martial's attempts to persuade his daughter were of no avail, and Gruchon's attentions only made her hate him.

At length, Jean, with the retreating remnant of the army, returned to Paris, and for a time the old moneylender ceased to annoy her.

During the horrors of the siege Marie was almost happy. Was not Jean fighting for her? Could she not see him, almost from day to day, and assure herself that he was safe! Only during the hopeless sorties—when the French were always driven back—she felt a horrible fear lest her sweetheart should be struck down, never to re-enter the gates.

Then came the capitulation and—the First of March!

On that day the Prussians entered Paris, and, amid the confusion, the National Guard, maddened at the disgrace of surrender, seized the cannon, and carried them to the heights of Monmartre. The rabble of the city thronged round the fort thus made, and foremost amongst them were Martial Buissonière and old Gruchon, inciting the people to deeds of violence, and urging the soldiery to rebel.

Thiers attempted in vain to recapture the guns; it was the signal for the war of the Commune, and, to avoid detection, the army was ordered to Versailles.

So Jean and Marie had to part once more, and the young soldier grew anxious, almost terrified, when he thought of his sweetheart left in the insurgent city. Still, he tried to speak cheerfully and not think of what might happen. Marie's words, however, made it impossible to ignore the chief danger. "But there is Monsieur Gruchon," she said.

It was a terrible position, and, as Marie clung to him, weeping, Jean was distracted. The name the *gamins* had given the usurer—"the old vampire"—came to him in all its forcible meaning. He pictured the man watching and waiting patiently to seize his victim, as soon as her protector should have gone. He fancied he knew why Gruchon was working his way to the front rank of the Communists; if they held the city he would be a leader—a power amongst them, and Marie—how could she escape him!

The girl looked into her lover's face and saw the agony he felt. Her heart reproached her for adding to his trouble, and she wiped away her tears and kissed him.

"Never mind, Jean," she said bravely, "I know you

Marie clung to him.

will soon be back, and—yes, when all is peace, we will be——" she finished the sentence with a blush. "And perhaps, after all, the horrid old wretch will forget all about me. You see, it will be all right, dear, and whatever happens, I shall always—always love you."

So Jean went away comforted a little, in spite of his forebodings.

The next day the cannon on Monmartre opened fire, answered by the battery of Mont Valérien. The second siege of Paris had commenced!

For six days the shells shrieked over the city: for six long days Marie, terrified, watched alone at her window; saw the mob of men and wild-looking women stream

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down the street in the direction of the Boulevards, and, shuddering, saw the dead and wounded carried swiftly past.

Then the rush to the front ceased, for the army of Versailles had entered Paris, and above the shouts and the cries, the young girl heard the sustained firing that told her the soldiers were storming the barricade at the head of the Rue des Martyrs.

Her heart beat with hope. Jean would soon be with her now.

Suddenly a red glare lit up the sky; the Communists were firing the houses!

Marie watched the light spread and grow as the flames ran from roof to roof, from street to street. Night came, but no darkness of night; and below, in the flare and heat, ran women, old and young, all mad, frantic—singing and yelling—hair streaming, red sashes flying, swinging cans of petroleum and blazing torches. One of the furies fell in the mad rush; her oil-saturated dress caught fire; she fled screaming down the street, a living mass of flame. It was a carnival of fiends. An incarnation of horror!

Marie could not look away from the scene, it fascinated her.

Amid the noise she did not hear the door of the room open, and she turned with a cry, as a hand was laid on her shoulder. It was Gruchon, black with powder—red with blood—more hideous than ever.

"You thought you were forgotten, my pretty one," he cried, "but no, I am here to save you. We must leave this place at once."

He went to a cupboard, and taking out one of Martial Buissonière's blouses, put it on. "The army has entered the walls," he continued, pouring water into a pail, and washing his hands and face. "You look hopeful. Gr—r—r, I know; you think of your lover. But he will be too late. I intended to leave my love-making until we were masters of the city, but that dream is over. Only when Monsieur Jean comes he will find the bird gone. Eh, my pretty, we can hide safely till the fighting is done. I know where. I have money, too. I took care to hide that from my dear comrades. Shall we not be happy, my dear?" And he threw his arms around her, and kissed her in spite of her struggles.

"So you bite, do you? You will not have it that it is a good plan? Now, see the consequences of refusing."

He dragged her to the window, and looked down upon the mad crowd.

He dragged her to the window.

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"See," he cried, his face lighting up with a devilish enthusiasm. "See the brave girls! See the noble women! They burn the city; they destroy; they kill. Bravo! bravo! *Vive la Commune! Les pétroleuses! Les pétroleuses!*"

"Heaven protect me," murmured Marie, shuddering as the wild chorus of the Marseillaise reached her ears. "Where is Jean? Where is my father?"

"Your father," growled Gruchon brutally; "in the trench of the first barricade. No fear of his interrupting our love scene. Shall I call them up—*les pétroleuses?* Would their embraces be softer than mine? Now will you forget your Jean and be my wife? Your promise," he demanded, shaking her savagely by the shoulder, "or into the street, and our she-wolves shall tear you limb from limb."

A yell of execration rose from the men.

"Ah, no. Mercy! Mercy!"

"Which is it to be? Quick."

"My God! Mercy!"

"Yes, then?"

"No, a thousand times, no!" cried Marie in desperation.

Gruchon's face was distorted with rage and disappointed passion.

"Come, then," he shouted, "come; down below to the *pétroleuses*—to the girls of the torch—come!" and he dragged her to the door and flung it open. A volume of stifling smoke poured into the room, and drove them back. The *pétroleuses* had fired the house!

Loth to relinquish his prey, Gruchon caught her up in his arms to carry her through the dense clouds that rolled up the stairs, but she clung desperately to the side and posts of the door. In vain he tried to tear her away. He was suffocating.

"Curse you, you will not come?" he yelled at last. "Then stay—and burn, burn, burn!" Flinging her to the ground he slammed the door, locked it, and rushed down the already crackling stairs.

Marie rose, and staggering to the window, threw it open. "Help! help!" she cried.

At that moment, down the street, driving before them the rabble, rushed the soldiers. Jean was with them. He heard the cry, and saw Marie's face at the window. With one bound he was at the door. As he reached it, Gruchon rushed out. Jean recognised him, and, mad with rage, caught him by the throat, hurling him back amongst the soldiers as a rat is thrown to the dogs.

"A Communist!" he cried, and disappeared in the doorway.

A dozen hands seized the denounced man.

"No, no, for God's sake! No! I have nothing to do with them; see, my hands are clean."

A soldier reached over, and catching the collar of his blouse, tore it down with a sudden jerk, showing beneath it—the red sash of the Commune!

A yell of execration rose from the men. "To the barricade," was the cry. The wretched Gruchon, coward at the last, cursing, praying, shrieking, was hurled against the barrier, and as Jean, bearing Marie in his arms, reached the street, there was a rattle of musketry, a scream—and the soldiers swept on.

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The Queen against Owen

By Allen Upward

Author of "Secrets of the Courts of Europe," "The Prince of Balkistan," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Indictment.

"Mynyddshire to Wit.—The jurors for our lady the Queen upon their oath present that Eleanor Margaret Owen, upon the first day of June in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and eighty-nine, feloniously, wilfully, and of her malice aforethought did kill and murder one Ann Elizabeth Lewis against the peace of our lady the Queen, her crown and dignity."

CHAPTER II.

The Brief for the Prosecution.

"A brief for you, sir, for the assizes at Abertaff—the great murder case."

Mr. Prescott looked up as his clerk entered, and heard these words. Then he silently put out his hand and took the brief, while the clerk retired into the outer room of the chambers to make a note of the fee.

Everyone had heard of the great Porthstone murder. Mr. Prescott had followed the papers pretty closely in their accounts of it—the discovery, the proceedings at the inquest, before the magistrates, and so on. The brief did not take him altogether by surprise. He had been intrusted with several important prosecutions before this, and the solicitor representing the Crown in the present case was a personal friend of his own. He had, therefore, all along had expectations of appearing in the case, and his only doubt had been whether, on account of its unusual importance, a Queen's Counsel would be engaged along with him, or whether he would have the charge of the case himself.

It need hardly be added that Mr. Prescott was still a member of the "Junior Bar," that is to say, he had not arrived at the dignity of a Queen's Counsel. But he had been some ten years in the practice of his profession, and occupied a foremost position among the members of the Southern Circuit. Tall, thin, and auburn-haired, with a ruddy complexion, his appearance was rather remarkable among the brethren of the long robe. But he had a pattern lawyer's face, with a firm, decided chin, the pronounced nose and strongly-marked eyebrows characteristic of the race.

Before opening the document in his hand, he took a hasty glance at the outside. It bore the usual endorsement. At the head were the words "Mynyddshire Summer Assizes, *Holden at* Abertaff, 29th July, 1889."

Then followed the name of the case: "Regina, *on the Prosecution of Sergeant Evans*, against Eleanor Margaret Owen," and the description of the offence: "*For Wilful Murder.*"

Next came the word "Brief" in very large letters. "*For the Prosecution:* Mr. Chas. Prescott, 20 guineas."

And a little below, on one side: "With you, Mr. F. J. Pollard." This was a younger man, who was to act as junior to Prescott.

Last of all came the solicitors' name at the foot: "Pollard and Pollard, Abertaff." They were, as may be surmised, relations of the young gentleman who had been favoured with the junior brief.

Mr. Prescott smiled pleasantly at the number of guineas, and sardonically at the name of the counsel whose assistance he was to receive. Then, pulling off the tape, he unfolded the document, and settled down to a study of its contents.

It was headed inside by the same words as appeared in the endorsement, down to "wilful murder." After that it went on to give a copy of the indictment.

Then came the narrative itself:

"Case for the Prosecution.

"In this case the prisoner, Eleanor Margaret Owen, is charged with the wilful murder of Ann Elizabeth Lewis.

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"The facts of the case are as follows:

"The deceased, Miss Ann Lewis, was a maiden lady, living at Porthstone, in Mynyddshire, a quiet little seaside place about twenty miles from the county town, Abertaff.

"Her only surviving relative was a nephew, John Lewis, who had been for a considerable time in Australia, but, having made some money, returned to England, and arrived at Porthstone on the evening of the first of June.

"The accused, Eleanor Margaret Owen, is an orphan, her father, the late Rector of Porthstone, having died two years ago."

("Poor old Owen! I remember him well," murmured the barrister. "It's well for the poor old chap that he is gone.")

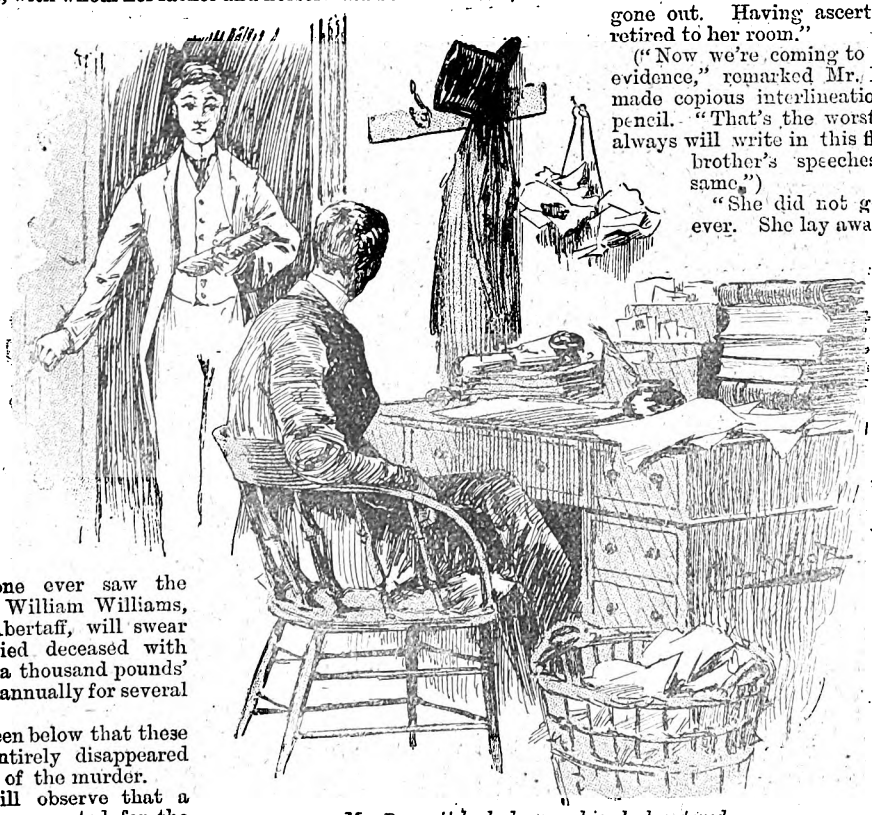
"Immediately on her father's death she went to reside with Miss Lewis, with whom her father and herself had been on friendly terms, in the capacity of a paid companion.

"She was paid £24 a year and had no other means of support; but Rebecca, a servant in the house, will say that she has heard Miss Lewis promised to remember the accused in her will.

"Deceased was rather eccentric in money matters, and invested a large portion of her savings in valuable jewels. No one ever saw the collection; but William Williams, a jeweller, of Abertaff, will swear that he supplied deceased with something like a thousand pounds' worth of jewels annually for several years past.

"It will be seen below that these jewels have entirely disappeared since the night of the murder.

"Counsel will observe that a motive is here suggested for the crime.



Mr. Prescott looked up as his clerk entered.

"On the night of the first of June last Mr. Lewis, deceased's nephew, left the house about ten o'clock and did not return that night.

"Shortly after he was gone deceased was heard to retire by the servants. These are four in number, and consist of a butler or general man, cook, housemaid, and parlourmaid.

"The three women servants went to rest at a quarter-past ten, and the butler at half-past.

"All this time prisoner was downstairs in the drawing-room, where she had spent the evening with deceased and Mr. Lewis.

"About eleven the butler thinks he heard her come upstairs to her bedroom, which adjoined deceased's, with a door of communication between. This door was never locked or bolted.

"An hour afterwards Rebecca, the parlourmaid, woke from sleep, and heard a stifled groan somewhere below. Apparently it proceeded from Miss Lewis's room. She did not waken the housemaid, who sleeps in the same room. She attributed the sound at the time to troubled sleep.

"Shortly afterwards she heard a subdued sound, as if of footsteps going downstairs. She was not alarmed, as she thought she recognised Miss Owen's tread. She, therefore, roused no one, but, inspired by curiosity, got up herself, put on some things, and crept downstairs.

"All the doors were closed as she passed. She listened outside Miss Owen's room, but heard nothing. Just then she thought she heard the front door pulled gently to. She went cautiously down, and discovered that all the bolts had been undone, and the door was fastened simply by the latch.

"Three persons carried a latch-key—Miss Lewis, the butler, and Miss Owen. One of the three had, therefore, gone out. Having ascertained this, she retired to her room."

("Now we're coming to something like evidence," remarked Mr. Prescott, as he made copious interlineations with a blue pencil. "That's the worst of Pollard, he always will write in this florid style. His brother's speeches are just the same.")

"She did not go to sleep, however. She lay awake listening for some time, and then she heard footsteps ascending and going into one of the bedrooms below. Her room was immediately above that of deceased.

"In about ten minutes more, to employ the witness's own expression, the footsteps came out again and descended to the hall for the second time. The parlourmaid now awakened the housemaid, Lucy, who slept in the room with her, and they both sat up and listened intently for some time.

"The footsteps sounded heavier this time; the witnesses describe them as 'thumpy.' Counsel will see that this would be the natural result of someone carrying a heavy load.

"This time neither of the servants made any attempt to follow or observe what was taking place. They say they heard the hall door softly pulled to, but nothing more.

"Shortly afterwards they both fell asleep.

"The same night, about twelve o'clock, a fisherman of the place, named Evan Thomas, was coming up from the beach. He had been doing some night fishing.

"As he got on to the esplanade he observed the figure of a woman walking swiftly away from him in the direction of Newton Bay. He knows prisoner well, and believes it was her he saw.

"There is no further evidence as to what occurred that night.

"In the morning the housemaid Lucy was the first down,

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as was usually the case. *She found the hall door locked and bolted, as the butler left it at half-past ten the night before.*

"One of the household, therefore, must have been out, and returned after the witness Rebecca had gone back to her room.

"Putting these facts together, it is clear that the only possible authors of the crime subsequently discovered must have been the butler, who had a latch-key, and prisoner.

"At eight o'clock the witness Rebecca came down and took two jugs of hot water to the ladies' doors. She knocked at each. She heard a faint reply from prisoner, but none from deceased's room.

"At half-past eight prisoner usually came down, and deceased was generally seen a few minutes after.

"On this morning, the second of June, neither of them had appeared by nine o'clock.

"The witness Rebecca then remembered that Miss Lewis had not answered when called, and feared that she had failed to waken her. She therefore went upstairs and knocked again.

"There was no answer. Becoming alarmed, because her mistress was old and had once suffered from some seizure, she went to Miss Owen's door and knocked impatiently.

"Prisoner at once came and opened it. She was completely dressed, and apparently ready to come down.

"The following conversation, or something near it then took place:

"The witness Rebecca began by saying that she had knocked at Miss Lewis's door, but could get no answer. 'Do you know if anything's the matter?' she said.

"Prisoner heard her without any appearance of surprise, and merely answered:

"'No; we had better call to her, and if she doesn't answer, I'll go in.'

"They then went together to the door on the landing, and prisoner called out loudly: 'Miss Lewis! May I come in?'

"There was again no answer. Prisoner then put her hand to the door and turned the handle. The door, however, would not open. It was locked, and the key was inside.

"The only possible access, therefore, was through prisoner's own room.

"It is unnecessary to draw counsel's attention to the gravity of this circumstance."

("Quite unnecessary," said Prescott sarcastically to himself. "Bless my soul, how he piles on the agony!")

"By this time, the other servants in the house had taken the alarm. The butler, John Simons, came on the scene, followed by the cook and housemaid. It was he who now addressed prisoner:

"'We must get in through your room, miss,' he said.

"It may be well to state here, that Simons had lived with the deceased for fifteen years, and was greatly trusted.

"He now went straight into prisoner's bedroom. Prisoner seemed thoroughly alarmed, and ran in after him, the three women coming next.

"As he was about to take hold of the handle of the door opening into Miss Lewis's room, he suddenly beheld a sight that made him reel back. This was a smear of blood on the china handle. The witness Rebecca caught sight of it at the same time, and uttered a loud scream.

"No one noticed the demeanour of the prisoner at the moment of this discovery. But when they had recovered sufficiently to take notice, she was leaning against a chest of drawers, deathly pale."

("Confound the man!" exclaimed the reader, as he came to this sentence. "How he does go on against her! It's enough to make me think her innocent. Poor little Eleanor! It's five years since I saw her. She was a pretty little thing of fifteen then. I wonder what sort of woman she has turned out. Well, well, I must stick to business.")

"Simons quickly recovered his presence of mind. Taking hold of the handle so as to avoid touching the smear, he burst open the door, and rushed in towards the bed.

"The bed was empty.

"It seemed to have been slept in the night before, and the clothes were not much disarranged; but on the lower sheet, close to the bolster, was a large stain of blood.

"The stain was about the size of a cheese-plate, dark in the centre, and fainter round the edge. There was no other trace of violence.

"The room was then searched. All present took part in the search except prisoner, who sat in a chair looking on.

"Deceased's clothes, worn by her the day before, were found in their proper places, negativing the idea that she could have gone away herself. Her nightdress, on the other hand, was missing. This would point to the prisoner's having killed her in her sleep and disposed of the body as it was.

"This was a smear of blood on the china handle."

"No further trace of violence was discovered in the room. The butler then got them all out, and locked both doors on the outside. He then went for the police.

"This was about half-past nine. On his way to the police-station he met Mr. Lewis, deceased's nephew. He stopped him and related the circumstances.

"Mr. Lewis was greatly upset. As soon as he was able to speak he pointed out that the only possible author of the crime was Miss Owen. He turned and accompanied Simons to the police-station.

"At the police-station they found Sergeant James Evans. To him Simons detailed the incidents already described. Mr. Lewis then stepped forward and said:

"'I charge Eleanor Owen with the murder of my aunt,

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Ann Elizabeth Lewis. I have made some money, and, please God, I'll spend every penny of it rather than my poor aunt shall remain unavenged.'"

("All this is not evidence," muttered the barrister, impatiently scoring out the paragraph with his pencil. "Why does Pollard put in things like this? Perhaps it supplies a clue, though, to his enthusiasm," added Mr. Prescott thoughtfully. "I dare say he's got this Lewis behind him, and is bleeding him pretty freely. That accounts for the figures on my brief, so I oughtn't to complain. But I wish to goodness it were anybody but old Owen's daughter! Why, I can remember kissing her when she was only six years old.")

"Sergeant Evans, who will be called as a witness, now proceeded to the house and made a thorough search. Two important facts were discovered.

"The butler had left the house by the back door, but on returning with Mr. Lewis the party entered by the front. Simons stepped forward with his latch-key to open the door, but found the latch already lifted and stuck fast in its raised position.

"This was a thing which always occurred if the latch was lifted too high. The keyhole is shaped like an inverted T, and the members of the household who carried keys were generally careful not to push them too far upward, lest this result should occur.

"Counsel will probably be inclined to see a sufficient explanation of the incident in the agitation and haste by which a criminal would naturally be overcome just after the commission of such a crime."

("Yes, I suppose so." The barrister paused for some time, knitted his brows, and tried to think the matter out. "Yes, it would be a natural result," he admitted at length, and resumed his reading.)

"The next discovery was equally important.

"Miss Lewis's bedroom window looked over the front garden. Immediately below it, under the dining-room window, was a grating over a window, which gave light to an underground scullery. This grating was surrounded by a bed of shrubs, which concealed it from the eyes of visitors.

"Sergeant Evans's first move was to proceed to the spot. He was rewarded by finding bloodstains on the grating. The nearest shrubs had been roughly handled, and some of their leaves lay scattered about.

"The inference which counsel is asked to draw is that the body—or a portion of it—was lowered down through the window, and thence carried away.

"This would evidently be much easier for a young woman like the prisoner to do than to carry it downstairs.

"Her second journey down, when she appears to have been bearing a load of some kind, may be accounted for by supposing that she returned for the jewels. These, as already stated, have disappeared.

"During deceased's lifetime she maintained great secrecy about these jewels. No one, not even the servants who had been with her longest, seems to have known anything as to their whereabouts.

"It is suggested, therefore, that they were kept by deceased in a secret hiding-place. This secret must have been disclosed to prisoner, or found out by her.

"Probably, had deceased's nephew been home longer, he would have learnt something about the matter.

"Counsel will doubtless have noticed the coincidence of the crime being committed on the very night of Mr. Lewis's return. Probably this was to anticipate any communications between aunt and nephew which might have resulted in his obtaining access to the treasure hoard."

("Coincidence, indeed! Some people might think it a d—— suspicious circumstance," said the reader. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he added: "Of course she's guilty, and it's my duty to get a conviction; but, upon my word, I never had a job to do that I liked less. It's all Pollard's fault for writing up the brief so desperately. He and his Lewis!")

"Sergeant Evans now proceeded to arrest the prisoner. When he charged her with the crime she turned pale and cried out that it was impossible. But she shed no tears, and showed but little emotion after the first surprise."

("Pooh! What difference does that make? This sort of thing depends simply on the person's character, not on whether he is guilty or not." And the blue pencil did some more scoring out.)

"The only remaining circumstance of the case is the disposal of the body.

"In the afternoon of the same day, the second of June, a visitor staying in Porthstone, named Wilfrid Meredith, was walking out to Newton Bay. Just as he rounded the corner and came into the bay he discovered on the edge of the waves a human hand.

"Although somewhat bruised and discoloured, this hand has been identified as the deceased's by her nephew and the servants.

"On the fingers were several valuable rings, which deceased constantly wore. About the identity, therefore, there can be no reasonable doubt.

"No other portion of the body has yet been found. For this reason the Treasury has declined to take up the case, which is in the nature of a private prosecution on the part of Mr. Lewis.

"Call John Lewis."

At this point Mr. Prescott laid down his brief and leant back in his chair. The remainder of the document consisted of the proofs or statements of the evidence which each witness was prepared to give. Much of it would, of course, be merely a repetition of the narrative contained in the first part. It could therefore be looked at some other time.

He laid down his brief, and began to think over its contents. It was a case of circumstantial evidence, evidence which all seemed to point one way, and to fix a horrible crime upon a young girl whom he remembered as a pretty child.

Though not a native of Mynyddshire, Charles Prescott was familiar with the district. He had, in fact, been educated at a grammar school in the next county, and it was while there that he had made the acquaintance of the Owens.

His favourite schoolfellow, a boy a few years younger than himself, came from the little watering-place, and a summer seldom passed without Prescott spending some part of his holiday at his friend's home. There it was that he had seen old Owen, the parish rector, and had caught a few passing glimpses of little Eleanor.

Hence his interest in the present case, and the unusual feeling of reluctance with which he approached his task. He had not been to Porthstone for five years now. The schoolfellows were still friendly—in fact, they saw a good deal of each other still, having taken up the same profession and joined the same circuit. But Prescott had got on much better than his friend. He had had five years' start to begin with, and his was that firm, persevering temperament which insures success to the lawyer. He had, therefore, risen steadily, and was already making an income of twelve or fifteen hundred a year, while his young and erratic friend had but gained a precarious foothold in the profession by dint of a few brilliant speeches, which covered a very superficial acquaintance with the law.

"I wonder who will have the defence," meditated Prescott. "It will surely run to something more than a docker."

A docker, it should be explained, is the name for a retainer which is handed direct from a prisoner in the dock to a counsel, without the intervention of a solicitor. It is the resource of the poorer class of offenders, who can scrape together that single guinea, but no more.

"I have it. I'll go and see Tressamer about this. He goes there still, and ought to know all about it."

Tressamer was the name of his old friend. His chambers

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were in an adjoining court of the Temple. Prescott put on his hat, told his clerk where he was to be found, and strolled forth.

CHAPTER III.

Counsel for the Defence.

"Mr. Tressamer is inside, sir. Will you walk in?"

Thus said the clerk at Mr. Tressamer's chambers as soon as he saw Mr. Prescott. Then, stepping to the door, he rapped and opened it, saying the visitor's name.

"Well, Tressamer, where have you been this age?"

The speaker stopped, startled at the sight that presented itself, for there, lying on his face on the hearthrug, with his hands clutching at his thick black curls, lay George Tressamer, the very picture of one in mortal despair.

He sprang to his feet as his friend entered, and made an awkward attempt to behave as if he had not been seen.

"Why, Prescott, where do you come from, pray? More excursions to the County Court, with the solicitors on opposite sides racing to you to see which can get his brief into your hands first?"

Prescott thought it best to take the hint, and not remark on his friend's trouble. He quietly answered:

"No; I've not been anywhere. Been in town, preparing for the assizes. By-the-bye——" He paused to look for a chair, and was surprised to find everyone in the room littered with books. He proceeded to clear the nearest to him, lifting the books on to the floor. "I've just had a brief to prosecute—Hullo! 'Hawkins' Pleas of the Crown'! I had no idea you were such a student—in that Porthstone case—the murder——"

Again he stopped short. A look of anguish had come into his friend's face.

"What is it, old man? I can see something's gone wrong."

"Charlie," was the reply, spoken in a tone hardly above a whisper, "are you prosecuting Eleanor Owen?"

Prescott nodded.

"And have you read your brief?"

"I've just come from it."

"Then you can understand how I feel. I am defending her—and I love her!"

He threw all the energy of his passionate nature into the last sentence, and then sank down upon the window seat, and hid his face with his hands.

For several minutes neither spoke. Prescott hardly knew what course to take. To offer to resign his brief might be to let it pass into the hands of one who would share Mr. Pollard's prejudice against the accused. On the other hand, to retain it, unless he were prepared to bring the case fully home to the prisoner, would be alike a breach of professional honour and an act of dishonesty. He resolved at last to leave the choice to his friend.

"George," he said.

The other slowly lifted his head. Looking upon that face, his friend could see the marks of the terrible experience he was passing through. Tressamer had always been a youth of wild and stormy emotions; no man less calm and steadfast than Prescott could have maintained a friendship so long with such a nature. But now he was struggling with passions compared with which the emotions of schoolboys were as nothing.

"George, what shall I do? I want you to decide. You know me too well to think I care about the little benefit to myself when it's a case of life and death with a friend like you. Shall I chuck up the case?"

Tressamer gazed at him gratefully at first, and then with a hesitating, pondering look. Finally he said:

"You have read your brief, and, of course, you know the worst. Tell me, what do you think, honestly?"

"Honestly, George, I see no defence. There is no doubt the old woman has been murdered. I don't see how it could have been done by anyone outside the house; and then there is the blood on the door-handle. I may tell you that, even before I knew how you stood, in reading the brief I felt a sort of hesitation—that is, I couldn't get that feeling of confidence that one generally has in one's case when the evidence is clear. I felt as if I shouldn't put much heart into the prosecution. But, still, I don't see what defence there is."

Tressamer listened in silence and let a moment or two go by before he gave his decision.

"I would rather you kept your brief. I would rather you did it. After all, you have merely a mechanical part to perform—it is only routine. Suppose I were to have a limb amputated, I should like it to be done by a man I knew. And this is something of the same sort. The evidence is there, and you will not make it any worse—or better."

The other was shocked at the gloomy, resigned way in which he spoke.

"Good heavens! You don't mean that you, too, believe——"

"No, Charles; I believe she is innocent. But I do not expect her innocence will ever be proved in this world!"

"Oh, come, you mustn't give up now! All sorts of things may happen. The trial may go differently to what you expect. Half the time these witnesses don't swear up to their proofs."

"They have given their evidence twice already—at the inquest and before the magistrates."

"Yes, but then they weren't cross-examined. It is very different when they have a man like you to turn them inside out. You are not nervous about it, are you?"

"Nervous!" He smiled grimly. "No. It was at my own request I received this brief. A breach of etiquette, you see"—with another heavy smile. "If she can be saved I shall save her. Shall I tell you my defence?"

"No, don't; I would rather be taken by surprise. I don't want to shine in this case, Heaven knows! Take every advantage I can fairly give you. I know you don't expect more."

"Thank you," was the answer.

There was a little pause, during which neither spoke. At last, returning to the only topic in either mind, Tressamer observed:

"I have been deep in this ever since it occurred. I have been running up and down to Porthstone. I was at the inquest and in the police-court, but I thought it best to do nothing, and let the public think she was undefended. It may soften their feelings towards her. All these little things have to be thought of."

"Yes; don't you remember that famous Shepherdsbury case? The man who acted for the prisoner—the solicitor, I think it was—made such a brilliant fight in the police-court that the magistrates hesitated to commit; but the result was that the Crown knew all about the defence, and when the real trial came, the man hadn't a chance. Always reserve your defence."

"Yes; but you forget, the solicitor has got a splendid practice through it," was the bitter answer. "Few men in the West of England are doing better in that class of business. Did you know—but of course you didn't—that I was down at Porthstone only two days before the thing happened?"

"No; were you?"

"Yes; and I was staying in Abertaff that very night. I intended coming up to town the first thing in the morning, but something detained me, and in a few hours the news arrived. So I went down at once, saw Eleanor at the police-station, and advised her what to do before any of those meddling Pollards got at her."

"Pollards? Why, they are briefing me for the prosecution!"

"Yes, I know. Pollard conducted it in the police-court. At the inquest he represented that man Lewis, the nephew, and very bitter he was, too. But I made Eleanor choke him off before that. Wouldn't have him at any price. I

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have got a quiet old chap in Abertaff now who won't interfere—old Morgan."

"Do you know, I thought he was trying to press the case rather in my brief. This accounts for it. But what sort of a man is this Lewis?"

"Oh, a big, coarse-looking fellow. Came back from Australia just before it happened. A brute! He's egging on the Crown. She left him all her money—about twenty thousand—but the jewels are supposed to be worth nearly as much more, and he's lost them, and so he's savage."

"I say, George, I don't know that I ought to say it, but has it occurred to you as at all curious that he should have returned the very night it was done?"

A gleam of furtive joy crossed the other's face, and instantly vanished again.

"Has that struck *you*?" he said, and seemed about to add something more. But he restrained himself, and merely added: "The less you and I talk about it the better, perhaps. Coming out?"

And they left the chambers together.

But though Tressamer ceased to discuss the subject with his friend, he could not dismiss it from his mind. The sparkling wit, the wild, extravagant humour, for which he had been famous, seemed to have withered up in the furnace of his terrible grief. He lunched with Prescott in almost dead silence, and as soon as it was over got up hurriedly and disappeared.

She was sitting in a dull, stony apathy.

He had truthfully described himself as having been deep in the case from its commencement. When the news of what had happened at Porthstone reached the town of Abertaff he was walking in the High Street alone. He saw the unusual excitement, and meeting an acquaintance, learnt from him that Miss Lewis had been murdered.

"And they say it was done by her companion, a girl named Owen," added the man.

Tressamer turned white, gasped for breath, and cried out loudly:

"It's a lie! I swear she is innocent!"

In another moment he had darted off to a cab-stand, and was on his way to the station.

There he had one of those sickening waits for a train which are inevitable on such occasions. Twice he was on the point of ordering a special, but each time he restrained himself by the thought that by the time it was ready the ordinary train would be nearly due. He shunned the gloomy waiting-room, and strode up and down the narrow platform, with swift, excited strides.

The porters and newspaper-boys stared as he rushed to and fro, hardly heeding the piles of luggage with which railway servants seek to break the dull monotony of a platform promenade. There was French blood in Tressamer: short, dark, thick-necked, yet far from stout in figure, he possessed the strain of sombre passion which runs through the blood of the Celtic races. He could no more control himself in deference to the officials of Abertaff Station than a madman, when his frenzy is on him, can conceal it from his keepers.

At last the train drew up. He sprang into a carriage, and impatiently endured the journey down to the sea-side. Arrived there, he proceeded instantly to the police-station, and demanded an interview with Miss Owen.

At first there was some difficulty with the police officials, but Tressamer was not to be checked.

"I am her legal adviser," he announced. "I am a member of the Bar, and I consider it of vital importance that I should see the prisoner at once. If you refuse, I shall wire straight to the Home Office."

This threat produced its natural effect. The police, in doubt as to their powers, gave way, and he was taken into the cell where Eleanor had been secured.

If Eleanor had not wept when she was accused of the terrible crime, neither was she weeping now. She was sitting in a dull, stony apathy, from which she was hardly aroused by the sound of the barrister's familiar name. She looked up, it is true, and gazed at him with lack-lustre eyes. But she uttered no word.

He, on his part, waited till the constable had withdrawn. Then he advanced a step from the door, and said:

"Eleanor, you are innocent. Will you let me save you?"

Then at last the light came into her eyes. Then at last the unnatural stiffness faded out of her frame. Then at last the awful coldness loosed its hold of her heart, and answering, "George, I do not deserve your help," she gave way to a tempest of tears.

He waited till the storm had spent its first fury. Every shade of anguish passed across his face meanwhile. But he strove to master his feelings, and to put a commonplace expression into his voice, as he said at length:

"I have been in Abertaff the last two days—since I left you." His voice trembled an instant, but he went on: "I heard the news this morning, and came down at once. I want to defend you. I want you to accept my services as a token that you still look on me as a friend, in spite of all that has happened."

"I don't know how to answer you," she murmured. "The more generous you are, the more ashamed I feel. I ought not to take your help. And yet you are the only creature in the world who has not forsaken me."

"Don't say that, Eleanor. No one else knows you as I do. No one else feels for you—but I won't say anything about that. One stipulation I must make. You are not to thank me—not one word."

And with a stern gesture he waved her off, as she made a movement as if to throw herself at his feet.

"But you must forgive me," she said. "Whether I am as wicked as you told me I was when we parted or not, you must tell me that you take me for what I am, that you expect no change in me." She paused a moment, and then cried out with sudden vehemence: "Oh, I have done you

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injustice! I didn't know how noble you could be! But it is too late; I cannot alter now."

An angry throb convulsed the man during her first words. At the end he ground his teeth and clenched his hands together.

"Silence, Eleanor! If you speak to me like that again I shall go. There are to be no thanks, no praises. Never refer to the past. I know you and understand. If I cannot tear all hope out of my heart, what is that to you? I ask nothing, and will take nothing unless it is freely given."

He ceased, and she looked at him with a mixture of gratitude and fear.

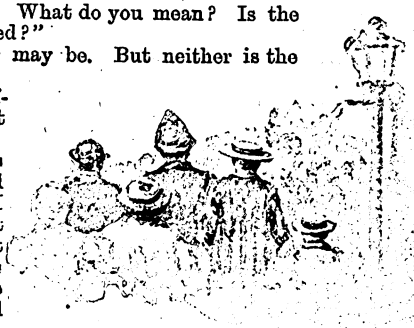
Then he referred to her dreadful situation.

"I needn't tell you, Eleanor, that as your counsel you must confide in me fully. I have heard the story so far as it is public, and up to now I may tell you that, as a matter of law, you are in no real danger."

Eleanor stared at him.

"In no danger? What do you mean? Is the murderer discovered?"

"No, and never may be. But neither is the body."



"Why, what difference does that make?"

"Don't you know?" answered the barrister. "I thought most people knew that till the body was discovered no one could be convicted of murder."

A ray of hope shone out in the prisoner's face.

"Then do you mean that Miss Lewis may be alive still?" she asked quickly.

"No, no. Nobody doubts that she is dead, or that someone has killed her. But the point is this, that you cannot be legally tried and convicted. The body has disappeared."

The heavy shade of despair settled down once more.

"What good is that?" she answered reproachfully. "If they believe me guilty it makes it worse for me, because I can never be acquitted. I shall be suspected till I die. Oh, I would rather suffer death, I think."

"Hush, hush!" he exclaimed, shocked and agitated. "Listen to me and try to bear it as best you can. The evidence against you is simply overwhelming. Probably I am the only man in the world who believes in your innocence."

"Except the murderer," she interrupted.

"Except the murderer, of course. But what I want to say is this—as things stand now no jury that ever breathed would acquit you. Only a miracle can reveal the truth. But what I can do, and mean to do, for you is to save you on the ground I have told you of. You must expect nothing more."

"George, it will kill me. Alone, hated, abhorred, what use would my life be to me when the whole world believed me guilty? No, I will pray for a miracle; but if not——" She stopped and panted in anguish of soul.

Her suffering was reflected on the man's face.

"Don't—don't talk like that!" he cried. "Remember, there will be always one who trusts you, one who reveres you, loves you! I don't mean to ask anything. I would not speak to you like this if I could help it; but remember, if the worst comes to the worst, you have always one friend to turn to, one man who asks no higher joy than to pass his life with you, whether here or in some far-off country, and devote himself to soothing your distress."

While he was unfolding these views a sudden misgiving entered Eleanor's mind. Rising up, she crossed the cell to where he sat, and, laying her hands on his shoulders, she gazed full into his eyes.

"George," she uttered in solemn tones, "I adjure you to tell me the truth. Do you really believe me innocent?"

"Before God I do!" burst out his answer as he looked her in the face.

She was satisfied, and returned to her seat.

"And now," said Tressamer, assuming a more lawyer-like tone, "tell me all that occurred that night."

A long conversation followed, of which the barrister took copious notes in his pocket-book. It was late in the afternoon when he came out of the cell, and went to secure accommodation in Porthstone for the night.

"*Lost! She is lost!*"

His step was slow, his head drooping, as he came along the esplanade. Suddenly he saw in front of him a concourse of people following a policeman, who held something in his hand, and a gentleman dressed in the unmistakable garb which proclaims the sea-side visitor.

As the crowd came on, Tressamer noticed that this gentleman appeared much agitated. Even the constable's face betrayed an excitement unusual among his kind. But it never occurred to the barrister that this excitement could be connected in any way with the case in which he was so deeply concerned. He took a closer glance at what the policeman was carrying, and then, to his horror, perceived that it was a human hand, the fingers still gay with precious rings. The next moment they all came up to where he was, and he heard someone in the crowd saying:

"That's the hand of the woman that was murdered. A gentleman has just found it in Newton Bay."

The fearful truth burst upon him like a thunderclap. The blood forsook his veins; he staggered helplessly to the nearest seat and sank down upon it, moaning to himself:

"Lost! She is lost!"

The firm ground on which he had been standing had crumbled all at once. The law point on which he had relied to save Eleanor's life, in spite of the crushing weight of evidence against her, was robbed by this accidental discovery of more than half its strength. Who could any longer pretend to doubt that a murder had been committed? Hence Tressamer's despair. Coupled with what Eleanor had said to him in their interview, however, it drove him to seek more earnestly than he otherwise would have done for some theory of defence upon the facts, some means whereby, if possible, to force a doubt into the

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minds of the jury, and wring from them a verdict of acquittal.

To this task he now devoted himself. He assumed the part of a detective rather than a barrister. In the case of an ordinary client conduct such as this would not have been tolerated for a moment by the rigid etiquette of the Bar; but where a case is of such a nature that the barrister is personally concerned, and where he acts as a private individual pursuing his own interests, etiquette has nothing to say. In joining the Bar, a man does not cease to be a citizen, and to enjoy the rights and privileges of ordinary mortals. It is only in his professional character that his acts come under that rigid supervision which is at once the dread and envy of inferior professions.

But, in any event, George Tressamer's present mood would not have let him give much weight to considerations of such a character. Too much was at stake. He had to keep in constant communication with Eleanor, to encourage her in face of the ordeals of the coroner and the magistrates, and to protect her from the zeal of the various graduates of the Incorporated Law Society who were thirsting to win glory in her defence.

As a blind to the public, he caused the rumour to be spread that she was without professional advice. This idea was confirmed when it got to be known that she had refused the services of Messrs. Pollard and other gentlemen of the neighbourhood.

Meanwhile Tressamer was enabled to go about with less publicity, and to pursue his inquiries. Eleanor was disposed to wonder at him for not employing a detective. But he soon explained that.

"I know detectives," he said to her. "I have seen them in the witness-box and out of it. They are admirable men in their own groove. Give them an ordinary crime—a robbery or a forgery—and they can grapple with it. They will track the defaulting cashier to America for you, or run down the absconding broker in the depths of the Australian Bush. But there their usefulness ends. They are no good in the face of a real mystery like this. This is not a question of clever detection; it is a case of reading the human heart and penetrating its motives. A genius could help us, but I know of no genius in Scotland Yard. No, I will do what I can; and if I come to anything in the way of ordinary detective work, I will send for Sergeant Wright."

So he continued to work alone. He had by this time seen and talked with every witness whose name appeared in the brief for the Crown. He had been present, with the air of a casual spectator, at the inquest, and afterwards at the inquiry before the magistrates, which ended in the committal of Eleanor to the assizes to take her trial for wilful murder.

He did not tell Eleanor much as to the results of his inquiries. He would simply mention that he had been talking to Simons, or that he had had a game of billiards with John Lewis, and she had to form her own idea of what had passed between them.

Finally, he went up to London and plunged into that minute study of Hale and Hawkins which had awakened the surprise of his friend Prescott. He was thus kept occupied till both he and his friend were summoned down from town by the approach of the assizes.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION—No. 24.

The London guinea was awarded to Miss Johnson, 11, Park Walk, Fulham, S.W.; and the Provincial guinea to Miss M. C. Hardy, 16, Barrow Street, South Shields, Durham.

Jumbled Story Result.—No. 23.

A large number of competitors succeeded in correctly solving this story, and the £5 has gone to Miss G. Trotter, care of Mrs. Pindred, Crohill, Pendennis Road, Streatham, S.W., whose attempt came first to hand.

£1 has gone to each of the following competitors:

Mr. Eric Mayne, 49, Wellington Street, Strand, W.C.

Mr. John R. Ray, 8, Springwell Terrace, Northallerton.

Miss Mary Bramwell, care of Mrs. Meggison, 42, Blessington Road, Lee, Kent.

£2 has gone to:

Mr. M. E. Burns, care of Miss B. Kilcollun, The Mall, Sligo.

The title of the story was not in this case taken into consideration in checking the results.

KEY.

70	100	4	116	90	117	76	55	46
65	42	39	94	87	40	34	96	3
71	21	41	18	109	12	84	11	110
75	101	16	58	107	17	8	52	79
80	91	28	89	5	54	20	92	6
19	47	98	2	9	113	43	64	67
74	108	62	115	69	118	82	51	45
72	121	29	105	36	31	50	44	24
53	102	38	66	103	14	32	68	88
99	104	1	106	25	112	63	33	86
30	119	23	26	78	77	57	85	
37	111	114	48	27	81	22	10	
59	61	93	15	7	35	95	122	
60	97	13	49	73	83	56	120	

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THE GUILTY HANDS

By

DEREK VANE

Author of "The Sin and the Woman," "The Spell of Delilah," "Sentenced," etc., etc.

My own affairs have little to do with this story, so it will be sufficient to say that I am a well-known private detective, and that on May 22nd, 18—, I was seated in a first-class compartment of the express train leaving Marseilles at 10.30 a.m., due at Monte Carlo about four o'clock.

I had travelled through from London, breaking the journey only at Paris and Marseilles, at each of which places I had stayed one night. I had been sent out by the friends of a young man who had got into bad hands at that lovely little nest of wickedness on the Mediterranean to which I was bound, and though the matter was important, it was not urgent enough for there to be any necessity for me to go without my night's rest, so I had done the journey comfortably.

It was a corridor train with a dining-car attached, and being so late in the year it was half empty. No one was going South; everyone had come or was coming home as fast as they could. London and Paris were more attractive now than the Riviera. In my compartment, beside myself, there were only a young French lady and her maid, and they occupied the two corner seats on my left. I sat in a right-hand corner with my back to the engine, next to the little corridor which ran alongside of the carriages. The door of my compartment was wide open, as was the door of most others, for the day was very warm and we were glad to get as much air as we could. The window in the corridor, which faced my door, was open too, and I was looking idly out of it, for, unfortunately, I cannot read much in the train, so that I am apt to find the time drag somewhat on a railway journey unless I light upon a congenial companion. And up to the present time—about twelve o'clock—I had not exchanged a word with anyone except the conductor.

My companions—the lady and her maid—had entered the train, as I did, at Marseilles, and came into my compartment a few moments after I had taken my place. I had seen them standing on the platform at Marseilles, and had casually admired the young lady's appearance and her general attire which, while eminently suited for travelling, was at the same time very tasteful and becoming. She was a slender, fairy-like creature, with a mass of pale yellow hair coiled at the back of her little head, and her eyes, which I met once or twice when she glanced shyly at me, were clear and blue as a child's. There was a look of delicacy about her which excited my sympathy and added to her interesting appearance, and I should by no means have objected to a little conversation with so attractive a neighbour.

But, as she scarcely volunteered a remark, even to her maid, and lay back in her seat with her eyes half closed nearly the whole time, there seemed little chance of my wish being gratified. The maid was a great contrast to her mistress, being a big-boned Frenchwoman, with a dull, rather stupid face.

I had been asked by the steward whether I would go to the first or second *déjeuner* and had taken my ticket for the second, as had likewise my companions. I had watched the little crowd, who were going in to the first breakfast, hurrying past our door on their way to the dining-car, thinking that they looked as eager as though they had fasted for a week—but a meal certainly makes an agreeable diversion on a journey—and my eyes were wandering back to the window again, when I saw something that, for a moment, paralysed me with horror and surprise.

I have not mentioned that on each side of the window in the corridor was a long, narrow strip of looking-glass, and as I lay back in my corner I could just see the head of a gentleman in the adjoining compartment reflected in one of these strips. It was the head of an elderly man of stout build. I should say, for the thin hair was nearly grey, and the face was rather full and puffy. The once or twice when my eyes had wandered away from the scenery to the looking-glass, I had noticed that he seemed to be dozing most of the time, leaning back in his corner, his head reclining against the cushions.

It could not have been more than a minute after the first lot of passengers had gone past to breakfast that my eyes fell on the strip of looking-glass, and instead of my elderly neighbour reposing quietly in his corner, I

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was horrified to see his head pushed back by two hands that were pressing a white handkerchief over his mouth and nostrils. The tell-tale glass just reflected the head and hands, that was all, and I instinctively noticed that the latter were very white and shapely—delicate, nervous-looking hands they were, with unusually long fingers.

The next moment I had recovered my senses and started up with a loud exclamation. I was about to rush out to my neighbour's assistance, convinced that something was wrong, when I heard a little scream from the pretty girl in the corner.

"What is it? What has happened?" she cried, clutching my arm. "You look so dreadful. Are you ill? Why did you call out like that?" Her face reflected the scare in my own, and she was trembling violently.

I shook her off without a word, for there was no time to lose, and I should have been in the corridor the next moment, but the door was blocked by the portly person of the lady's maid, who had jumped up to see what was the matter. As I was about to push her away with scant ceremony, a man rushed past and was gone like a flash of lightning. I had just time to see that he was tall and slight and wore a black silk mask, and that was all. I called out for the conductor and hurried into the next compartment, thinking I might be most needed there.

As I entered I was met by a strong smell of chloroform, which almost overcame me for a moment, and looking round I saw that the carriage was empty with the exception of the elderly gentleman, who lay back motionless in his corner with the handkerchief still over his face. I snatched it off, and just at that moment one of the officials, who had been attracted by my cries, hurried up. Fortunately my French is pretty fluent, or I might have found myself in rather an awkward predicament.

"This gentleman has been drugged," I said. "See if there is a doctor in the train, and bring him here at once. And send someone to look for the man who did it. He rushed past just now with a black mask over his face."

The man stared at me for a moment, as though he thought I had taken leave of my senses, and certainly it seemed strange enough that such a thing should have happened almost publicly in broad daylight; but when he would have questioned me I waved him impatiently away. I did what little I could for the victim of the outrage, laying him down on the seat and loosening his collar, but he remained completely unconscious, breathing in a heavy, stertorous fashion. As I was bending over him I felt a light touch on my arm.

"What is it? Is he dead?" asked a woman's voice in a terrified whisper, and looking up, I saw my fair companion from the next carriage. The stolid figure of the maid stood a little way off in the corridor, her heavy features showing nothing more than a little curiosity and excitement, but the delicate girl at my side was trembling almost convulsively, and her face was deathly pale.

"This is no place for you," I said gently, and I added sternly to the maid: "Don't you see that your mistress is ill? Take her away at once. You ought never to have let her come."

"I couldn't stop her," the woman muttered sulkily, but she put her arm round the little trembling figure and led her gently away.

Fortunately there was a doctor among the passengers, and he made his appearance on the scene in less than five minutes. A little crowd began to gather, for, of course, by this time a rumour of something wrong had gone round the train, but he would not permit anyone to remain in the carriage but one of the officials and myself, and shutting the door he proceeded to make an examination of his patient.

"Has the villain been caught?" I asked in a low tone of the conductor.

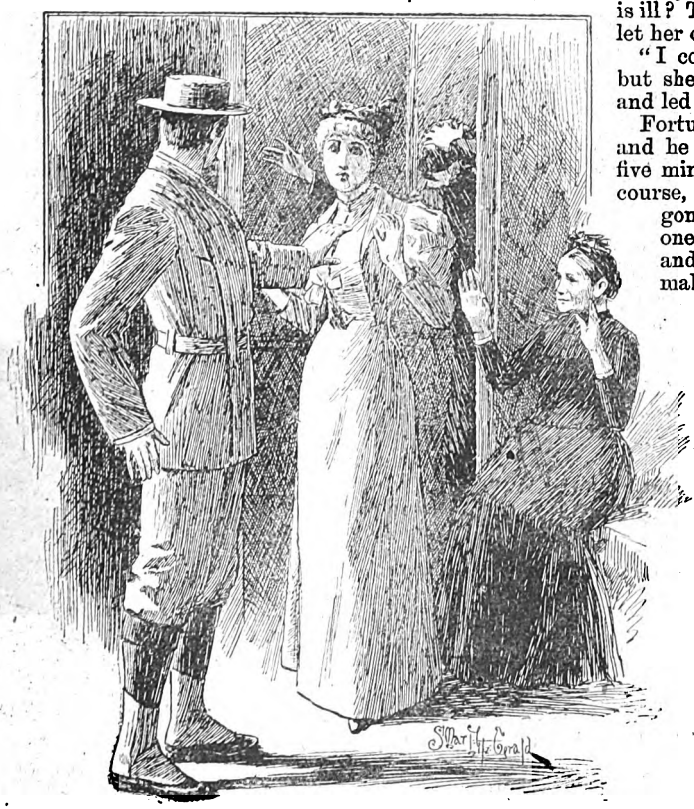
He shook his head.

"We found an overcoat lying in the corridor, but that is all. It is a mystery what can have become of the man. All the carriages have been searched, but most of the passengers were at breakfast, and nothing at all suspicious has been found. Nobody seems to have noticed anything unusual, or seen any man running away."

"But he must be close at hand," I said impatiently. "He could hardly have jumped off with the train going at express speed. You gave the alarm less than five minutes after I called out. The man's appearance must have betrayed him."

"It doesn't appear to have done so," he retorted drily. "He must be a daring scoundrel to have planned such a thing, and no doubt he had everything ready and didn't waste a moment. I dare say he is laughing in his sleeve at us all now."

"There's nothing to be done here," interrupted the doctor. "Judging from this



"What is it?" she cried.

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unfortunate gentleman's appearance, I should say he had a weak heart, and the chloroform, combined with the shock of such an attack, would have been more than sufficient to kill him. Perhaps his assailant did not mean to commit murder, but he has certainly done so."

"It does seem so dreadful."

"Why do you fancy he might not have meant it?" I asked.

He picked up a pocket-book from the seat, which had evidently been torn open and the contents rifled.

"This looks more like robbery," he said. "I expect the man who did it was after a big sum of money, and used the anæsthetic as being the simplest way of getting it quietly."

I felt annoyed—perhaps not unnaturally. Firstly, a little delay, owing to my fellow-travellers being of the excitable female sex, had prevented me from catching the criminal, as I certainly ought to have done; and, secondly, the pocket-book had escaped my own observation, and no one likes being put right in his own business.

"Was anyone in the carriage with this gentleman?" I asked the conductor.

"He has been alone for the last ten minutes, since we left Toulon. Before that there were two ladies," he replied.

"Did they know him?"

"I should say not. I did not see them exchange a word."

The compartment on the other side was empty. Altogether there seemed a complete absence of clue.

The train was stopped at the next place of importance, the station-master summoned, and put in possession of all the facts, as far as we knew them. He took charge of the dead man, and when I and the doctor, as well as my fellow-traveller and her maid (who had also seen the man rush past, but were unable to add anything to my description), had given our names and addresses, the train was allowed to go on its way. I confided my profession privately to the station-master, telling him that I should consider it a favour if he would let me know if he discovered anything bearing on the mystery, and he obligingly promised to do so. And so we started, uncomfortably conscious that most probably we carried a murderer in our midst, although there did not seem the faintest chance of our discovering him.

Various suggestions had been made, of course. Someone proposed that every passenger should be searched, and so the contents of the pocket-book might be discovered; but the suggestion was neither feasible nor likely to lead to anything could it be carried out; for supposing the thief carried the spoils on his person, who could say what had been the murdered man's property and what was his own? A few inclined to the belief that the guilty person must have dropped off the train immediately after committing the deed—such things had been done before, even from an express train—and it seemed impossible that the murderer could have preserved his composure and calmness at such a time; surely he would have done something which would have betrayed him. With my larger experience, I was not so certain of this. I had seen more than one villain look innocent and unconcerned under very trying circumstances, and once safely back in his place, this man would have little to fear. In any case, I thought that if he had sought safety by jumping off the train, he ought to be found somewhere along the line; it would be a miracle if he had escaped death in such a leap.

I was shocked to see how much the tragic occurrence had upset my fair companion. She remained some time in a half-fainting condition, and seemed to be afraid to be left alone. Her maid endeavoured to soothe her in an awkward way, but I could not but feel gratified that she seemed to turn more to me for comfort and sympathy. This terrible affair had broken down all reserve, and she talked to me freely.

"It seems so dreadful," she said with a shudder, "that the poor man should have been killed so close to us, and perhaps nothing would have been known about it for ever so long if you had not happened to look in the glass. How strange that you should have just seen the struggle! Who would have thought of such a thing?"

"Certainly not the murderer," I said, with a grim laugh. "And if I hadn't called out and startled you—and I ought to have had more self-control—he wouldn't have escaped me. But I was quite knocked over for the moment, the whole thing was so sudden and terrible."

"And there seems no chance of finding him now. How horrible to think of his being close by, perhaps!" And she looked slowly round with frightened eyes. It was evident that her nerves were quite upset.

"You mustn't think any more about it," I said firmly, "or you will make yourself quite ill. At present certainly there seems no clue. The overcoat, which he had evidently worn as a disguise, is like a hundred others, and does not even bear the maker's name. But the police may get him yet. There is often a curious fate about these things."

She shuddered again violently, and clasped her hands to her eyes. "I shall never forget that old man's face," she murmured. "I wish I could get away from it all. I can hardly sit still."

"Are you going far?" I asked sympathetically.

"To Monte Carlo. My brother is there already, and I am going to him. I have been ordered South for my health; I am not very strong." There was a pathetic drop in her voice as she said this.

"Is it not rather late for the Riviera?" I asked for want of something better to say.

"Not for me. I can stand any amount of heat," smiling faintly.

The steward came just then to say that the second *déjeuner* was served, and I got up quickly' feeling that I should be all the better for a good meal after the excitement of the last hour.

"You are coming, are you not?" I asked my companion, seeing that she did not move.

"Oh, no, I couldn't!" with a look of apprehension. "I couldn't! It would be too horrible."

"But," I said, a little surprised at such excessive sensitiveness, "I really think you ought to eat something. It would do you good. I suppose it seems a little unfeeling to sit down quietly to a meal after such an event, but it won't do the poor fellow who is dead any good our staying away. Let me persuade you."

"Oh, no, indeed, I would rather not," she said again

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with considerable agitation, and, seeing how much the idea seemed to upset her, I did not urge it any more. "My maid will bring me some wine and biscuits here. That is all I want."

I was rather surprised on our arrival at Monte Carlo not to see someone waiting to meet her at the station.

"My brother is such a dreadful gambler," she said with a faint smile, "that I dare say he has forgotten all about me. I expect he is sitting in the Casino at the present moment."

She got into a hotel omnibus with her maid, and shook hands with me on parting.

"If you are staying here any length of time, we are sure to meet again," she said. "You will go to the Rooms, like everybody else, I suppose; so I won't say good-bye, but *au revoir!*"

I walked up to the Victoria Hotel, where I intended staying, leaving my luggage to follow, and when I had removed the dust of the journey and made myself presentable, I sauntered down to the Hôtel de Paris, where the prodigal son, whom I hoped to bring to his senses, had taken up his abode.

I had never been at Monte Carlo out of the season before, and the generally deserted aspect of the place struck me strangely. The empty benches in the Casino Square; the solitary figures that mounted the steps to the famous gambling-rooms, instead of the gay crowds I had been accustomed to see, were rather depressing. I knew that the men and women who were here now were mostly either inveterate gamblers, who preferred playing in the "off" season, when they had the tables more or less to themselves, or unfortunate creatures who had lost all they had, and were either ashamed to return home or lingered on in the hope of being able to retrieve their shattered fortunes by some lucky *coup*.

A gentleman was sitting next to her.

I was fortunate enough to find the prodigal alone in his own room, and agreeably surprised to see that he was in a subdued and penitent mood, and evidently heartily sick of the place and all its belongings, though his pride would not let him acknowledge as much. However, by handling him gently and carefully, I extracted a promise from him that he would leave for England as soon as he had settled one or two things. By this I understood that he was not going to be driven home like a naughty boy, but that he would be very glad to go as soon as he had a decent excuse for doing so, particularly as I reassured him on the score of the paternal reception. It was settled before we parted that he should leave in a couple of days, but, of course, I meant to stay and see that he did, as in such cases it is not wise to run any risks.

After dinner I sauntered down to the Casino, thinking I might as well go there as any where else, and duty and inclination both leading me in the same direction, I felt that I ought to see whether my charge would keep away from the tables, as he had promised me he would, and I was also not averse to a possible meeting with my fair travelling companion. However, though I stayed until nearly closing time, I saw nothing of her, and I concluded she was probably too exhausted to leave the hotel; but I did not see my charge either, which was more satisfactory. I looked idly at the few players, who were seated at the roulette and trente-et-quarante tables, but could not make up my mind whether any one of them might be the brother who was so fond of gambling. There was no one in the least like her, and the play generally was of a very mild and unexciting description, so that I was not sorry when the evening came to an end.

I had a few lines from the station-master the next day, saying he had heard that the murdered gentleman was a native of Paris, and that he had had a large sum of money with him, intending to try his luck at the gaming tables at Monte Carlo. No money had been found, and it was therefore presumed that it had been kept in the pocket-book which the murderer had rifled.

That same night, which was to be my last in the Principality, I went into the Rooms again, and at one of the roulette tables, I saw my pretty friend. She looked up, and, meeting my glance, bowed graciously, but rather distantly, I thought; so that I did not feel encouraged to go round and speak to her, particularly as she had a pencil and card before her, and was evidently calculating the chances of the game. Perhaps I should have an opportunity later on, so I waited on the opposite side of the table just behind the croupier's chair, idly looking on.

A gentleman was sitting next to her, and presently he took up her card and made some remark, which I was too far off to hear. She nodded her head in reply, but she looked a little startled, I thought, and he put a bank-note down on the single number five and another on eight. He drew his lips in a little with that peculiar tense, almost breathless, expression of the gambler who is risking more than he can afford, and his eyes were glued to the little ivory ball as it was spun round.

The croupier gave the usual warning: "*Rien ne va plus*," as the fateful ball began to tumble about, and eventually it rolled into 5.

A pale look of excitement crossed the man's face, and, drawing a deep breath, he turned to his companion.

She smiled faintly, but seemed nervous and ill at ease. The croupier was dealing out the winnings now, and with his little rake pushed a pile of gold and notes towards the lucky player who had staked on No. 5, while greedy, envious eyes looked on from round the table.

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With an eager movement the man stretched out his hands to take the money, and for a moment they both lay, white and conspicuous, on the green cloth. I looked at them carelessly, and then in a flash something went through me. I almost gasped for breath. *Here was the perpetrator of the tragedy in the train!*

I knew it; I was convinced I had discovered the truth—as sometimes, by a sudden intuition, we do know things, though our reasons might not be always considered sufficient in a court of law. But I could swear to those hands anywhere—white and supple and blue-veined. I seemed to see them again pressing the handkerchief to the face of the helpless victim! He was about the height and figure, too, of the murderer.

"He's dead," she said.

I was still absorbed in my discovery, still watching, fascinated, those long-fingered, nervous hands as they sorted the money, when I suddenly looked up—as though someone were watching me—and found my acquaintance of the train regarding me with a fixed, suspicious gaze. Directly her eyes met mine she smiled and nodded, as though asking me to rejoice at their good fortune; but I had seen the first look, and I did not feel quite comfortable.

This woman was something quite different from what I had imagined. She had been clever enough to hoodwink me once; what was she going to do now?

I did not move, but stood quietly watching the play, as though nothing had happened. But I knew instinctively that I had put her on her guard, and that, under cover of the game, she was observing my every movement. What should I do? That was what I was trying to decide, and I could not arrive at any very satisfactory conclusion.

For me to attempt to arrest either one or the other was, of course, quite out of the question. The only thing I could do was to lay my information—which to a stranger might appear more suspicion than knowledge—before the proper authorities, and leave them to act. It was getting late now, so I thought I could saunter off to another table and so gradually make my way out without exciting suspicion

This I did, and as soon as I got outside I hurried off to make my suspicions known to the police.

They were sceptical at first, and inclined to pooh-pooh the idea (I think a little natural jealousy that a foreigner should have made such an important discovery partly accounted for this), but at length I induced them to treat the matter more seriously, and before I left they had agreed to take all necessary precautions to prevent the escape of the suspected persons.

But it was too late. The birds were already flown.

We discovered that they must have left the Casino a few minutes after I did, and, hastening back to their hotel, had taken their luggage and been driven to the station in time to catch the night mail to Paris. But they must have got out somewhere in the early morning, before a telegram could be dispatched to stop them, for nothing was seen of them at any of the stations to which information was sent, and no one knew anything about them. They had completely disappeared. They had plenty of money—I heard that they carried off about £500 from the tables that night—so that there was nothing to prevent them from making good their escape.

Of course, it was not really my business, though I felt annoyed at such a failure, and I did not forget it at once, even when I found myself back in my old quarters in London, having brought my own mission to a satisfactory conclusion.

It was six years later, when it had almost faded from my memory, that I learnt the end of the story, and was able to clear up what I had hitherto regarded as an inexplicable mystery.

I had been engaged on a little business in Soho, and my researches brought me into contact with a Frenchwoman, who led a very curious life under cover of the pleasing art of dancing. I should not have recognised her, but she recognised me. Probably I had changed less than she had. It would have been difficult in this shabby prettiness to find the dainty ethereal creature, who had been my companion on that memorable journey to Monte Carlo. It was evident that she had known hard times since then.

When we had exchanged a few remarks, I inquired after her former companion.

"He's dead," she said, "so you can't do any harm to him or to me. Do you think I should have been such a fool as to speak otherwise?"

"If that is the case," I replied, "perhaps you won't mind explaining one or two things that have always puzzled me. I should like to know how you managed that little affair at Monte Carlo?"

"Well, you're a pretty cool hand!" she said with a laugh, after glaring at me a moment. "But I don't mind obliging you: it is all the same to me now. What do you want to know?"

"Who was the murderer, and how did he manage to escape?"

"The murderer—as you politely call him—was a gentleman," she retorted insolently, "and he made the old man's acquaintance in Paris, and found out that he was going to try his luck at Monte Carlo. So, Henri—who was very short just then—thought he saw a chance of doing something for himself. He managed the old man capitally and found out all he wanted. He didn't mean to murder him; that was his own fault for being knocked over by a few whiffs of chloroform."

"And what part did you play in the performance?" I asked.

"Oh, I and the other woman were little more than spectators," she replied. "I don't think you could make

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"Who was the murderer?"

us out to be accomplices. We merely took our place in the carriage with you to get in the way, if necessary—and in that I think we succeeded," she concluded with a mocking laugh.

I felt my colour rise. I had certainly not been a match for the wiles of this Delilah.

"It was a very smart idea," she went on, still laughing. "Henri engaged himself as a waiter on the dining-car, and then, when everyone had gone in to the first breakfast, he rushed off for a moment and got the money. I had managed to let him know where the old man was, and as he was alone it was all smooth sailing. He had only to tear off his overcoat, throw the mask out of the window, and hurry back to the dining-room, and he was perfectly safe. No one thought of suspecting a waiter. If anyone had noticed his absence—which was very unlikely in the bustle of getting the breakfast ready—he would have said that he had gone into the kitchen to fetch something. You see, it was very simple."

"Very," I said drily; "and you seem to take it a good deal more coolly now than you did then."

"Oh, I have grown older and harder," she said carelessly. "I was new to such things then, and they upset me."

"It was a lucky escape for you both," I said. "What made you go off in such a hurry?"

"You!" she cried. "I saw your face change as you looked at Henri's hands in the Casino that night (he was very proud of his hands, and took a lot of trouble with them), and I knew that you had seen them before—and where? I remembered your saying you saw two hands pressing the handkerchief over the old man's face. Really, considering your profession, you were very confiding."

I bit my lip. I always had a weakness for a pretty woman, and certainly it must have made me very dull on that occasion.

"That was the last bit of luck we had, though," she continued; "we won a lot on 58—that was the old man's age, we had discovered, so it was bound to be a lucky number. Afterwards—well, afterwards we went from bad to worse, until at last I have got down to *this*," with an expressive little gesture of disgust. "But that won't interest you, though for old acquaintance sake"—with another mocking laugh—"perhaps you would like to make me a little present before you go? I have been very complaisant, you will acknowledge, and I am not proud."

I was weak enough to do as she suggested.

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SCOTTY'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

THE fortunes of the roving gold hunter had brought Scotty Collins and Dinny Flynn together in the new mining camp of Slipshod, whither they had gone on hearing of the rich pay-dirt that had been struck there.

It was only natural that they should become partners.

Scotty had once been a clog dancer in some variety troupe, while Dinny had a talent for whistling and warbling, and these accomplishments, exhibited in Slipshod's biggest saloon, "took" with the boys at once, and the two miners became exceedingly popular.

One evening, when the men had gathered in the saloon after their day's work, and in the midst of the whistling and dancing, a new-comer strolled into the place, carrying a violin case in his hand.

He watched the performance for a minute and then quietly drew his violin forth, and, leaning nonchalantly against the bar, started up a jig that forced the two partners to suddenly break off and keep time to it.

A yell of approval went up from the rough crowd when he finished, and the stranger was requested to "take something."

"Scotty," whispered Dinny, "ain't there room enough in our shanty fer that chap?"

"Plenty fer a feller that kin fiddle like that, if he wants to join us, you bet," was the reply, and, on being questioned, the stranger, who said his name was Carter, and that he had come to the camp "to look round an' try his luck," agreed to join them on being invited to do so.

The partnership proved to be a congenial one, and the trio at once became the pride of the camp, and night after night furnished amusement for the miners as well as themselves.

But winter was advancing, and when the snow fell, and the bitter winds swept down the gulch, the miners missed the "Three Pards," as they were called, for, owing to the inclement weather, they were not seen in the camp more than twice a week, their cabin being several miles away.

Since the first heavy snow, four weeks before, the partners had not been able to work their claim, and during the last three weeks that they had worked it, the results of their labours had steadily decreased, giving unpleasant evidence that the claim was giving out.

Perhaps it was thinking of this that made Dinny look so blue that afternoon, as he stared out of the little window of the cabin; either that or the dreary grey of the December sky that threatened another fall of snow before many hours.

It looked cold and forlorn enough, this mountain landscape, everything snow-covered except the blackish slabs of rock on the mountain sides, too precipitous for the snow to cling to. The countless pines, shooting out at all angles, drooped their branches lower under the mantle of white, now and then casting a little off in powdery flakes as a gust of the wintry wind made them tremble.

But the pines that fringed the summit of the hills on the other side of the gulch did not seem to stir. Perhaps it was because they were up so high—it seemed as though their tops must be scraping the clouds that were hurrying past.

It must have been bitterly cold up there, too (so thought Dinny as he meditatively eyed them). Perhaps they were too benumbed by the biting blasts to shiver.

"Scotty will get cotched in another snow if he don't get here perty soon," he remarked. "He wanted me to go 'long with him ter camp. Said he'd get me a Christmas present if I'd go—Christmas is termorry, you know. Hang Christmas. I wouldn't tramp ter Slipshod an' back in this snow fer all ther Christmas presents in creation."

No one with any liking for comfort would have wondered that Dinny preferred to remain at the cabin.

The one room was not very luxuriously furnished, but it was tight and snug.

A few skins were hung on the walls; there was one on each of the three bunks, and several were lying on the floor.

Carter, the tallest and thinnest of the partners, ("Fiddlin' Pete" the miners had already nicknamed him), was sitting cross-legged on one of the skins, puffing his pipe, while he stared hard at the fire that was blazing cheerfully in the fireplace.

Now and then he would glance up as an extra boisterous gust made the cabin shake, or whipped the cloak of snow from some unhappy pine, and threw it spitefully against the windows.

Then he would again turn to the ruddy blaze, inwardly thankful that he was warmly housed, and smoke on with renewed content.

He was in just the proper mood to appreciate Dinny's remark.

"Yer air dead right," he said slowly. "It would take a mighty big Christmas present ter get me ter camp to-day. It's mean weather, mighty mean weather, but it's allus ther way Christmas time up in these yere canyons."

"It'll be er mighty poor Christmas fer us fellers," said Dinny glumly. "I wouldn't a-give a penny, though, fer all ther weather if pay-dirt hadn't give out."

"I reckon we've squeeze her dry, that's a fact, an' there ain't nothin' ter do but prospect fer another when ther season lets us," replied Pete philosophically. "I 'spect we kin pull through ther winter."

Dinny did not answer, but stared up at the leaden sky, which must have been partially to blame for the gloomy state of his feelings.

Pete went on smoking and the room became quiet,

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except for the snapping of the fire as it tore frantically at the wood and endeavoured to escape up the broad chimney.

While Pete was eyeing the fire and Dinny aimlessly gazing at the snow-covered mountains—great pin-cushions, studded as they were with thousands of barren pines—they heard the report of firearms.

Inclosed though they were in the cabin, the clear mountain air brought the sound to them plainly.

"Must be Scotty," said Dinny. "It comes from up ther gulch. He must a sighted somethin' worth shootin' at."

As he spoke three or four more shots were heard. They were fired in rapid succession.

Dinny looked at Carter, but he seemed oblivious to everything but his pipe.

A minute passed and then half-a-dozen more shots were heard, crowding one after the other.

Carter jerked his pipe from his mouth, and his quick upward glance met Dinny's.

"Well—now—say," he began slowly (he always talked slowly), "what's all that shootin' fer? Mebbe we'd better look inter it a leetle, eh?"

There were two rifles resting on pegs on the wall. One belonged to Scotty, who seldom carried it. The other belonged to Flynn. The latter handed the gun to Pete, who took it rather awkwardly, not being used to such long weapons.

"Think we'll have a chance ter use these things?" he queried.

"Don't know. Scotty may be needin' them guns right about now, for all we know."

Each of them donned a bearskin overcoat of their own manufacture, heavy gloves and caps, and left the cabin.

The cabin was some little distance from the trail that led to Slipshod.

The snow concealed it now; but it was no trouble to know where it was, for it ran along close to the edge of a miniature precipice that rose from the side of the gulch, its edge, whipped by the winds clean of snow, and winding along, mile after mile, a black streak in a field of white, its ragged line pointing out the path.

To avoid the snow that lay deeply elsewhere, the two men kept close to the edge of this shelf of rock that followed the side of the mountain for several miles. There were places, however, where the snow lay in drifts to the very verge of the precipice. Then, again, the side of the mountain would be almost perpendicular. Where the trail led along these protecting walls it was free from snow, except for the occasional contribution of some pine that peered over the ledge above.

When sheltered by these natural snowsheds the men proceeded rapidly, for it gave them a clean path as well as shielding them from the cutting wind, and they grumbled under their frosty beards when they were forced to leave it and face the biting breeze that swept the bare mountain sides.

It was while doggedly trudging along one of these exposed spots that Carter, his head bent, suddenly ran into Denny, who had stopped.

"What's the matter?" he growled. "By hookey! B'ar tracks!"

He discovered at once what had attracted Dinny's attention. There were good-sized bear tracks leading away up the trail. A wide, deep swath in the snow showed where Bruin had come clumsily down the mountain side in a way that must have been half slide and half walk.

"Big feller, that, Pete!" shouted Dinny, for the wind was shrieking loudly through the pines. "This splains that shootin'! Scotty must a-met the cus, an' mebbe he got the wust of it. We'd better be pushin' on."

Pete fell in behind Dinny, but he now kept his head up and his eyes on the alert. The gulch was sinking further and further below them, for the ledge they were treading was now winding upward at a sharp slant. It was narrower, and was bounded by a wall of rock and dirt encroaching so close to the edge as to allow but a precarious footing.

Dinny again came to an abrupt stop.

"Lookee yere, Pete!"

He pointed to the snow that was scattered in patches along the ledge. In the snow were bear tracks coming from one direction, and the prints of boots were to be as plainly seen coming from the other way.

Here man and beast had met. And with what result? Where were they now?

"These yere tracks tell the story, Pete," said Dinny.

"But what in thunder's become of 'em?" said the other. "Neither of 'em backed water, an' they couldn't a-clumb up there," tapping the face of the cliff.

"Dunno. If Scotty, an' it must bin Scotty, had jumped over inter the gulch ter get outer the b'ar's way, the b'ar wouldn't a-follered him. They've got too much sense. A tumble off'n here would squelch a b'ar ter jelly."

"Yes, an' a man, too," said Pete, peering over into the gulch below; "or else bury him so deep in snow he'd never get out. I don't believe Scotty jumped over."

"Well, I'd do it before I'd let a b'ar get a-holt o' me, an' no gun handy. But it'd be a fool trick fer a b'ar, I swear, but it looks though he'd done that very thing."

Carter was leaning over the brink of the ledge.

He called Dinny's attention to a crevice just below the edge of the projecting rock, from which a mass of stones and earth appeared to have been recently loosened. There were also parts of the roots of a tree.

Dinny looked at it carefully.

Then he pointed straight downwards.

The side of the mountain projected outward, so they could not see much of it below them. Thirty-five or forty feet below them was another shelving slope, covered with snow.

Half imbedded in this snow, and its top suspended over the edge, a sheer fifty feet to the bottom of the gulch, was a slender pine.

"There's ther tree that grew in the crack," said Dinny. "I kin see through it now. Scotty has gone over, an' ther b'ar too, an' ther chances are they're both deader'n Mark Antony."

Pete did not inquire who that person was, but proposed that they get down into the gulch as soon as possible.

To do this it would be necessary to proceed a quarter of a mile further.

They hurried away, and when they reached a spot where they could descend, they left the trail and plunged down the hillside.

The snow was over their knees, and much deeper in the bottom of the gulch, so they kept along on the side, pushing ahead as rapidly as possible.

They were passing by a huge boulder, when they heard a warning growl.

A full-grown bear stood in their path, glaring at them angrily.

The sight of the men seemed to enrage him, for, uttering another surly growl, he advanced in a way that was unmistakably hostile.

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"Careful now, Pete. His mad is up, for he's got some lead in him already. 'Twon't do for us to make a botch of it."

But Pete knew his business; he had met these mountain lords before.

As cool as the surrounding snow, the two miners took aim at the animal and fired.

The ungainly monster stumbled in his tracks, fell, made a clumsy effort to regain his feet, then sank back in the snow and was still.

"We've done for him," remarked Pete elatedly, as they stood looking down at their trophy.

"An' mebbe he's done fer Scotty, who knows?" replied Dinny dubiously. "See here," and he pointed to spots on the animal's shaggy coat that were blood-stained, "he's bin peppered, an' if anything'll make a b'ar want to tear things up, it's ter have his hide punctured. If Scotty fell inter his paws after poppin' them holes in him, it's all up with him, poor bye."

Anxious to find their comrade, whom they were now convinced had met the bear and tried to vanquish him with his revolver—an almost useless weapon in such a case—they pressed on up the gulch, following the tracks of the bear.

They travelled on for perhaps ten minutes, during which time the tracks had maintained a tolerably straight course.

The tracks ended at a spot where the snow was hollowed out and scattered in every direction.

Down the steep side of the gulch was a deep, wide path in the snow, as though a heavy body had been dragged along. In some places the earth was laid bare.

Dinny climbed up to its starting point, and then looked straight above him.

Overhead was the shelving rock.

"Jes' as I thought," he declared. "Ther b'ar struck ther ledge up there, an' rolled off an' struck here."

"I reckon Scotty didn't foller," said Pete, "else we'd see ther hole he made in ther snow. He must a-lit on ther ledge above. Ther b'ar may have done for him just ther same, an' he may be lying dead in ther snow up thar now. How are we goin' ter git up?"

Dinny did not answer, for he was already tramping away, and Pete could do nothing but follow.

His partner led him along the side of the gulch for quite a distance, and then climbed upward to reach a point where the shelving rock ran into the hillside. Dinny helped the older man to climb upon the ledge.

Pete's long legs were quite useful now, for the snow lay deeply on the ledge, and he had no trouble in keeping behind Dinny, who was struggling through it as fast as he was able.

"Look there! Dinny," suddenly called out Pete.

Dinny turned, and saw that his companion was pointing at the great bare slab of rock, slanting outward from their right, until its keen edge was marked against the sky, showing where the trail led along, thirty or forty feet above them.

A column of smoke was leisurely crawling up the mountain side.

The two men hurried to the spot from whence it seemed to emerge—a crevice running horizontally at the base of the cliff. They could only catch glimpses of it, on account of the huge boulders that were scattered along.

Their curiosity now on edge, they advanced between the boulders and peered into the mighty crevice, a yawning crack in the mountain side, twice the height of a man.

A bright fire was burning there, sending its ruddy light dancing along the dark rock.

And there was Scotty by the fire.

But what ailed him?

He was in the midst of one of the most complicated and fantastic dances they had ever seen him perform. As though exhibiting his skill before thousands of spectators, he gyrated on one foot, swinging the other in the air as he twirled. Then he would suddenly change it to a clog, and his heavy boots thumped a lively tune as he stamped them down on the stony ground.

And all the time he kept tossing something from one hand to the other as a juggler does a ball.

He did not see his two partners staring at him in wonder.

"I know," whispered Pete, thinking he had discovered the clue to Scotty's queer behaviour; "he's dancin' ter keep warm."

Dinny looked solemn as he answered:

"I opine he ain't. He got sech a rap on ther head when he tumbled that it's knocked him clean daft."

This argument made Pete look anxious, as it seemed more reasonable than his own, for in that sheltered spot it could not have been severely cold beside the fire.

Just then Scotty turned and saw them.

"H'ray! h'ray!" he yelled wildly. "We're all right!" and at it he went again, kicking his legs right and left, and tossing that something from hand to hand.

Dinny went up and seized him by the shoulders, and thus brought the performance to a sudden stop.

"Lookee yere, ye durned fool, what ails ye?"

"Nothin'."

"How'd ye get here?"

"Hanged if I know."

"Was that you doin' that shootin' awhile ago. Was them your bullets in that b'ar?"

"Yes. Did you lay him out?"

"Why didn't you kill him while you were about it?"

Dinny spoke with assumed contempt.

"Wal, now, mebbe you think you could do any better with a thirty-two on that kind o' game. It ain't so easy. You see, I war comin' along kinder careless like, an' whistlin' as usual when I'm alone by myself, when all ter onct there war mister b'ar right in my way, as though he'd dropped right thar. You seed the place, I reckon. There wa'n't no climbin' that rock, and as fer turnin' roun' an' runnin', I knowed he'd cotch up with me in less'n no time. But there wa'n't no time ter throw away thinkin' what oughter be done—I jes' had ter do it.

"'Course I had my revolver with me, but I didn't want ter risk it on him.

"There war a pine-tree leanin' out over ther gulch, an' when ther b'ar made fer me, I jus' grabbed a-holt of it, an' clumb up it like a good feller, I tell ye—an' I got up as near ther top as I could get.

"I didn't have no idee ther fool b'ar would try ter follow me up, fer most b'ars would a-known that tree couldn't a-held up his weight. But I 'spects he must a-bin powerful hungry, fer, after a leetle scratchin', he commences ter climb up ter me.

"He kep' on a-comin' a leetle higher an' a leetle closer, an' ther tree never bent nur give 'er grunt, as far as I could see.

"'Thunder!' thinks I, 'if this keeps on he'll have a-holt o' me in less than two minutes,' an' twistin' my legs aroun' ther tree ter keep from fallin' off, I drew my gun an' commenced ter whang away at him. But, Lor' bless you, I couldn't shoot. A weather vane on a church spire wouldn't a-come in fer more wind nur cold than I

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cotched, perched out on that pine over ther gulch. It jus' began ter freeze me in double quick. There wa'n't no feelin' in my arms nur legs, an' it war all I could do to pull ther trigger, an' as fer tryin' to hit any particular part o' him, I'll jus' tell ye I wa'n't in it, fer I couldn't command my arm no more'n if it had a-bin wood, an' it's a wonder I hit him at all, big as he war.

"I knew I war cracking him, though, by ther way he growled an' scrambled up all ther faster, an' I began ter calc'late how fer I'd have ter drap, an' if ther snow down yonder war deep enough ter keep my bones from breakin'. I judge it war 'bout half er mile from where I war, but I war determined ter drap before I'd let him get near 'nough ter swipe me with that paw of his'n.

"While I was kinder ruminatin' on this, ther tree began ter move. My end war goin' down.

"Ther b'ar quit his climin', dug his claws inter ther tree an' sorter whined. I held on fer dear life. Then ther tree made a half circle sweep downwards that made me dizzy, but it wa'n't a comparison ter when she broke loose. She shot down like a streak. It took my breath away.

"I don't know how it war, but I wa'n't hurt any. If it hadn't been for them branches that I war mixed up in I 'spect some o' my bones would 'a got cracked, fer all ther snow war tol'ble deep.

"As soon as I could think of anythin' I thought o' that b'ar, but he wa'n't nowhere in sight.

"Lookin' over ther edge of ther shelf I seed mister b'ar wallerin' round in ther snow down in their gulch. He'd tumbled off ther ledge an' I didn't come far from it, lemme tell you.

"The next thing war ter get outer there, but I war most anxious ter get to a place where I could get a fire started an' kinder thaw out, fer I war about friz.

"So I looks aroun' an' spies this crack here, an' lops off some o' ther branches o' that pine an' starts a fire."

"An' so you war dancin' ter keep warm, after all?" put in Pete.

"Dancin' ter get warm?" echoed Scotty. "Not by er long shot. You'll dance, too, when I tell you. As I war stoopin' down ter light ther fire, what d'ye 'spose I found?"

"Dunno," said both of them.

"This," and Scotty held out to them that something he had been tossing from hand to hand, and which he had kept behind his back while relating his adventure.

Dinny and Pete did not dance as Scotty predicted they would, but they did swing their hats and utter exultant yells as they examined the article he had handed them.

It was a large gold nugget, liberally endowed with the metal they were all so anxious to procure.

"Scotty, you're a trump," declared Dinny. "We'll have a claim here that'll knock anythin' aroun' these diggin's, eh, Pete?"

"You bet," replied Pete decidedly. "It won't be sech a blue Christmas for us after all, will it, Dinny?"

"Christmas is all right," answered Dinny, comtemplatively examining the nugget. "An' we'll feast on b'ar meat termorry in honour o' ther day an' this chunk."

Christmas was a stormy day.

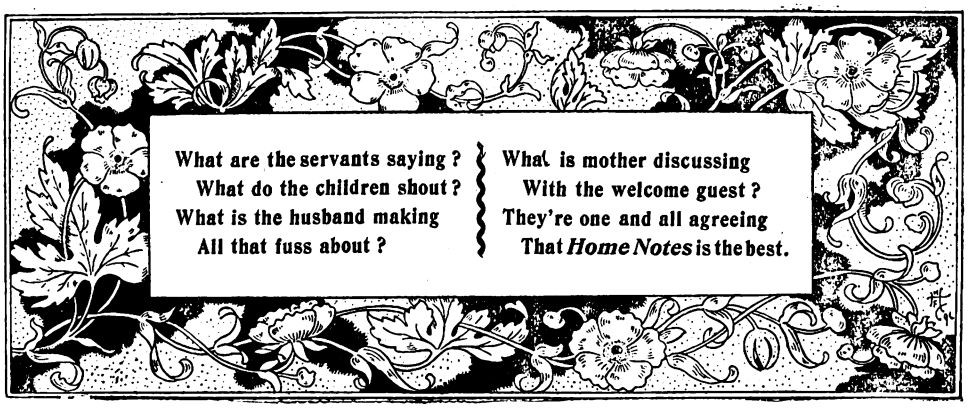
The wintry wind howled and moaned through the pines and piled snow against the little windows until the interior of the cabin was darkened, but it was one of the jolliest and brightest days the partners had ever spent, and had the miners who passed the time in playing cards in Slipshod's big saloon known that one of the "Three Pards" unique entertainments was in full blast nearly all that Christmas afternoon, with no witnesses to applaud, it is not unlikely that they would have braved the storm to a man and made a pilgrimage through the sleet and snow to the lonely little mountain cabin.

When good weather came again it began to be noised abroad that the "Three Pards" had struck one of the best paying claims around there.

"But what in thunder put 'em in their notion of locatin' a claim in such an unheerd-of place?" was the question that many of them asked, but none could answer.

"Yes, an' they've give it ther durndest name: "Ther Christmas Gift!"

CHARLES F. WELLES.



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By Madge Morris.

Young John Burton would not marry. It was a great pity, for he was an eldest son with good prospects, and a present income of nearly two thousand pounds. He had a handsome face of the fair Saxon type, a well-built figure, and an easy, jovial temper. Perhaps he was not exactly a style fitted to inspire romantic maids with sentimental yearnings; but his disposition was one eminently suited for domestic wear, and his friends were apt to say of him a little regretfully: "What a capital husband he would make!"

And now he was thirty-three, and it was firmly believed that he had never entertained the least intention of matrimony, or had even been at the trouble of seeking to make himself specially agreeable to any maid, wife, or widow, in town or country. Old Burton, who was just as sweet-tempered and easy-going as his son, used to reassure his wife, and comfort himself with the contented, but somewhat vague, anticipation that "Jack would settle down some day when the right young woman turned up." For now and then the old people felt sorry to find their sixty years upon them, and no grandchildren growing up to cheer their dark days, and to brighten their son's home when they should have left it. Sitting together sometimes in the evening, while Jack was smoking a cigar on the terrace, they would discuss the matter in some such fashion as this; the old gentleman sipping his coffee complacently in the intervals of the conversation, and his wife meantime busy with her needle or knitting pins:

"John," Mrs. Burton would say softly—it was generally she who started the conversation on this particular topic—"John, my dear, don't you think it might be well if you were to point out—of course, only as a hint, you know—to our Jack the advisability of thinking about getting himself a wife?"

"It has often occurred to me to do so, Bessie, but he doesn't seem to me to care for anybody. A man should be in love before marrying, or else, according to my views, he will be miserable after."

"It is odd he doesn't fall in love," says Mrs. Burton, with a reflective air, "considering how many nice girls there are in the county. Alice Fairfax, for instance, and Constance, and that charming little Kate Harries! Kate was at the hunt-ball last Tuesday, you know, and she looked lovely. He danced with her three or four times, but his manner was just the same to her as to all the rest."

"Or there is Georgie Sandhurst, his old playmate. Jack and she used to be great friends before he went to Oxford. But she's almost always in London now, staying with her cousins."

"*That* little flirt! Oh, John, Georgie will never marry at all; she is quite as bad as Jack himself! They say she has refused ever so many offers, and means to die an old maid."

"I know she is a great flirt, and has several ardent admirers, but I doubt her having definitely refused anybody. I fancy Miss Georgie is rather the sort of young woman to engage herself three or four deep, than to say a serious 'No' to any one of her swains."

Mrs. Burton laughs.

"I shouldn't wonder," she says; "but neither you nor I would care to see Jack in the ranks of the noble army. No, Georgie is very fascinating, but she is not steady enough for our boy. She is devoted to dogs and horses, and I have heard her called 'fast.'"

"I don't know exactly what that term implies, my dear. But though Georgie is certainly daring, and perhaps giddy, I am sure she is genuine and has a good heart. You must make allowances for her; the poor child has been an orphan since her infancy, and her uncle has let her run wild. She is more like a boy than a girl; but there's no harm in her."

"Mr. Sandhurt wishes her to marry, I know; for he told me so not long ago. She is of age now, and he will leave all he has to her. But I should prefer Kate Harries or Connie, or any one else. Georgie cares for

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"I have heard her called 'fast.'"

nobody save herself and her horses, but the other girls are different. And Kate's family is excellent—old on both sides. She comes of a thoroughly good stock. Cannot Jack be induced to think about it?"

She lays her work down on her lap, and looks appealingly at her husband. Old Burton smiles, sighs, shakes his head, and at length answers with confidence:

"He'll settle down, Bessie, you may be sure, before long—when the right woman turns up, my dear; we all have to wait for that. Why doesn't he come in? It's freezing out on the terrace now. He'll be wanting a cup of coffee in a minute; is it hot still?"

One evening, after a parental discussion closely resembling the foregoing, Jack, returning to the drawing-room, announced his intention of leaving home on the morrow, for a few days' visit to an old college friend in a neighbouring county.

"You'll be back by Christmas, Jack, of course?" said Mrs. Burton. "We couldn't sit down to dinner without you."

"Of course I shall be back, mother; come home on Christmas Eve."

"Tom wants to have a carpet dance on Christmas Eve," she continued; "I didn't refuse—it is to be only small and early. You will be here in time for it?"

"Oh, yes. Who is to be asked?"

"The Jeffery girls, and Dally Forrester, and Kate. You like Kate, I think?"

"Anyone else?" said Jack, evading the question.

"The Smyths, Connie and Alice, and perhaps Georgie Sandhurst, if she is in London. Tom will ask his friends, and you can give him any names you like. We don't want more than eighteen or twenty in all. If you start to-morrow morning, it will be best to give him your list at once. He is in the library."

Jack put his empty coffee-cup on the table and went to join his younger brother.

About a week later, in the early afternoon of Christmas Eve, Jack Burton, having concluded his visit, stood on the platform of a railway station, about thirty miles from his home, awaiting the arrival of the down-train. It was a bright, frosty day; cloudless, keen, and crisp; a day to put one in high spirits and in the best of humours. But the train was late, as trains are apt to be on Christmas Eve, and when at length it panted into the little station, there proved to be but scant space left in the first-class carriages.

"There's one that doesn't seem full," cried Jack to the bewildered porter. "I'll get in there."

He opened the door hastily and sprang in. In the further corner sat a single passenger, a lady, closely enveloped in furs, and looking out of the opposite window. For a moment Jack hesitated, wavered, and would have retired had time and fate permitted.

But before his uncertainty could shape itself in word or act, a shrill whistle sounded, a voice cried: "Right!" and with a jerk and a scream the train sped onward.

"How are you, Mr. Burton?" said a brisk, silvery voice from beneath the fur in the corner.

"Why, Miss Sandhurst, fancy my getting into your compartment! No doubt you were put in here by your discreet cousin, to be kept in safety and seclusion, and I have trespassed on the preserves."

"No, you are wrong! I was put in here at Euston, with my maid to take care of me. But I turned her out at the last station we stopped at, and sent her into another carriage."

"Why did you do that?"

"If I don't tell you why, you will never guess; and if I do tell you why, you won't believe me."

Jack laughed.

"You talk conundrums, Miss Georgie, and I am far too lazy to unriddle anything so intricate. But I am very inquisitive, too."

"Well, I'll tell you. Perhaps you may help me. I turned Belinda out because I wanted to be alone; and I wanted to be alone because——"

She paused, hesitated, and slightly reddened.

"If you wanted to be alone, it follows that I must be in

"How are you, Mr. Burton?"

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the way," said her companion, feeling in his turn somewhat embarrassed.

"Oh, no!" cried she quickly. "I don't mind you—you are not like Belinda, you know. But I am making a momentous journey to-day, Mr. Burton; for between the next station and H—— I must choose a husband."

"I have had that pleasure once or twice."

"Choose—a husband! What *do* you mean?"

"Why, just this. It is four years since I 'came out,' you know, and in that time people seem to think I have flirted a great deal. Perhaps I have; but you see, it has been my misfortune to like so many fellows, and yet not to like any of them quite enough. Anyhow, uncle says I must make up my mind, and he has written to tell cousin Mary that I must really say 'Yes' to somebody, or 'No' to all; and she has been worrying me about it horribly for ever so long. And it seems that uncle has had three or four 'bids' for me, and he wrote and told me of them last week, and said that when I came home to-day I must come with a definite reply, for he couldn't stand it any longer, and people were saying I was heartless and all sorts of abominable things.

"Well, I considered and considered, but I *couldn't* make up my mind. First I thought I liked this one best, and then that, and then another; and then I began considering all over again, and each time it was worse. At last the idea struck me that if I could put them all in a row, and compare them with one another, I might arrive at a clear decision. So long as one only sees people at different times and in different places and circumstances, it's so much more difficult to judge fairly of each. Now, I can't exactly put all my candidates in a row, but I have hit on a lovely plan of seeing them all within an hour after another; and this is what I have done. I wrote to them all, and told each that I was coming down from London to-day, and particularly wished to see and to speak to him a moment on important business, and that my train would stop at such and such a station, at such and such a time, and if he would be on the platform I should be glad to say a few words to him. I appointed a different station for each—the one I thought would be within most convenient distance, according as the candidate was accustomed to ride or walk; and there are just ten minutes between each stoppage. It will be exactly like a review, a kind of 'march past' of the regiment, you know. They are to begin at the next station."

"How many applicants are there?" asked Jack, immensely amused and interested.

"Six. You see it will be all done within the hour; and then I shall collect my impressions, and make up my mind which of them I really prefer. It's no use attempting to do it any other way, because, when I try to do it mentally, I find there's so much to be said for and against each. But if I see and talk to them one after another, and am able to compare with each, I shall be sure to find out the nicest. Isn't it a grand idea?"

"It is worthy of you, Georgie; therefore, it is profoundly ingenious and wildly startling. The train is slackening speed now. Who is to be on view at the first station?"

Georgie slipped her fur hat aside, disclosing a rosy face, with full-curved lips, a "tip-tilted" nose, and a pair of merry brown eyes.

"I have written down the names in order in my pocket-book," said she, producing from a recess in the folds of her mantle the article in question.

"Tambridge Station—Cecil Vivian."

Jack was about to utter a commentary, but Georgie lifted a warning finger and he was silent in time, for the train had already stopped. She leant from the window, nodded gaily, and cried:

"Glad to see you, Mr. Vivian! I thought you would do me the kindness to come, especially as I know you ride over here so often. Think you have met Mr. Burton?"

"I have had that pleasure once or twice," said a melancholy, measured voice; and a tall man in riding gear, dark-skinned and heavily moustached, stood by the carriage, clasped Georgie's proffered hand, and bowed gravely to Jack.

"So you are returning from town, Miss Sandhurst, and I hope for some time? Do you get out here?"

"Oh, no! I go on home to H—— I wanted to see you for a moment only as I passed, and I supposed this was your nearest station. What a lovely day! Perfect for riding, isn't it?"

"Perfect. You are good enough to wish to honour me with some commission, I think?"

"Certainly," cried Georgie hurriedly. "It is about a horse; the horse Miss Dawtry wants to sell, you know—bay, with black points. I have ridden him once or twice. Could you be so kind——"

The guard blew his whistle and waved his hand warningly. "Step back, please; the train's off!"

"One moment, my good fellow," said Vivian, with an air of authority: "I wish to speak to this lady."

"Beg pardon, sir; behind time. Can't wait!"

"Oh, never mind, then!" cried Georgie energetically. "It doesn't matter in the least. Another time will do. So kind of you, Mr. Vivian! Horrid of them to be in such a hurry; see you at my uncle's instead. Good-bye."

An expression of infinite disgust, not unmixed with anger, gathered upon Vivian's dark face as Georgie drew back into her corner, and the train moved on. Surely he had provocation. To ride some twelve miles on a freezing day to keep an appointment on "business" with one's adored, and to be dismissed in this airy fashion, as though the whole meeting were the merest accident. But perhaps the experience would serve to lessen the pangs of a greater disappointment assuredly in store for him.

Jack laughed outright.

"Poor Vivian!" said he. "I fancy we have not left him so good-humoured as we found him. I really begin to think you are what the Yankees call a 'cool hand'!"

"What do you think of him?"

"I should say," answered Jack, with deliberation, watching her face closely as he spoke—"I should say

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that he will not suit. He is too melancholy for you, too ceremonious: and he has a temper, Georgie! I saw it flash out when we started. He has a 'vicious eye,' like your old chestnut, Xantippe."

Georgie opened her pocket-book demurely, and drew out her pencil:

"But, Mr. Jack," said she, "he is so very rich. Old Sir Cecil, his grandfather, has left him all his property."

"I wouldn't put wealth in the scale against happiness, if I were you, Georgie," said her companion, more earnestly.

She drew a line dividing a page of her pocket-book in the centre, and wrote at the top of one column, "Advantages;" at the top of the other, "Disadvantages." Under the first column she inscribed the words: "C.V.: Rich;" under the second: "Melancholy; vicious." Then she handed the memorandum to Jack.

"That's business-like, at all events," said he, more and more amused. "What a funny girl it is! Are you going to make similar entries on all the 'applicants'?"

"Certainly," replied she, shutting the book. "'Aids to meditation,' you know. Here's station No. 2."

"And who is here?" asked Jack, bending eagerly towards the window. "I don't see anybody, except old General Benbow."

"Well," she returned, in a low, swift whisper, "he's the man. Don't exclaim; they're all ages and sizes."

The train stopped; the General advanced with the courtly bow of an old-fashioned gentleman.

"Good-morning, Miss Georgina. How are you, Burton? I am glad to see Miss Sandhurst has so efficient an escort. We have missed her sadly of late in this part of the world."

Then, after a few kindly commonplaces: "And the 'business,' Miss Georgie?—though the pleasant anticipation of seeing you was quite business enough to bring me here."

"Good morning, Miss Georgina!"

"You are too good, General; but, the fact is, your gamekeeper has a mastiff, a beautiful dog, which my uncle admires greatly. Now, I want to give uncle a Christmas present, and, of course, I couldn't ask Gough about it before him, you know, and so I thought it would be a good idea to get you to meet me here and let me know if Gough would bring his dog over to-morrow morning after church. He wants £5 for him, I think. Now——"

"Say no more about it, Miss Georgie. Of course the mastiff is yours to do what you please with. Gough shall take him over to you by noon; but, mind, you don't owe him anything. No, no; don't be cruel, Miss Georgie. Give me this pleasure, or we shall quarrel, and that won't do at Christmas-time—peace and goodwill, you know. You haven't an idea what a delight it is to me to be of service to you, even in so small a thing. There's your train starting! Good-bye, both of you, till we meet again!"

And the General was left on the platform, smiling, and waving his hand towards the receding train.

"Well, Mr. Burton, isn't he charming?"

Georgie leaned back as she put the interrogatory, and fixed her bright eyes full on her companion's face.

"Yes; extremely charming. I have always thought the old General the best and most thoroughly kind-hearted fellow in the county, barring *my* superior officer, of course."

Georgie seized her pencil.

"But," continued Jack, "although he would make you an excellent papa-in-law, the pity is he has no son to make you a husband."

"What do you mean?"

"That girls of twenty should not mate with old boys of sixty. No, Miss Georgie, he is not to be thought of in the particular capacity under consideration. Think of the infirmities to which, in about ten years' time, he will, in the natural course of things, be subject! You will then be in the prime of your womanhood and will need, not a patient to mind, but a protector to mind you. He is too old by half: and it is his only fault, but it is decisive against him."

She was silent an instant, and a regretful expression lifted the corners of her eyebrows, and depressed her lips. Then she made a short entry: "General B: Perfect temper. Too old for the work."

"The next candidate," she said, consulting her list, "is Mr. Piggott-Crawford."

"What! The Rector of Burnitt! You can never think in sober earnest of becoming a parson's wife?"

"No, frankly. I don't think it would suit; but still I thought I would trot him out, as he seems to have gone in seriously for me. I suppose he thinks *I* should suit *him*, or he wouldn't have done it."

"I am curious to know what 'business' you can have invented as the occasion of a rendezvous with him. Not a horse or a dog, I should fancy?"

"Of course not, you goose; but hothouse flowers for his church decorations to-morrow. I told him in my note that if he would be at the station as I passed, and let me know whether they would be acceptable, I would send Robert over on a pony to the Rectory this evening, with a basketful of camelias and white roses for the altar. Hush, we are stopping, and there he is!"

The interview with the Rector of Burnitt was but a brief one; for no passenger alighted, and the train remained stationary only long enough to allow Georgie's reverend suitor time for an acknowledgment of her offer, and eager acceptance of it.

"So thoughtful of you, my dear Miss Sandhurst. I only wish you could come over to the early celebration to-morrow, and see how beautiful the altar will look; but, of course, you will be assisting at your parish church. To-night we have a midnight service, you know. I love the sweet old Catholic custom; don't you? Good-bye, and God bless you!"

Then, without consulting Jack, Georgie wrote on the recording page:

"P.C.—No advantages. Much too slow a goer."

"That disposes of No. 3," said she.

"And who is No. 4?"

"You will never guess."

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"I should never have guessed the last two candidates. But you seem to compel all hearts alike, old and young, grave and gay. We have had the Army and the Church; perhaps the next applicant will represent the profession of medicine, or of law?"

"So thoughtful of you, my dear Miss Sandhurst."

"No; he is 'a scion of a noble house,' as the sixpenny novelists say. Unless he plays me false, you are about to behold the lofty and aristocratic lineaments of a British peer of the realm."

"Oh, now I know your man! It is Lord Pinkerville! Well, that is no surprise at all. Everybody in the county settled the match between you ten or twelve months ago."

Georgie tossed her head and pouted.

"Everybody had better mind their own business," said she ungrammatically, but with severe emphasis. "I only put him down in the list because he happened to be one of the lot, and must be taken in order. But he is quite too dreadfully odious!"

"And why?"

"He hasn't an idea in his head. At least, I am forced to that conclusion; for he is one of those men who think it necessary when talking to a woman to avoid mentioning anything of interest, public or private. Therefore, as I have no means of knowing whether he ever thinks at all on any other subjects than lawn tennis and the last new waltz, he is no more to me than a mere talking doll in masculine attire."

"You are strong-minded, then, Miss Georgie?"

"I fear not; for, you know, that word is anything but a reproach. Surely it ought rather to be a reproach to be thought weak-minded. I like a woman who dares to think her own thoughts, and to do her own deeds, and to be a person, instead of a thing! I wish to be a person, and I should like my husband to be one too."

Jack became more interested than ever in this quaint little girl and her naïve, ingenuous speeches.

"Yet," said he, "they say you prefer horses to persons, and all animals generally, to the male biped of your own kind?"

"Yes," she answered, a touch of pathos in her clear tones; "I think it is a true bill. Someone once said in reply to a similar charge: 'The more I know of men, the more I admire dogs.' Well, that is a little *my* feeling. Horses and dogs are genuine, they never forget a friend; and if you love them, and show it, they will love you back without reserve, with entire trust, and for yourself alone.

"You may tell all your heart to your horse or your dog whenever you are in trouble, or grieved or indignant about anything, and he will understand and sympathise with you, and tenderly comfort you, and never betray you. Ah, I have told my horse Nestor lots of things nobody else knows, time after time!"

She checked herself abruptly, sighed a little, then laughed, and lowered the window.

"Look, there's the noble Viscount; and see—what a beautiful bouquet he has! That's for me, of course. I wonder what the guard thinks of my holding a *levée* like this at every station?"

"Charming weather, Miss Sandhurst, but confoundedly cold! Let me wish you all the compliments of the festive season. Train seems very full to-night. Thought you were at X——, Mr. Burton. Chaperoning Miss Sandhurst, I see. Congratulate you on your good fortune. Will you allow me to leave you a few flowers, Miss Sandhurst? I know you like flowers—remember you are a great admirer of roses—heard you say so once or twice. Going to be a hard frost to-night, I fancy. *Not* many balls on in town now, I suppose?"

"Not many. But we shall have a good deal of dancing down here for the next month or two, you know. I dare say I may get a waltz or so to-night."

"Really? After your journey? You are indefatigable! By-the-way—see the guard going to hold up his hand?—mustn't forget to ask what it is I can have the pleasure of doing for you; think you wanted to see me for something or other?"

"I'm afraid it was only the gratification of having a chat with you, Lord Pinkerville, and of receiving these lovely flowers;" and burying her pert little nose in the bouquet, Georgie smiled mischievously at her interrogator.

"Upon my word, Miss Sandhurst, you are too overwhelming, too complimentary, you know, I mean. It is unspeakably delightful to find oneself so flatteringly appreciated—above all, by your too charming self! Well, good-bye, *au revoir*."

"How can you say such things, Miss Georgie!" cried Jack, as they glided onward; "and to a man whom you pretend you don't like?"

"That's just exactly why," she retorted recklessly. "If I cared for him the least bit, of course, I should behave as if I didn't."

"But why, in heaven's name?"

"Because all girls do," said Georgie, with conviction. "It's a way we have." Upon which Jack mused awhile in silence. Presently he said:

"There's only one more station, I think?"

"And two more deputations," answered she. "I was obliged to give them both the same place of rendezvous. They are Fred Forrester, and his cousin, Harry Fielding."

"And they have both 'applied,' as you call it, to Mr. Sandhurst?"

"Not at all. They both 'applied' to me personally, but at different times. And I told both of them the same thing—that I couldn't make up my mind just then. And they both said they'd wait till I did."

"I know you like flowers."

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"How nice of them! And do they know why you have asked them to meet you this evening?"

"I said I had a parcel to leave on my way for Dolly Forrester; and if they would walk down to the station to meet this train I would give it to them. Here's the parcel; it's a little moonstone locket for Dolly." And she opened a small travelling bag, and produced from thence a little packet tied up with a blue ribbon, and inscribed: "With best Christmas wishes to dear Dolly."

"For invention of detail, if not for boldness of design, Miss Georgie, you beat every diplomatic artist it has ever been my fortune to hear of."

"That is a far more handsome compliment than you have paid me yet. But now, pray observe, and lend me your 'most considered counsels,' for these are the two likeliest applicants for the vacancy. Why, there's Fred alone! Where's Harry? I don't see Harry."

"May there not have been 'pistols for two, and coffee for one' ordered on receipt of your double-barrelled invitation? People who play such dangerous games as yours must expect tragic *dénouements* now and then, you know."

"What a nuisance!" she exclaimed peevishly. "Now that puts me all out of my reckoning. And it's just Harry I like best of all!"

"Ye s'ould ha'e told him that before!" said Jack aggravatingly. "'T'was ever thus from childhood's hour!'"

"*Do* be quiet!" cried Georgie, quite fiercely, and putting her head out of the window as the train entered the station. "Why, Fred!" she exclaimed, with but scant ceremony. "Where's Harry?"

"A Merry Christmas, Georgie! It's getting quite dark. I should never have found you if you hadn't hailed me."

"A Merry Christmas to you, too, Fred. Here is Mr. Burton going home with me. And here's my Christmas present for Dolly. I know she wanted a moonstone locket, so I got her one. My love and best wishes with it. But I thought Harry would have been here, too."

"Ah, Georgie, I see you don't get the latest telegrams from this populous locality. That locket of yours will contain somebody's photograph before it hath been twenty-four hours in my fair sister's possession, else I am content 'to be writ down an ass.'"

"What! Dolly—your cousin Harry!"

"Precisely. The state of the case could not have been more correctly or more succinctly put. My sister Dolly has pledged herself to become the property of Cousin Harry on the shortest notice, consistent with the convenience of certain dressmaking and confectionery establishments; and he charged me to say all that was amiable to you on his behalf, and to tell you that Dolly particularly wished him to stay with her this evening to help in the decorations of the room, and he had to obey orders."

For a moment Georgie's self-possession seemed hardly equal to the emergency. Jack's eye was on her, and she knew it, and flushed from throat to brow. Then, with a visible effort, and lips whose trembling betrayed her emotion, or perhaps her annoyance only:

"Why, this," cried she, "is indeed a surprise! Unless you are joking, Fred?"

"Not a particle of joke in the matter, Georgie; it's a real genuine sale of *bonâ-fide* articles. But, as you sapiently observe, it *is* a surprise, and one of very recent date. The engagement was only announced to *me* yesterday, and the world—that is to say, the county—will probably not be informed of it until after Christmas week. So don't go and let it out prematurely; for Dolly and her young man are deuced shy, and they want to get all the snap-dragon and plum pudding over before starting the case in public. Well, you're off, I see; shall I meet you to-night?—carpet-dance at your place, Burton—and Tom's asked me. Dolly and Harry will come, too; but mind, Georgie, and you, too, old fellow, mum's the word. Ta-ta till nine o'clock."

"What a nuisance!" she exclaimed peevishly.

And again the train sped on, and the last of Georgie's "candidates" was lost in the fast gathering gloom of the winter twilight. She leant back in her seat, silent, and doubtless piqued. Was it *only* pique, Jack wondered, or had she really cared for the recalcitrant Harry? She was candid; it would not, he thought, be difficult to get at the truth. Better to break the pause bravely.

"It's very remiss of me, Miss Georgie, but I have actually quite forgotten to ask the question Fred put to you just now, and which, by-the-way, you did not answer: *Are* you coming to our dance to-night?"

"Certainly. Didn't I tell Lord Pinkerville that this very evening I should make use of his nosegay?"

"Come," thought Jack, "if she can dance, she's not so very hard hit."

"And," continued Georgie, with considerable warmth, "I wouldn't miss going *now* on any account, just to let Mr. Harry know that I have heard of his engagement, and that I don't care a pin!"

"Of course, that's the proper and amiable spirit to show," returned Jack approvingly. "But you see the trampled worm *will* turn occasionally."

"You are odious, with your quotations and proverbs and morals!" cried she with vehemence. "It's not more than a month since Harry spoke to me last, and begged for an answer. And I said—well, I don't quite remember what, but it was much the same as I had said before, and he ought, at least, to have waited till I set him free."

"But he was never bound!" expostulated Jack with some reason.

"Well, I don't care. I dare say I should have refused him, after all; and I hope Dolly and he will be happy. But he was certainly the nicest in the catalogue. Fred's no good, and I hate all the rest; and I get out at the next station. How dark it is, and so awfully cold, too!"

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Jack handed Georgie forth.

Jack leant forward and closed the window, which had remained lowered since they left the last station. As he re-seated himself, a gleam of light from a roadside lamp flashed upon Georgie's face, and he saw her brown eyes were fixed steadfastly on him.

"Georgie, do you remember building sand houses, down by the brook at Longdorne, with me when we were children? You were a flirt even then, and I used to suffer terrible pangs of jealousy in consequence of the way in which you *would* carry on with young Hawthorne."

"Yes, Jack; and you and he had a fight about it in the long meadow, and I looked on; and we all had cake and damson wine together, afterwards, under the big elm. Oh, I remember it perfectly, and lots of things besides. Are you ever jealous of me now, Jack?"

"Little brazen jade!" thought Jack. "What girl in the world, save Georgie, would dare ask a man such a question as that, under the circumstances?"

But he answered aloud:

"I have no right to be jealous now; and besides, are you not about to dismiss all your admirers?"

"Yes. I shall live and die an old maid. Old maids are often much happier than wives. I shall build a model hospital for poor women, and appoint women physicians to attend them, and institute an Order of Mercy for the better protection of animals, and do lots of things I am always thinking about and longing to do, and to see done. And it will be better far to make the world happier and more human, than to marry some stupid man, and do and be what every ordinary housekeeping, stocking-darning, married woman does, and is all the world over."

"If you married the right man, Georgie, he would take an interest in such things as those you name, and would help you."

"But I don't know any man who would interest himself in these things. Certainly, none of those we have seen to-day; except, perhaps, the old General—for my sake, you know. But we thought him *too* old. And there are no more candidates."

"The sixth candidate *has* come, Georgie, and is travelling with you. It is your old chum, Jack Burton. Are you going to break my heart now as you did in the old days? Are you determined to wear the white flower all your life?"

* * * * *

Lights multitudinous gleamed from the windows and poured through the open door of Longdorne Grange. Carriages followed one another in quick succession up the avenue leading to the house, and group after group of youthful figures flitted through the entrance, and clustered about it with laughter and jest, and merry greeting.

A carriage rolled to the door and stopped. Then, pausing only to bestow a nod of familiar recognition on the garrulous spectators, Jack handed Georgie forth, resplendent in white silk and Christmas roses.

"So glad to see you, Georgie!" "What a lovely bouquet!" "How did you come to meet Jack?" "Picked him up on the way?" "Come into the tea-room." "Lovely moonlight night, isn't it?" cried all the voices in Dutch chorus.

"Jack," said Mrs. Burton, appearing at the tea-room door, "how late you are. We feared you must have missed the train. You'll have no time to dress before snapdragon. Why, you *are* dressed!" she cried, as her son uncoated himself and appeared in evening garb.

"It was my fault, dear Mrs. Burton," exclaimed Georgie, pressing through the group at the doorway, and embracing the old lady. "He stopped to take care of *me*. I came down by the same train, in the same carriage; and so we went home together and saw uncle, and Jack changed his things while I dressed, and we came here in the brougham together."

Something in Georgie's eyes—a light unaccustomed, deeper and softer perhaps than hitherto—arrests the mother's attention.

"Together!" she repeats doubtfully. "You came together? Jack," turning to her son, "Jack, my dear boy——"

But she stops abruptly, and asks no more, for she sees written on her son's face the announcement for which she has so long waited in vain.

"Mother," he says, taking the girl's hand in his, "I see you have guessed the news already—Georgie has promised to be my wife."

And Mrs. Burton, pleased and proud because Jack is happy, takes the little flirt to her heart, and kisses her cordially, without a regretful thought for sober Kate Harries.

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PRIZE IDEA STORY.

FARMER HAYSEED'S DILEMMA.

LOOK ON PAGE 858.

OLD GEORGE hadn't much book learning, that's a fact; but what a heap he did know about potatoes—much more than any three other men in the county, I dare swear. 'Taters was George's pet hobby. It was 'taters, 'taters, 'taters, always 'taters, indoors and out. Even now he was sitting out in his patch of garden peeling potatoes for the stew, and he was happy.

Well, there was just two more to do, and old George was feeling round for them at the bottom of the pail, when he stopped suddenly.

"It 'ud be a good idea," said old George, and he took the bits of adhering peel from the knife with a finger and thumb, dried it by rubbing both sides across his corduroy trousers, pushed his stool away just a bit, and proceeded to go indoors.

But he hadn't got as far as the door when he stopped, turned pale, and scratched his head.

"Well, I never!" said old George; "hanged if I haven't come away without my idea!"

So back he went, turning out his pockets on the way, and felt in the pail for his idea. But it wasn't there. It wasn't *under* the pail, either, and it wasn't in the grass anywhere about, because he spent quite half-an-hour looking for it.

Then old George said: "Some'un's stolen it."

And someone must have stolen it (for old George was quite sure he had an idea half-an-hour ago, and hadn't got it now), unless a crow had flown away with it. But that never struck old George—at least, it didn't *that* day.

Well, he couldn't spend for ever and for ever looking just about for it, could he, so off he toddled home, and he said to his wife Sarah: "Sarah, I've lost my idea."

"No," said Sarah amazed, "have you though? Where did you lose it, George?"

"I dunno," said old George, "or I'd go and find it," and he laughed, and Sarah laughed too presently when she saw through it, for it was a smart thing to say—at least it was a smart thing for old George to say. "It must be found too," said old George, "for it was quite a good idea." So old George turned out the cupboards, and he turned in the window shutters, and he turned up the carpet, but no, his idea was not to be found.

Old George thought he'd got it one time though. "Dunno," said old George, "but what it might ha' slipped through that hole in my pocket into my stockings." But when he came to look into his stockings there was a hole in each of them, and it wasn't in either of his boots. Nothing could work out of *those* boots.

Well, old George went on looking for his idea for quite a long while. It was quite a good idea, you remember, and worth looking for, and he got thin and irritable looking for it and not finding it. So one night, about nine o'clock, while he was lying in bed thinking whatever he could have done with it (for, as you know, they go to bed very early in the country), he dug his elbow into his wife's ribs and woke her up with a start, and made her put her head under the sheet and scream thinking, most likely, it was thieves, and he said: "Sarah, shouldn't wonder if someone hasn't taken that idea of mine up to Lunnon. It was the best idea in the world, you know, and they take all the best things up there for the rich folk to buy."

Well, nothing would do old George but that he must get up and dress there and then and go right off to London by the next train. It was about half-past eight in the morning when he got there, and an hour later he found himself on Waterloo Bridge. Everybody seemed to be going the one way, and old George could not help but notice that quite a number of men were carrying little bags in their hands.

"I'll be bound," said old George, "my idea's in one of those bags!" The more he thought of it the more likely it seemed, and at last he went up to a gentleman who was carrying a big and heavy bag, and he said, did old George: "'Scuse me, mister, but might you have my idea in that there bag?" And the gentleman stopped and said to old George: "Get your hair cut."

And old George said to himself: "Well, it's not half a bad idea, but it's not my idea."

However, he didn't ask any more people what they had in their bags, but he walked into the Strand and found that they'd got the road up. Then old George turned pale, and he said: "I always did hear tell these Londoners were smarties," and he went up to the first workman he came to and said: "I say, mister, might they be looking for my idea?"

And what the man said it isn't nice to repeat. It was rude, very rude, and it made old George blush crimson—and, mind you, outdoor life had made old George pretty crimson as it was. So he turned and left the rude man as quickly as he could, until presently, as he walked along, he saw a policeman standing in the middle of the road with his right arm stuck out, and all the cabs and 'buses standing still behind him.

Old George had a good look at him, and he noticed that his coat-tails bulged out, and then he suddenly remembered that down in the parts where he came from policemen were called "guardians of the peace," but *his* policemen never had such power as this policeman seemed to have, and guardian, of course, meant keeper. Why, there couldn't be any doubt about it—there was old George's idea bulging out of the policeman's pocket.

Well, old George meant to have his idea. So what did he do but steal round to the rear of the policeman and put his hand into his pocket—the policeman's pocket of course. Old George didn't know quite what happened next. Indeed, old George wasn't quite sure about anything until the next morning, when he found himself in the court-house and the policeman saying something about the "execution of his duty." Old George thought it was all up with old George then, and felt the rope round his neck, but the magistrate only gave him 30 days.

When old George came out he gave up his idea as lost for ever, and took the first train home. It was a terribly hot day; the road was long and dusty, and old George was quite worn out when he got to his house. But, lo! and behold, there was his idea lying upon the doorstep. In a frenzy of delight he stooped and picked it up, dusted it carefully, and carried it indoors.

"Sarah," said old George, "I've found my idea."

"No," said Sarah; "have you though?"

"Yes," said old George, "and it's quite the best idea in the world, as I said it was."

"Well," said Sarah, "what is it?"

"Why," said old George, beaming all over, "it's——"

[What was this great idea? £10 is offered to the person who correctly names it. See page 858.]

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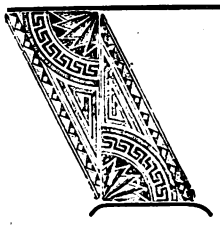
A Ten-Pound Note,



Eighty-Four Books,

AND Twelve Handsome Bags.

ARE OFFERED AS PRIZES UNDER THE FOLLOWING SIMPLE CONDITIONS. . .

A Ten-Pound Note.

1 On page 857 will be found a story entitled, "Farmer Hayseed's Dilemma." In the early part of the narrative the farmer has an idea, which suddenly goes out of his head. What was that idea? Ten pounds will go to the first person who sends in the correct answer.

* * * * * *

2 Twelve copies of F. Frankfort Moore's collection of short stories, "The Impudent Comedian," will be given to the twelve persons who draw the most humourous sketches of an elephant, using only straight lines. *Post-cards only.*

* * * * * *

3 Twelve copies of "Footlight Favourites" will be given to the twelve persons who make up the cleverest composite picture of all or any of the illustrations appearing in the Christmas Double Number of ***Short Stories.***

* * * * * *

4 Twelve copies of Vol. I. of ***Pearson's Magazine*** will be given to the twelve persons who send us the oldest coin. These coins will be afterwards sold for the benefit of next year's Fresh Air Fund.

* * * * * *

5 Twelve copies of Miss Winifred Graham's book, "When the Birds Begin to Sing," will be given to the first twelve ladies who correctly solve the following problem (*open to Ladies only*): At a review which took place some time since, a body of soldiers, forming a solid mass, were drawn up, and exactly filled a space bounded by a tree at each corner. A question arose between two gentlemen as to the number of men contained in the space, which measured forty yards in length by twenty in width, and it was agreed to allow two feet square as occupied by each soldier. By this reckoning, how many soldiers were there?

6 Twelve handsome bags will be given to the twelve children under fourteen who send us the most interesting scrap-book made up of Christmas and New Year's cards. The books of the prize-winners will be given to some hospital. The others will be returned, if stamps are inclosed for that purpose. The bags are worth 10s. 6d. each, and each contains half-a-sovereign.

* * * * * *

7 Twelve copies of "Guilty Gold" will be given to the twelve persons who make the cleverest anagram on the words "Guilty Gold by Headon Hill."

* * * * * *

8 Twelve copies of "Valdar the Oft-born" will be given to the twelve persons who make the cleverest anagram on the words "Valdar the Oft-born by George Griffith."

* * * * * *

9 Twelve copies of "The Final War" (by Louis Tracy) will be given to the first twelve persons who correctly solve the following problem: Two sportsmen, whose ages together do not amount to thirty years, after a day's successful shooting, counting the pheasants and partridges they have killed, Tom finds that altogether there are ten more than seven times the number of his own age, and George that there are ten times his age and eight over; also that the proportion of partridges to pheasants is as Tom's age to George's. Find the boys' ages, and the number of pheasants and partridges they bagged.

* * * * * *

All the Competitions close on January 4th, 1897.

* * * * * *

Persons may enter for any number of competitions for which they are qualified. Each attempt must bear the name and address of the sender and must be put in a separate envelope, marked on the outside with the Number of the competition. The paragraph announcing the particular competition must in each case be cut out and pasted on the attempt.

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Or, THE ROMANCE OF A LOST CONTINENT.

By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of *"The Winning of Gunhild,"* etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Graven Shaft.

Marenso sat thoughtfully silent awhile, watching the fire-flies that began to gather in the gloom, whilst I covered little Alcis—who had fallen asleep, tired out with youthful frolics—with a corner of my cloak and held him tenderly on my knee. The servant, Arac, was reclining on the ground half-a-dozen paces off, having crept closer to us that he might hear the Sleeper's tale. Presently the latter went on:

"I was thirty and three years old when the war came to an end, and in the seven years that followed, as I told thy Queen, no enemy dared lift his hand against Monteza's crown. Wealth and honour were mine in plenty, and I had all things I desired, save one. That one thing I lacked was a mate to love and by whom to be loved; a fair companion to share my fame, to grace my table, to sweeten my resting hours.

"In the fourth of the seven years of peace I thought I had found my wish, for one of the ladies of the palace, Leolin by name, so enthralled me by her beauty and her grace, that I fell an easy and willing victim to her charms, and asked her to become my wife. It was no light honour, and I could see that she was not disinclined to become my bride, but the King, also, had cast eyes of longing upon her and she was not proof against the great temptation. Monteza was then wifeless, and so great was his ardour that he offered her the Queen's seat. She took it, and they two ruled over me—the master whom I had served so well, and the fair one whom I loved to my own sorrow.

"In time, however, Leolin grew tired of her royal husband, and his attentions palled on her, in which plight she turned to me for companionship and comfort—to me whom she had cast over as a useless toy before. For a time our friendship was but friendship; for I struggled hard against the yoke I saw impending, but in the end our relations could no longer be called friendship. Her hatefulness of the King's company, and my love for her, broke down all the barriers that discretion, pride, and vengeance should have reared between us for ever, and so, we loved in secret. I need say no more to you, King Arnon."

I thought of Listra, and held my peace.

"Now, though the matter never reached the ears of Monteza whilst I remained awake," pursued the Sleeper, "it someway came to the knowledge of my brother, Mattoni the priest, when I was in my fortieth year, giving him great concern. He foresaw, as well as I, the direful result of my folly, if persisted in, and strove to turn me from it, but in vain.

"In desperation he avowed that sooner than see me come to disgrace and death, he would cast me into a sleeping trance, nor wake me from it till either the King or Queen were dead. I laughed and said:

"'Tis not a bad thought of thine, brother. But if thou dost so, lay me in the Grotto sacred to Truth, for there none of my enemies may come at me to do me a hurt whilst I sleep!'

"'Mirthful words full often come true,' said Mattoni gravely, 'and I will bear thy wish in mind if ever I carry out my threat, though I must warn thee that the Priests of Truth aver that whosoever sleepeth in the Grotto beyond the lifetime of a man shall wake not until the time of the last King of Atlantis.'

"'I care not for priestly prophecies,' I said, 'my own right arm hath ever proved my staunchest friend, as well thou knowest, brother; and even were the tale true, thou wouldst waken me before I had slept so long, which no man could. But why talk we as men full of wine and folly? Let us speak of present things. Goest thou to-morrow to the Isle of Olives with me? Olasin hath promised to be ready to start at morn, and nowhere have we such excellent fishing!'

"'I will come to the palace for thee ere the dawn hath opened thine eyes!' answered my priest-brother, with a hidden meaning that I found not for a thousand years, and then we parted to meet no more until our spirits find each other in the Shadows. I went to my apartments that night, to supper with the Queen, and sank into an easy slumber. I know not any more until I heard thy voice commanding me to awake, and I came to new life as thou saw'st me, in my own land still, it is true; but to find it sadly shrunken in its size and all its people strangers to me.

"What became of the King my master, of the Queen my mistress, or of my brothers, I know not; nor is anyone alive who can tell me, but I can frame some sort of story regarding them that I think is likely to be true. There is more in priestly magic than I thought, and I believe that my brother, coming to my room in the early morn, threw me into a senseless sleep, afterwards causing me to be conveyed to the Sacred Grotto. Once there, I believe that the Priests of Truth, in accordance with their tradition, and, it may be with an eye to notoriety and wealth should it be fulfilled, kept all people from me, refusing even the King admittance. Then I must imagine that Mattoni, who alone had power to recall me to life, died suddenly before it could be done. Thus I account for my long, deep sleep, though at best 'tis only a plausible tale."

"So plausible that 'tis likely to be the true one," I said, "and showeth that the Spirits work their will in their own

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way, heeding not our lives or wishes in the reaching of their aims. Yet it would ill become me to murmur, whom they have blessed with all that heart desires and more than hope once dared to hope for. Their will be done."

"Their will be done," re-echoed my companion; and then, the story ended, we sat there together in silence, busy with our own thoughts, till night had shrouded the shore with a faint darkness and menacing storm-clouds gathered overhead. I was about to remark that 'twas time to be up and away, when suddenly and clearly, my ears caught the well-known sound of oars dipping in the water. I whispered caution to the others, and carrying Alcis, still asleep in my arms, stepped down to the inshore sand and there listened, endeavouring to find the whereabouts of the boat that dared intrude on our fishing place.

The sound ceased, but almost at the moment there came the noise of someone crashing through the undergrowth of the dell, as if pressing towards us from the outer shore of the little promontory. Back again, up the graded slope I strode, till I caught the sheen of the sea behind the trees, and saw a score of moving figures flitting about in the shadowy shelter.

"Hold, there!" I cried, "and give an account of your-

The Sleeper and Arac fell to the earth.

selves for trespassing on the King's preserves. Know you not that this is our especial fishing ground?"

For answer came a mocking laugh, and in angrier tones I repeated my command, and Marenso ordered them, in the name of King Arnon and his Chief Minister, to show themselves: one replied derisively that he knew no such authority. Intending to lay Alcis on the soft turf to be out of danger, I called to Arac and Marenso to go forward and discover who these knaves were, but at the same time an order was given to the mysterious band in the Atlantian tongue and in a voice that was strangely familiar to me: there was a twanging of bow-strings and the whistle of arrows and the Sleeper and Arac fell to the earth pierced through with the feathered shafts. I also should have fallen there, dead, shot through the heart, but that the body of little Alcis, still pressed to my breast, received and stayed the fatal arrow that was speeding straight to my vital part. It scratched the skin beneath my tunic as it was, but that was all. Yet at what a cost was I saved!

The little body in my arms quivered a moment and gave a little cry, then stiffened out and was still for ever. Tenderly I laid him down, that youngest son of mine, my gentle Alcis, who in dying had saved my own life, and with dagger in hand, rushed towards the foe, feeling in that instant of mingled grief and rage, like a lioness robbed of her cubs. How I cursed the love of ease that had lately grown on me and made me leave my famous sword in the palace! With that in my grasp I could face and slay a score of enemies, but now I had only a short, sharp-pointed knife wherewith to strive against an unknown force.

In the mad blindness of my advance my feet caught the prostrate body of Arac, and, stumbling, I fell headlong to the ground. In a moment, 'mid a shower of arrows, I was afoot again, only to be thrown to earth again over the fallen form of Marenso. As I went down the second time, cursing loudly, footsteps clustered round, voices sounded, heavy blows rained fast upon me, and one, catching me full on the head, made a thousand stars dance redly before my eyes and caused my brain to reel. Yet I was not utterly unconscious after it, for I heard a medley of tongues consulting over me, and a firm, clear order given in the voice that sounded so familiar, but which I could not recognize; then came the sound of footsteps dying away in the distance, and all was still.

When all had gone I rose to my feet—slowly and with keen pain, for I felt as though I had fallen from a great height upon rough stones so bruised and aching was my carcase—and followed their track to the seashore, stumbling often and groaning with agony at every step. At last, with a great effort, I reached the sea, to find, as I expected, my unknown enemies gone.

There were few stars visible through the murky cloud-rack that moved along o'erhead, and no moon, but a faint phosphorescence shone on the waves and lit up the leaden-hued horizon, showing me, in a hasty, searching glance, a full-rigged sailing vessel, far away in the offing, now vanishing like a phantom craft.

Now, though I could fain have laid me down on the wet sand and writhed in torture, I remembered that I was a king and that 'twas never the way of Didron's son to cry out at pain or give way to it, and back again I struggled through the belt of mangroves, to where my son lay lifeless by the water's brink. The fatal arrow was still in his little body, and with a heart sore with grief and a mind black with rage, I drew it forth and held it a moment in my hand, standing as one dazed.

Just as I would have hurled it, spitefully, into the waters of the creek, a brilliant glare of light lit up the dimness, showing me, in one swift look, the figure of a cross cut on the shaft, and under it, graven in the written characters of our tongue, the name of Listra, Princess of Aidè! Then the thunder bellowed forth its reverberating roar and darkness settled down upon me, while the flood-gates of the sky were opened and the rain fell in soaking torrents.

How shall I describe the storm that raged within my soul that night? which raged so fiercely that I heeded the howling tempest around, and its lightning flashes splitting the veil of its ebon shade, even less than on a careless day I would have heeded the idlest zephyr that ever ruffled the curls of my raven hair. So swiftly and tumultuously tossed the thoughts within my aching head, that at last, worn out alike with mental and with bodily anguish, I fell upon the sodden, steaming ground, and with one arm clasping little Alcis, sank into a fevered sleep.

* * * * *

Meantime, Briseis, growing troubled at my long absence, questioned Valdo regarding my safety many times, and sent, with some of the Royal Guard, when the storm broke in its fury, to see that I was brought to the palace before any harm could befall me. This command my faithful retainer hastened gladly to obey, so that when I woke from my troubled sleep it was to find myself in my own apartment, watched and tended by my own dear Queen, even as she had watched and tended me long years agone, when I lay, a helpless fugitive, in her fair and stately mansion.

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Her eyes were red with weeping now, and on the queenly head was set the chaplet of dead dwarf ferns, the sign of a great bereavement.

"Methought thou wert never going to wake, my Arnon," said she, smiling fondly at me for all her sorrow; "and I began to fear I should need to mourn a double loss. Thou hast lain here two days since my servants brought you in."

"All too long to be idle when vengeance should be afoot," I answered, "for the foe hath a good start. How say the priests that I favour for recovery?"

"Passing well," said Briseis, "for Unim vouches that within three days thou wilt be well. And fret not, dear one, of vengeance. I have seen the death-shaft and read the name upon it, and already the priests and soldiers everywhere are searching the land, and offering reward for the finding of the traitress, while a hundred swift-sailing ships are scouring the seas around."

"Art a Queen indeed, wife," I said, "and never was King blessed with one so tactful and so true. But what have they done with the dead?"

"They lie in state, here in the palace, for the people to see them ere they are buried, and Unim says that until thou art able to inter them so that the prophecy may be fulfilled they must remain."

"Strange are the mercies of They who rule!" I said in the bitterness of my heart, when the dread words of that prophecy came back to me and shattered at a blow my hopes and dreams of peace and plenty in a long, calm future for my name and race; "it seemeth to me that They can have no care for human suffering, so reckless are They in inflicting it."

"Speak not ill of the Spirits, husband," said Briseis gently, "for thee have They favoured above all men in many things, and wouldst thou have all the world bow down to minister to thy every wish?"

"I am rebuked," I answered humbly, and wearily also, for I was yet weak, "but woman's faith was ever deeper, more unquestioning, than man's. Mind'st thou, dear one, the last time thou piously reproved my grumblings?"

She answered: "Yes," and, casting herself beside me on the couch we mingled our tears and talked awhile. From then I grew better and was soon able to be up and about, and attending with fitting dignity to the affairs of the nation.

Rumour and fear were abroad, unsettling the minds of the people, and the words of the prophecy were once more bruited about, and passed from lip to lip with lightning speed. It needed all my sternness and all the Queen's persuasive grace to keep our subjects from a panic of affright. The coming evil, the predicted end of the land, gave great excuse to the disaffected and the criminal, who wanted only a chance to raise and plunder the wealthy nobles, and afterwards pillage, burn, and slay to their hearts' content. I increased my army to be in readiness for any outbreak, and would have made the rich lords disgorge some of their ill-gotten gain, but these last were too strong for peaceful measures, and I could not compel them save by bringing on the terror that I feared.

Secretly, in the dead of night, I and the Priests of Truth buried the body of the Sleeper in the Sacred Grotto near the half-submerged ruins of Miropis, putting him deep down under the place where the costly couch had been. In the flashing light of the thousand lamps, at the bottom of the vast inverted cone, we laid him down for his last earthly rest, and at his side, with eyes blinded with tears, I placed my youngest son, my gentle, tender Alcis. In the right hand of each we placed the piece of money that must be paid at the entrance to the Garden of Pleasure—the Passport Piece 'tis called—and there left them together in silence, the old and the young, the general of King Monteza and the son of King Arnon, between whose births stretched an age of more than a thousand years.

Then all the priests drew away to their own apartments, save Unim, with whom I left the inside of the Grotto, and climbed up its outer stair to the summit. At the top we stood and talked, taking counsel together what course it were wise to pursue in face of the threatening danger.

"Repeat to me again the words of the prediction that is told regarding Marenso, who sleeps his last sleep beneath us," I said.

"See, the dawn is breaking," he answered evasively; "were it not better to leave it unspoken?"

"Tell it me now, I charge thee," I repeated. "As thy King, I command; as thy friend I entreat."

"For the latter tie between us I will grant thy request," said Unim, "but not for Kings may the servant of the Spirits be compelled against his will. Thus runneth the old saying: 'It is foretold that whoso wakes the Sleeper shall bury him, dead truly, in this very spot, and whoso reigneth as King of Atlantis in the day that the Sleeper dies, that King shall be the last that shall reign in this land and the end of the land itself shall not be far away. In those same words I told it to thee the first time that thou entered the Grotto, and one other thing I told thee, namely, that till thou hadst been here a third time, to fear not death."

"And the third time has come and gone!" I said. "So be it. At least I am forewarned, and will take good care of my skin from now, for I love this life, despite its evils, better than the prospect of the unknown shadows. Say, priest, can'st foretell my future now?"

Unim was silent for a space, looking up into the dome of heaven. Then he spoke, saying:

"As I told thee, Arnon, once before, I could uplift the veil so that nothing of thy remaining life should be hidden from thee, but I refused then as I refuse now, lest thy eyes be blinded and thy mind unsettled by the sight. 'Tis not well for any of the sons of men to probe too far into the secrets of existence and of destiny, and though I have the power, I have never sought to know my own end. Enough for the time is the evil and the good that cometh in its due season: enough for the present our present weal and woe."

"Art wise, my priest," I observed, "but *I* would dare to know all, had *I* the power. However, as I cannot compel thee, I must bear my soul in patience. Thinkest thou, then, that I shall be the last King of Atlantis, and that it is already doomed?"

"I think so truly," returned Unim; "for even now the sea hath gained great stretches of the land and is rising faster this last month than it has ever done before. The time will surely come, and that before many years, when the highest hills in our seagirt land will be fathoms deep under the ocean waves, and other countries may send their fleets unheeding over a waste of waters where now these fertile fields are lying."

I looked out over the pleasing landscape, reposing calm and lovely under the paling stars, and glinted here and there with gleams of coming day, and the awfulness of the desolation foreshadowed wrung a deep groan from the depths of my heart.

"Ye Spirits!" I cried, "can it be that all this land and all its citizens are doomed, and that its name and their memory shall be wiped from the earth?"

"The Spirits have given and the Spirits have power to take away," said Unim gravely; "and what the Spirit of Truth declares is just." After a long pause he went on again: "Thy duty as King, Arnon, is to face the danger fearlessly, so that the trembling thousands may take heart at thy courage and prepare to meet the avertless doom as men. Already the people clamour for the building of more ships that the province of Ulmeca may be re-conquered and so prove a refuge for them in their hour of need. I would advise that thou dost double the fleet at once and keep the builders ever at the task of making new vessels, strong and swift. So, at least, will thy subjects be pacified, even though it be labour spent in vain."

"Why should it be in vain?" I asked, for though I was loth to put my hands to war again, I was ready so to do if

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thereby I could save my people from the overwhelming horror.

"Have I not refused to lift the veil?" said Unim abruptly, "and wouldst thou know the end of all men? Did I not tell thee once that thou wouldst die in the arms of the sea that thou lov'st so well? What more wouldst ask?"

"Naught," I answered, "from one so chary of his knowledge!"

My heart was still sore with grief at my recent loss, and heavy with the weight of future fear, and full of resentment at the Fates, so I parted from the Priest of Truth in an ill-temper and went away with scant courtesy, nor have I set foot within or upon the Sacred Grotto since that sorrowful day.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Gathering of the Waters.

Slowly passed the first few months of the year, with the sea ever rising, and each day bringing fresh news of some shoreside hamlet or harbour submerged and deserted, some low-lying harvest land covered over with the salt waves. The people flocked to the cities and towns by hundreds and by thousands, and Kronos itself, where the waters encroached least, was now swollen to twice its former size, its streets of half finished dwellings stretching far out upon the plain.

From lowland to upland the populace retreated, from little villages to larger towns, as though safety lay in numbers—as yet all orderly, a panic being prevented by the influence of the priests, and aided by the knowledge that the builders of ships were working in relays by night and day, and that my wealth and that of many nobles was flowing like water to equip such a fleet as would enable us to retake our lost provinces and seek a refuge there for all whom their native land could not hold in future.

Many recovered courage when they saw my energy, and for a time we kept the rebellious and dishonest classes down. But nevertheless I knew that Atlantis was honey-combed with discontent at the loss of wonted luxuries, and that, deprived of her pampering wealth, she was no longer the great nation she once had been.

The hour of her prime was past and the knell of her downfall was already sounding in her ears.

With all my public cares I found time to go aboard the *Ravager*, and with her to sweep the seas to East and West for sign of the mysterious craft that had come upon us so silently in the gloaming, and from whence came the archer and the arrow that had slain my Alcis.

My search was vain as that of the other vessels out upon the same quest; vain as the effort of the Dreamers to find the secret of the Foodless Life.* I voyaged towards Nubia and back again to the shores of Ulmeca; I ventured far into the chilly north and southward upon the wide bosom of the tropic sea; I voyaged through calm and storm and wind and rain, under a burning sun, and under a cold and starry sky, but not a trace of that strange craft could I discover.

It had vanished as completely as though the sea had swallowed it up in the thunderstorm that burst when I lost sight of it, and so, indeed, I grew to believe in time, until there came the rude awakening.

Once upon my journeyings, I cast anchor in the bay of the little isle in the southern sea, where, in the past, I had so often started forth on pirate cruise in the self-same ship.

I landed on the well-remembered island, where still remained the ruins of the pirate settlement, but no sign of human life was left save the grass-grown plot of land where Viol and I had laid old Didron to his last long rest.

My mind teeming with the recollections of that time which still possesses a charm for me, despite my present abhorrence of sea-robbery, I wandered alone over the fairy isle, visiting the places of my youthful frolics, the paths in the dense, dark woods, the pebbly watercourses on the little hills, the sandy beaches and the tree-sheltered inlets of the palm-fringed coast, and especially that lovely little bay of shingle, where the limestone crags, all overgrown with creepers, jutted out into the emerald sea, and where the tiny breakers curved and fell with ceaseless murmur on the shelving shallows.

'Twas there I pighted my troth to my sweet and dainty Viol; 'twas there I parted from her for the last time; 'twas there I last saw my little Didron, and stroked his curly locks with my great rough hand.

"And now," thought I, "I have another bride, who is the Queen, and another son whose name is Didron. And now I am the King and have well-nigh driven all the pirates off the sea. So strange are life's changes!"

Thus thinking, sitting on the stone where Viol and I had so often sat in the byegone years, I lost my count of time, and was there when the sun went down on the edge of the sea, and the night-birds and insects began to chirp and twitter in the forest at my back. There was no moon, and many of the stars were obscured by clouds scurrying across the heavens, while a light sea-breeze played with my raven hair and fanned my bronzed and beaten visage.

My head nodded, and I dozed, and it seemed to me that out of the semi-darkness and the lulling sounds was fashioned a vision, and a symphony; a vision of Atlantis as she had been, and a symphony of spirit-music such as I had heard in the Temple of Karnac in the land of Khem.

Fancy, it may have been, or real, but this was what I saw mirrored on the pall of the tropic night:

Out of the darkness grew a sudden brilliancy, lighter then day, yet mellowed so that there was no glare to vex my eyes; and out of the stillness came a burst of melody, so loud that it filled my ears, yet softened so that I could have listened to it gladly for ever.

I thought that I was still near the bay, though I seemed to have no form or resting-place, when slowly the sea began to recede from the shore and the land rose from beneath, not sandy or damp, but covered with forests and fields, and full of strange animals roaming in their shades as though there had been no ocean there for a long time.

Following the retreating waters with my gaze, for I was not conscious of any motion, I saw that they kept on till the shores of Atlantis were reached, and between the little isle and the great land there was no more sea.

Then I saw the coast of Atlantis itself spread out, swallowing up the flying ocean to east and west, till but a narrow strait remained on either hand between it and the mighty continents that now are leagues and leagues away.

There were no cities ortowns in all its breadth then, only roving hordes of naked barbarians, fighting for their food with the savage beasts that roamed the plains or sheltered in the caves, using only rude stone implements, and eating their own slain.

But from the great land of the East, to the north of Nubia, came a swarming multitude of men, under strong and powerful chiefs whom their followers revered, skilled in the making of weapons and tools of copper and bronze, who overran the land before them like a colony of ants. Whenever their chiefs or great men died, they buried them deep in the earth, raising conical mounds above them, the largest above the greatest chiefs, and, though they had a spoken language, they had but scanty written words.

Now, at the shore of the great East land this nation split in twain, one division journeying to the south, and settling in the land that is now called Khem, or Egypt, and the other crossing the narrow strait and landing on the coast of Nubia, there multiplying greatly, driving the barbarians before them across the country from east to west, and so into what is now Ulmeca, settling down on the land they had conquered and becoming a great nation.

Then the sea fought back the shore again, and the

*We have only one other record of this strange sect of visionaries, but from what can be gathered it appears that they endeavoured to live their lives asleep, so as to dispense with food.

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straits widened slowly through many thousand years, till Atlantis appeared as it was when Marenso lived at Monteza's Court.

Now I know how it came about that the Egyptians buried their kings in lofty pyramids, as we did our own, and how it was that I could understand their speech so well and read their writing so easily, for a great way back our people were of the same stock, having the same customs and the same tongue.

Whilst I was yet pondering over this strange kinship, the scene darkened, then brightened again, and I saw Atlantis as it was when first I ravaged its shores and levied toll upon its wealthy sea-board towns.

Again the darkness blotted out the vision from my view, a darkness full of strange noises and mysterious mutterings, as of the entrance to the Shadows, and when the veil lifted and I looked again, I saw only a wide, wild waste of waters, heaving and tossing, and moaning, as it were, a dreary funereal dirge for the glory that was gone for ever, for the land that was buried under its waves, for the nation that was no more to be numbered among the nations of the earth.

I felt sick at heart, and the tears would have started from my eyes, had I a bodily form, when the light waned, the music died away in ghostly cadences, a sensation as of running fire shot through all my veins, and I awoke to find the night but little more advanced than when the phantasm first appeared before me.

The sea-breeze was still swaying the palms and cocoas with a soughing rustle, the little breakers were still curling on the sloping sands, dark clouds were still drifting filmily under the stars, and rousing myself resolutely and throwing off the influence of the dream, I sought out the encampment of my men, and next morning put forth to sea in the *Ravager*, steering straight for home.

Moody and silent I stood on the prow as the good ship clove the waters of the sun-kissed sea, plunging now through belts of yellow weed where little crabs thrived in countless swarms, now passing schools of porpoises, now followed by keen-jawed, evil-looking sharks with dorsal fins in air, and anon becalmed and making progress only with the oars.

Orlanis and the others thought I took my grief to heart, I trow, but said never a word to my face, only hinting that it was not needful for a king to work his ships. To this I answered shortly that a king could do as he pleased with his own.

When nearly half-way to our journey's end, as I was climbing the ladder to my solitary post in the first flush of the dawn, I espied a single sail to the eastward, low down on the larboard bow, scudding along with all canvas spread.

My lethargy vanished as by magic, and in less time than I had ever done it before I had the *Ravager's* head turned, and every stitch of her sails set and all her oars going in rhythmic, quick-succeeding strokes. Swiftly as a flying-fish through the air, we bore down on the strange craft, which showed no flag in response to our unfurling of the Royal Banner and seemed anxious only to get beyond our reach.

It was a long, stern chase, but the tough old *Ravager*, under her Egyptian rigging, gained on her quarry length by length, and fathom by fathom, the high-flung spray from her foaming prow dashing its briny drops into my weathered face with boisterous good-will.

We neared the fast-flying pirate-craft—for such she was—and scanning her spars and lines as we advanced, I saw that she was not the ship I sought. Still, I resolved to capture her, if only to add to my fleet, and bade the boarders get ready their grappling hooks. The distance lessened, and our ram at length came near touching the stranger's stern, when suddenly a big, burly form rose up from behind the bulwarks, an old, weather-tanned pirate, with scarred and sunburnt face, and hair and beard white as the driven snow.

"Tirhak the Pirate! By all the gods!" I cried. "Hold men, and sheath your weapons. This is no enemy of mine."

"Right glad am I to hear those words," said the tough old man, "and had I heard them sooner would not have fled from you. But, methinks, King Arnon, we have given the *Ravager* a sturdy chase."

"True, Tirhak," I answered, "but you know of old that Didron's ship had no match among the freebooters of the sea, while now I'll warrant she can outpace anything of timber that is afloat. But bring your bows up, and let me come aboard, that I may talk with you to better advantage."

"That will I," said he, and swung his vessel round with eagerness. Orlanis would have gone with me, but I preferred to go alone, trusting a sailor's honour more than armed protection. It was with a strange feeling that I stepped on board amongst that pirate crew, tall, strong, lusty fellows, grizzled and battle-worn, and reeking of the salt sea, and their talk full of fearless oaths as a shark's mouth of teeth; the last remnant of the old sea-dogs, whose tacit sovereign had been Didron, my foster father.

King though I was, they welcomed me with hearty goodwill, though with none of the servile cringing of the landfolk, and I sighed, almost wishing that I were once more one of them.

"You see, my men have not forgotten the name of one who was once their comrade," said white-haired Tirhak, "though 'tis over thirty years since I spoke you last on the seas. 'Twas different, then, when we pirates were reckoned passable men and our calling was a decent one. Now we are outlaws, and well-nigh banished from the ocean."

"'Tis so," said I, "yet I think it is for the best; though I sometimes long for the old days. Tell me, Tirhak, wherefore you came not openly to me at Kronos, instead of ranging these solitary waters, where no commerce now comes?"

The old man shook his head.

"I was a pirate when Dulo IX. sat on the throne, I was a pirate when Dulo X. ruled, I was one still when Briseis reigned, and I would fain be free to rove the seas as heretofore until I die, even though Didron's son be King of Atlantis.

"Also, I fought against you, though you saw me not, in the great battle of the ships, where you slew the boasting Thaska—Ha! ha. I roared till the tears came in my eyes when I heard of it!—and defeated the fleet of Quitzaal; and I feared your anger when I knew you were victorious, and remembered the language I used to you when I saw you on the slave-ship."

"Comrades should ever be careless of each other's tongues," I said, "and it was never in the nature of Arnon to bear malice for idle words."

"That I should have known," said Tirhak, "the more so, seeing that you are wedded to our gentle Queen, whom even we rough seamen would cherish and protect. And pray how fares it with the little ones?"

My brow clouded instantly, and I told him of the ship that had come out of the darkness and slain my youngest child, my friend, and my servant, and how fruitless was my search.

"'Twas a foul deed!" cried the old seaman, whose hands were red with many a deed of carnage, but who always struck fairly and in the light of day; "'twas a foul deed, and I would fain run down the strange craft if she be on these seas."

"Wilt search her out for me?" I asked, "if I give you my royal seal for safety and a warrant for food and stores in my name at any port you put in at? 'Twill be a light task, but one after your own heart. For myself, 'tis time I sat once more in Kronos."

"Will I?" echoed the pirate, his aged cheeks aglow with the prospect of active service. "Will I? I am your servant henceforth, and we will seek out and bring you this

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cowardly enemy though we scour every league of the ocean for her. Say you not so, my men?"

A ringing cheer rose from his crew, one and all agreeing to aid their captain in his quest.

"And now I will aboard my *Ravager*," I said, "unless you bring your vessel with me to Kronos for a rest."

"My resting place is here, on the free waves," answered Tirhak, "and I love not the life of cities. But one thing I would like before you leave—to see and test your famous sword, the repute of which has travelled far."

I drew "Sunderer's" shining length from its gem-set sheath at once, and gave it to him, enjoining caution in the handling of it.

"'Tis keen," he said, thumbing its edge in a way that would have made a novice to swordcraft sick, "and rings true, and is fair to look upon. I would give a year of the little life that remains to me for the having of it. By the beard of Amarunth, I would make it sing before the eyes of a few! See, comrades, how the metal shines blue, without a blemish in it."

With admiration not unmixed with awe, the blade was passed from hand to hand, the rough sailors handling it as gently as a woman tends her babe, and from the last one I received it, putting it back into its case with pardonable pride.

"I have sworn that henceforth it shall never leave me while I have strength to grasp it," I said, seeing Tirhak eyeing it greedily, "and now I must be saying, fare-you-well."

"Farewell," the old pirate answered, as I went on board my ship again and the vessels parted, one going north and one west. For a long time I could hear the sturdy seamen chanting the Ina-Ana in chorus loud and strong, its well-remembered melody floating to us across the sunlit waters with a soft, subdued, yet sonorous sound.

It was near the ruins of Miropis where we first sighted the Atlantian coast, but there was no anchorage or harbour left; even the place where the town itself had been was a fathom under the sea, and the tide's lowest ebb only uncovered the base of the Sacred Grotto. We looked at each other, I and my crew, with pale, awed faces, and saying never a word, put about and ran along the new shore-line towards Kronos, fearing lest that, too, should have been submerged in our absence, and longing to know the worst.

As we went our misgivings first increased and then diminished, for after finding that in many places the sea had gained even more than at Miropis, we saw, in nearing the capital, that the country rose gradually until the coast at last assumed its familiar form, and our keel ploughed the track of old time pursued by the home-coming ships.

But all along the shore was written desolation in letters of ruin, mutely eloquent. The villages lay dismantled and deserted, the fields were lonely, the little harbours empty, or strewn with upturned fishing boats settling down into the yellow sand, and not a sail, not a galley, not a pleasure-barque, tacked off or on the jagged line of land and water. All told of hasty flight from the ocean's resistless advance.

And so, filled with sore forboding, we hove to in the Bay of Kronos, where was gathered the fleet of seven hundred vessels, and there cast anchor and went ashore.

How gladly my Briseis welcomed me home again! vowing how solitary her life had been whilst I was away, and declaring, with all a loving woman's inconsistency, in one and the same breath, that she wished I had found the deadly foe and that she was glad I had been spared the shedding of blood!

"'Tis wearisome work," she said, "to deal with Didron and Vesta when you are not here, and to stop their constant questionings about our little Alcis. 'Twould break my heart to tell them the truth, and yet what can I say?"

We were in our own apartments then, and the two were playing with an ebon image, a little distance away.

"Come hither," I cried to them, and when they came, lifted them both upon my knees. "Should you like to know where your brother Alcis is?" I asked.

"I should; I *want* to know," said sturdy Didron, clutching my beard.

"I think you ought to tell us," echoed imperious little Vesta, looking at me reproachfully with her great round eyes.

"Well," I said, "he has gone to a far country where nothing dies and all the land is a garden, full of sweet-scented flowers and ripe fruit, and where all his playfellows are always merry and happy."

"But the slaves whisper that he has gone to the Shadows, like old Marenso and Arac," persisted Vesta, doubtfully.

"Then I shall be very angry with the slaves," I said, hiding my emotion with a show of displeasure, "and you must not listen to them. Arac has been buried by his people, and Marenso in the Sacred Grotto, but I saw your little brother last, before he went to the far country."

"Can we go to him some day?" asked Didron, "'cause I should like to see him again. And you, mother, and you, father, will come with us, won't you?"

"We may go sooner than you think," I answered, choking down the lump that rose in my throat, "all of us, and then we shall be parted no more."

"And will Phrena, and his father and mother be there, too?" queried Vesta, thinking of the only son of Atris.

"Yes, dear one, some day we shall all meet in that garden of delight," said Briseis.

"But I wish I had known, so that I could have wished him good-bye till then," Vesta said regretfully.

For answer I kissed them both, and setting them down, bade them go and play again.

"'Twill need not the Priest of Truth to absolve us from the sin of that half-falsehood," I said to Briseis, who looked at me with tear-filled eyes, yet answered bravely:

"No, indeed. And were it for some other cause, one could scarce forbear to laugh at Vesta's ready tongue! How quiet they are, now!"

"Too quiet," I replied. "Ho, there!" I called to the two, "send for Phrena to come and make merry with you, and be as noisy as you like! Run, jump, dance, sing, so you sound as many as of yore and I do not miss the absent one!"

They laughed, clapping their hands with delight, and soon the palace resounded with the pleasing notes of their childish amusement, and I felt more at ease.

(To be continued.)

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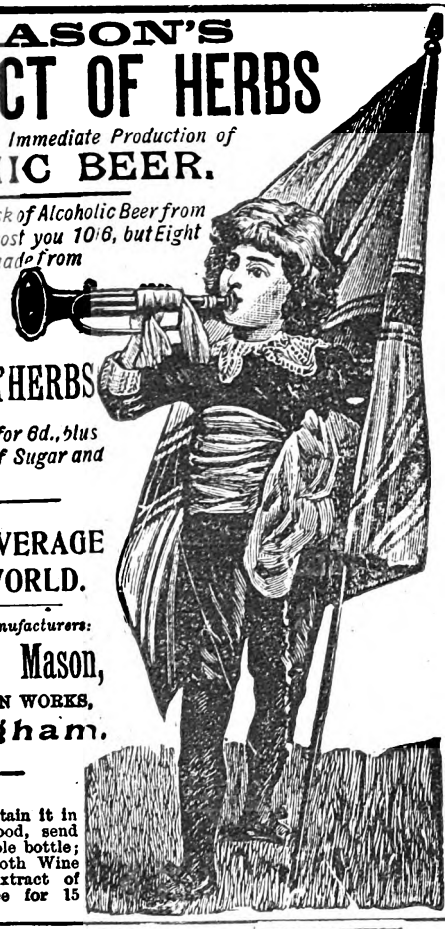

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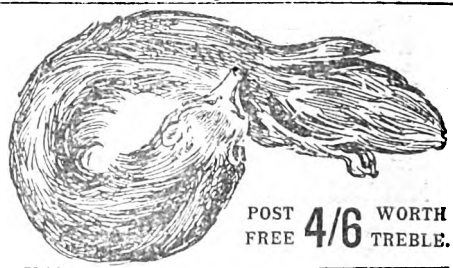

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OUR NEW VENTURE.—Yes, Two different Pattern Hearthrugs or Carpets for the Price of One! *(Copyright.)*

In the High Court of Justice (Chancery Division), HODGSON v. WEBB BROTHERS.—On the 18th day of July, 1890, his lordship, Mr. Justice Chitty, granted an interim injunction, restraining Messrs. Webb Brothers, of Hackney Wick, from infringing Mr. Fredk. Hodgson's Trade Mark, "Eclipse," No. 93,774 (Leeds).

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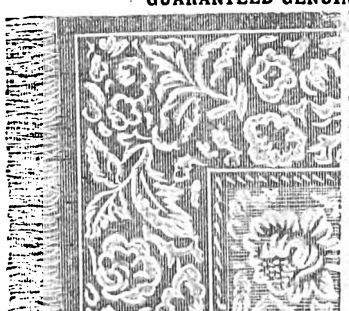
100,000 "ECLIPSE" CARPETS (Regd.)

GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.



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Two Carpets and Two Rugs 8/-, or Four Carpets and Four Rugs 15/6.

P.S.—When this Design (registered) is wanted in Carpets or Hearthrugs, as above, kindly quote No. 268,493.

We Rely upon Spontaneous Repeat Orders from our Clients for the Maintenance of our Trade. Established nearly a Quarter of a Century. All orders dispatched same day in rotation as they arrive by post. **Cheques and P.O.'s payable to**

"SHORT STORIES" CARPET COUPON. 26/12/96.

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Reversible, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 12 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine on one side the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian, and on the reverse the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

REDUCED SALE PRICE.

Size.	Each.		Size.	Each.
6ft. by 9ft.	4/9	REDUCED SALE PRICE.	9ft. by 15ft.	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft.	5/11		12ft. by 12ft.	12/9
9ft. by 9ft.	7/6		12ft. by 13½ft.	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft.	8/6		12ft. by 15ft.	15/9
9ft. by 12ft.	9/6		12ft. by 18ft.	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft.	11/6		12ft. by 21ft.	22/6

When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

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F. HODGSON & SON, Manufacturers, Importers and Merchants, WOODSLEY RD., LEEDS.

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